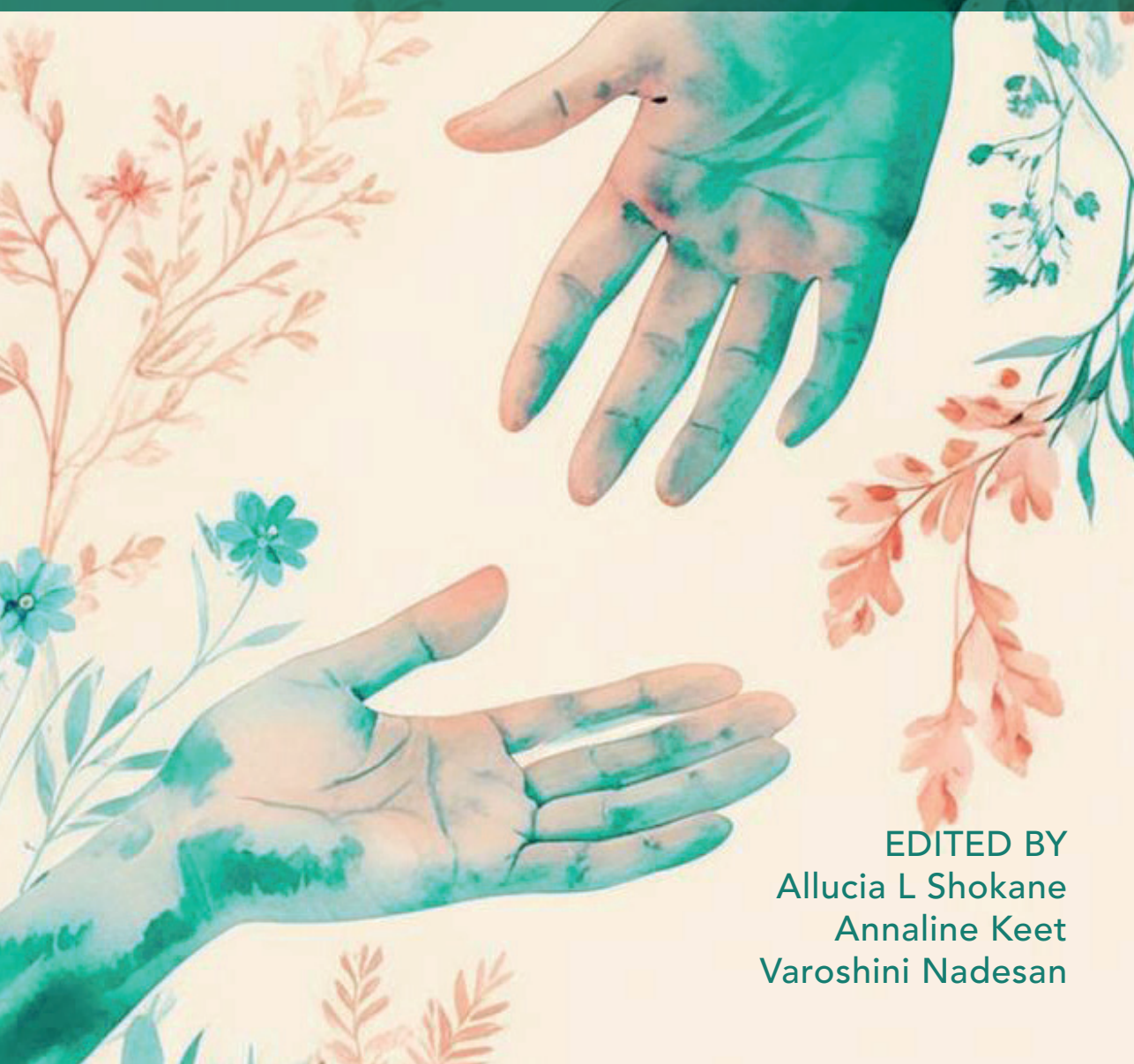
Knowledge Pathing: Multi-, Inter- and Trans-Disciplining in Social Sciences Series
Volume 3

Social work in the 21st century

Scholarship and praxis reimagined towards vulnerability



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Knowledge Pathing: Multi-, Inter- and Trans-Disciplining in Social Sciences
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Social work in the 21st century

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Knowledge Pathing: Multi-, Inter- and Trans-Disciplining
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Social work
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Scholarship and praxis reimagined towards vulnerability

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Peer-review declaration

The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer-Review of Scholarly Books'. The book proposal form was evaluated by our Social Sciences, Humanities, Education and Business Management editorial board. The manuscript underwent an evaluation to compare the level of originality with other published works and was subjected to rigorous two-step peer-review before publication by two technical expert reviewers who did not include the volume editor and were independent of the volume editor, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the editors or authors. The reviewers were independent of the publisher, editors and authors. The publisher shared feedback on the similarity report and the reviewers' inputs with the manuscript's editors or authors to improve the manuscript. Where the reviewers recommended revision and improvements, the editors or authors responded adequately to such recommendations. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the book be published.

Research justification

This scholarly book is the third volume in the 'Knowledge Pathing: Multi-, Inter- and Trans-Disciplining in Social Sciences' book series. Chapters were invited from contributing authors who are involved in social work practice and education and who are dealing with the issues of poverty, inequality and vulnerability from various fields of social work practice and education.

The focus of the book emanates from the main conference theme and the sub-themes of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) conference in 2021, which provided delegates with opportunities to network and deliberate around issues pertinent to social work education and practice. The theme of the conference, 'Pandemics, poverty, inequality and disability: Social work in the 21st century', provided an opportunity for deep deliberation, knowledge exchange and skills development on how vulnerable communities, already on the economic margins of society due to poverty and inequality, are further marginalised during significant societal disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is these deliberations which culminated in this book.

We acknowledge the bold step taken by the Executive of the ASASWEI to commission a publication around issues pertinent to social work education that promotes knowledge and skills around vulnerabilities in our social context and how the social work profession is challenged to interrogate its role in addressing ongoing challenges of poverty and inequality that keeps people on the peripheries of human development. This collection, which reflects a small portion of the studies presented at the 2021 conference, draws from the collaborative effort with key role-players and stakeholders in social work academia locally and regionally. On the regional and international levels, ASASWEI is honoured to collaborate with the Association of the Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) as well as the International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The ASASWEI, ASSWA and the IASSW have a long-standing relationship of working together. This collaboration of academic partners with a vested interest in social work education embraces the advancement of social work interventions into the 21st century.

The ASASWEI scientific committee has received over 200 abstracts and only the contributors of the eleven chapters presented in the book were included and accepted as contributors based on quality and fullness of contribution. The chapters consisted of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

Each chapter of this volume has undergone rigorous review, assessing the core qualities of scholarship that the editors deemed necessary for readers to have confidence in the trustworthiness and importance of ideas and messages. The editors evaluated each submission for originality, integrity and accuracy, relevance, credibility and hermeneutics. As part of the assessment for originality, each manuscript was processed electronically through disciplining in social sciences. The following three chapters are based on PhD and MA dissertations, and an acknowledgement is provided in the respective chapters in this regard: Chapter 2, 'Poverty alleviation interventions by social workers through facilitation of financial capabilities', by Ntobeko Bambeni and Lambert K Engelbrecht; Chapter 4, 'Analysing service delivery gaps in National Strategic Plans (NSP) implementation in City of Ekurhuleni', by Velile H Dlamini, Allucia L Shokane and Delarise M Mulqueeny and Chapter 11, 'Logistical, teaching and learning challenges of undergraduate students with visual impairments at a selected university', by Melanie Willems and Zibonele F Zimba.

The target audience for this book is primarily academics engaged in the field of social work and related fields. No part of this work was plagiarised or published elsewhere.

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Abbreviations and acronyms, figures and tables appearing in the text and notes

List of abbreviations and acronyms

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
APA	American Psychological Association
ART	antiretroviral therapy
ARV	antiretroviral
ASASWEI	Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions
ASSWA	Association of the Schools of Social Work in Africa
BA	Bachelor of Arts degree; bachelor's degree
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work degree
CANRAD	Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy
CANSA	Cancer Association of South Africa
CBO	community-based organisation
CDPs	community development practitioners
CDWs	community development workers
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
CoE	Community of Enquiry
COGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSSP	College of Social Sciences and Philosophy
CYCW	Child and Youth Care Work
CYC	Child and Youth Care
DiMTEC	Disaster Management Training and Education Centre for Africa
DG	Disability Grant
DHVSU	Don Honorio Ventura State University
DMA	*Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002*

DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DSD	Department of Social Development
DSW	Doctor of Social Work degree
EMM	Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality
EP&R	emergency preparedness and response
EROLT	emergency remote online learning and teaching
EU	European Union
FBOs	faith-based organisations
FCG	Foster Care Grant
FGDs	focus group discussions
FRPS	Family Role Performance Scale
GDSD	Gauteng Provincial Department of Social Development
GHREC	General Human Research Ethics Committee
HEDSA	Higher Education Disability Services Association
HEIs	higher education institutions
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HSREC	Health Science Research Ethics Committee
IASSW	International Association of the Schools of Social Work
ICSW	International Council on Social Welfare
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
IJDM	*International Journal of Disaster Management*
IK	indigenous knowledges
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	interpretive phenomenological analysis
IRIDeS	International Research Institute of Disaster Science
ISDM	Integrated Service Delivery Model
KPAs	key performance areas
LGBT+	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LMS	learning management system
MHEWS	multi-hazard early warning systems
MMM	Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality
MOA	memorandum of agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSW	Master of Social Work degree
NDMF	National Disaster Management Framework

NEET	not in employment, education or training
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
NIHSS	National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences
NPOs	non-profit organisations
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSPs	National Strategic Plans
OTM	Outcomes that Matter
PBCYC	Professional Board for Child and Youth Care
PBSW	Professional Board for Social Work
PEPFAR	United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PI	primary investigator
PIE	person-in-environment
PLHIV	people living with HIV
PLWHA	people with HIV and AIDS
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
PWA	people living with albinism
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAACHDE	Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SANAC	South African National AIDS Council
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Services
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDGs	sustainable development goals
SFDRR	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
SMSs	short message services
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
STIs	sexually transmitted infections
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
TB	tuberculosis
TIIKM	The International Institute of Knowledge Management
TTM	Transtheoretical Model of Change
UDM	uMgungundlovu District Municipality
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UN	United Nations

UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNETPSA	United Nations Training and Educational Program for Southern Africa
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
UTSS	Under the Same Sun
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WIL	work-integrated learning
WWA	women living with albinism

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Foreword

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This book arose from a very difficult and challenging time in the history of the world. This book, focusing on the context of pandemics, poverty and inequality, is both timely and important. The scourge of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has exposed other global pandemics of gender-based violence, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, food insecurity and the growing wealth gap. This is what I propose to call planetary nakedness. The whole world has been totally exposed. There is no doubt that the presence of pandemics, such as the recent COVID-19, caused great fear and frustration in communities around the world. What became obvious is the well-drawn line between the rich and the poor and how this phenomenon persists. Spaces of privilege are vivid against those who are pushed outside the centre of power and privilege. It is well known that power structures are characterised by and sustain multiple hierarchies organised around racial, gender, class, ethnic, religious, epistemic and sexual divides. This apparent privileging is historical.

The poor are silenced and denied space to be. This situation demonstrates the enduring legacies of (neo) colonial power in many communities across the world for many centuries. For the poor, particularly those with disabilities, who are even more vulnerable in the face of the power and privilege of the few, life has often been lessened to mere survival and resilience. It cannot be eschewed how coloniality works to undermine, destroy, relegate, reduce, marginalise and silence the poor masses. It aims to annihilate structurally and systematically. The fact remains that the mark of coloniality is pre-eminent.

The 2021 Social Work Conference aimed to challenge this hegemony. Also, it wanted to record frustrations in most communities that experience poor public service delivery, ongoing strikes, looting, sewage spillages on roads and streets in townships, village potholes, unemployment of youth graduates, mental health cases among young adults in villages and townships, and heightened challenges faced by individuals with physical disabilities.

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The picture looks bleak. In South Africa, the presented picture has become a daily occurrence. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened this situation. From mourning the death of family members, friends and colleagues to facing the ghastly reality of unemployment and lack of food, among other conditions. Life has become difficult for anyone to navigate daily. The conditions that have been laid bare during the pandemic continue to be a feature of society, and the role of social work in the context of ongoing structural and systematic marginalisation remains a key concern.

This book presents the voices of scholars, educators, students, policymakers and researchers who grapple with most of these issues. This is a social sciences book that unmasks and problematises this heavy space of power and privilege, poverty and vulnerability in search of human and social solutions. The proposed social dimensions presented here make a significant contribution. One important observation is that most chapters are influenced by a strong awareness of decolonisation and an understanding of the various approaches to COVID-19, especially from marginalised perspectives.

I wish to congratulate the volume editors: Prof. Allucia L Shokane (University of Zululand), Prof. Annaline Keet (Nelson Mandela University) and Dr Varoshini Nadesan (University of Johannesburg) for editing this volume. As the Series Editor of the 'Knowledge Pathing: Multi-, Inter- and Trans-Disciplining in Social Sciences' book series, I wish to commend the excellent work of the editorial team, reviewers and critical readers of this volume. I am happy to present this volume to the broader scientific community.

Summary

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The book is comprised of the following eleven chapters:

Chapter 1 reports on the parts of the broader explanatory qualitative study that focused on the complexities of the professionalisation of community development in South Africa. Collaborative partnership efforts remain a challenge in community development intervention. Multidisciplinary teamwork has been the model for working in community development for many years, emanating from the history of community development in South Africa. Despite the support for collaborative partnerships and inter-professional team working in social service professions as recognised by the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and the community as the key role player at the community level, this study reports on the findings of complexities and barriers to effective multidisciplinary teams working through the community development approach. The findings revealed many barriers to effective multidisciplinary team development, community participation and collaborative partnership functioning in community development.

Chapter 2 enlightens that financial capability is one of the important strategies for poverty alleviation wherein the social work profession plays a significant role in interventions that are aimed at alleviating poverty. However, such roles have not been adequately explored, especially in the South African context. This is despite social workers' contribution to the facilitation of financial capabilities development during their daily interaction with service users. Based on the research findings, some of the recommendations include the capacitation of social workers through the provision of in-service training on financial management and financial

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capability and the inclusion of financial capabilities development in the social work curriculum.

Chapter 3 sought to establish whether social workers in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality were able to render adequate resilience-focused interventions to vulnerable groups to optimise clients' mental health and psychosocial well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the period 27 March 2020 to 30 September 2020.

Chapter 4 establishes the necessity of understanding HIV and AIDS as it was identified almost four decades ago. It highlights how these epidemics have had an enormous impact on socio-economic development globally, with South Africa being no exception. Consequently, the South African government implemented National Strategic Plans (NSPs) for 2000–2005, 2007–2011 and 2012–2016 in collaboration with different stakeholders. The NSPs aim to reduce new infections, employ a comprehensive treatment and care strategy, monitor and evaluate progress, conduct research, and uphold the rights and dignity of people living with HIV. It is argued in this chapter that despite government and non-government organisations' intervention efforts, the country still grapples with new infections, an increasing antiretroviral programme and comorbidities. This chapter reports on how social workers have been involved in the implementation of the NSP provision of a wide range of services to people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Chapter 5 focuses on Ecometrics, which is a term devised in South Africa that describes a body of knowledge regarding the use of quantitative measurement scales, used in conjunction with qualitative protocols and procedures and scientific practices for assessing client systems in social work. Extensive developmental work in scale development and the promotion of Ecometrics by a stalwart core team of measurement activists has led to the acceptance of a policy for Ecometric instruments by the SACSSP in 2008. Working towards the wider adoption of measurement practices, the gathering of assessment metrics and information management in general in social work, proteges of Ecometrics continue to argue towards regulated adoption of assessment instruments in social work practice. The chapter provides a discussion of the progress towards instrument usage in South Africa and discusses four implemented examples based on three recently developed Ecometric instruments that hold promise for usage adoption. This chapter argues in favour of adopting Ecometric practices in the social service professions and outlines the benefit of such adoption.

Chapter 6 deals with the high prevalence of violence manifested through ritual murder, abuse, forced amputations and the sale and trafficking of the human body parts of people living with albinism. Albinism is regarded by the United Nations (2022) as a rare, non-contagious, genetically inherited

difference present at birth, which results in a lack of pigmentation (melanin) in the hair, skin and eyes. Globally, people living with albinism are confronted with various social and societal challenges, such as discrimination, abuse and violence because of the colour of their skin. This has necessitated a global concern as such acts demonise and dehumanise human dignity and the human body. It is in this light that the researchers uncovered social factors associated with the abuse and killings of people living with albinism in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Chapter 7 contends that for its relevance and effectiveness, social work as a discipline and professional practice requires exposure to local socio-cultural dynamics. It came about as a response to social problems during the Industrial Revolution of the 1880s in the Global North (i.e. Europe and North America) before it expanded worldwide. For decolonisation to succeed, the national identity of a collective people should be understood. To assist with establishing what particular 'people' regard as central to their collective identity (i.e. their 'world views' and 'national DNA'), this chapter adopted a process of examination of preambles of selected national constitutions (i.e. South Africa, Seychelles, India and Germany) as examples. For instance, in the South African context, central to its preamble is to address historical injustices and to embark on national reconciliation (thus, social work needs to put major effort into such endeavours).

Chapter 8 focuses on the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in most higher education institutions adopting online learning. This form of learning, commonly referred to as emergency remote online learning and teaching (EROTL), prevailed during a catastrophic pandemic. Key in this regard is the fact that face-to-face learning was excluded, at least for the prescribed duration of lockdown. This chapter starts by providing a brief profile of Paulo Freire, whose thinking and works bore relevance in this chapter. It further presents a critical analysis of the adoption of online learning based on the prevailing hypothetical view that the replacement of traditional learning by online learning was the desirable future. The question: 'What would Paulo Freire say about online education?' is hypothetically posed to reflect on what Paulo Freire would say about the transition to online learning, with reference to social work practice.

Chapter 9 focuses on the enablers and barriers to the effective execution of work-integrated learning (WIL), as well as the influence of a collaborative tripartite alliance comprising the university, fieldwork agency and student social workers. For students to be fully immersed in the social work profession, they need to integrate theory with practice (academic and practical training). Therefore, collaborative efforts, observed through tripartite alliances, are duly accountable for WIL. Effective WIL advances student learning, preparing students for work readiness while embodying

ethical and professional conduct. Under-preparedness, unskilled and inexperienced students harm the professional practice. In addition, this could place the social work profession into disrepute should there be inappropriate management of social work services. This chapter advocates for a solid collaboration of the tripartite alliance in executing the WIL programme.

Chapter 10 addresses issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a rigorous change across the globe, particularly in the academic system. The Philippines' Higher Education Institutions adopted various learning modalities to pursue education despite the pandemic. This chapter is aimed at understanding the perceived academic stress of university students who were exposed to blended learning and its effect on their family social functioning and academic and social experiences. The causes of the perceived academic stress among the students who are exposed to blended learning were identified as difficulty in academic workloads, inability to concentrate at home while engaging in schoolwork and Internet connectivity problems. Further resultant features included the effects on family social functioning, inability to do assigned tasks or chores at home because of online working, lessened and poor-quality communication among family members and displacement of academic stress at home. A social work intervention based on a task-centred model was proposed to alleviate the presented problems of the blended learning students.

Chapter 11 sheds light on the decades-long discourse and research surrounding the obstacles and encounters faced by students with disabilities, along with the adverse impact it has on individuals grappling with the accompanying inequality, posing a heightened humanitarian risk within the context of severe poverty and unemployment. However, few studies focused specifically on the logistical challenges of students with visual impairments at higher education institutions. This chapter aimed to gain insight into the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments at a selected university as a case study. The findings showed that undergraduate students with visual impairments experienced logistical, teaching and learning challenges at multiple levels. At the micro level, signage visibility and Microsoft PowerPoint fonts are a challenge. At the meso level, some support services may be inaccessible. At the macro level, transportation accessibility challenges were highlighted. The study concludes that students with visual impairment continue to face institutional challenges. The study recommends maximising the use of various social media platforms to raise awareness about the challenges faced by visually impaired students.

Introduction

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This series focuses on vulnerabilities resulting from and escalating through issues such as pandemics, poverty and inequality, which are some of the issues the social work profession is grappling with in the 21st century. The profession of social work is known for advocating human rights, social justice and equality. Our work has continued to emphasise building human relationships and fostering *ubuntu* while empowering the vulnerable during times of significant social disruption. Thus, the key theme of the conference in 2021, from which this publication emanates, was 'Pandemics, poverty and inequality: Social work in the 21st century'. This specific theme emerged from the successful Colloquium that the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) held in 2020, which brought together local social work academics to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work education and practice as well as our work in vulnerable communities during the lockdown.

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Subsequently, in 2021, to continue the discourse of social work and pandemics, the ASASWEI executive scheduled a larger and more participative conference, inviting international and local scholars to contribute papers and presentations and participate in theme-based workshops, all relating to sharing critical social work experiences and perspectives on teaching and learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic, discovered in late 2019, focused attention on issues of social vulnerabilities. Vulnerable groups are those groups of people in society who experience a higher risk of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion than the general population. The pandemic, as Michele Bachelet, United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights, stressed, exposed the damaging impact of inequalities in every society that renders some groups more vulnerable than others. People are vulnerable if there is a lack or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level owing to physical or social barriers (UN 2003). The COVID-19 pandemic raised the awareness of people's limitations caused by social vulnerabilities.

The term 'pandemic' is well-described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a disease's growth and rapid spread affecting several populations and countries. The WHO (2020) emphasises that in being declared a pandemic, the virus has little to do with virology, population immunity or disease severity. It means a virus covers a wide area, affecting several countries and populations. The years 2020 and 2021 will be remembered as the most lethal pandemic because of the COVID-19 outbreak (Boseley 2020). However, history informs us that there were other pandemics previously that impacted the world on a global scale, such as the 1918–1919 Spanish Flu and the AIDS pandemic from 1981 till the present.

To mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic when first discovered in late 2019, hundreds of countries implemented unprecedented 'lockdown' restrictions to control the spread of the virus, resulting in the closure of many businesses, travel bans, a rapid increase in unemployment rates and widespread disruptions to health and social services. Vaccination programmes were slowly implemented, and many countries battled to reach the masses to implement pharmaceutical interventions. The implementation of vaccination programmes sheds further light on the inequalities among poorer and more affluent countries and their abilities to safeguard their people against the devastation of the pandemic. Inequality, defined as an unequal distribution of opportunities and resources (Bell 2015), by implication, then, is viewed in relation to an unjust allocation or deliberate unavailability of specific prospects, possibilities that hamper people's growth, development and protection against atrocities. While countries at the time needed to take drastic measures to protect citizens

against the spread of the virus, the intensity felt in the aftermath of damages caused by the pandemic exacerbated the problem of poverty and inequality, which is faced by the most vulnerable populations serviced by the social work populations. All the governments of the world had to be proactive and commitment to diligence, fairness and equal distribution of resources to all (Ferreira et al. 2009; UN 2022a).

Inequality can have disastrous effects and results in an array of economic, social and health issues for many. Thus, Whitehead, Taylor-Robinson and Barr (2021) and Mubangizi (2021) were correct when they stated that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was not randomly distributed among the world population, and the economic effects were unevenly felt. The distribution of economic wealth, which is often linked to political power and oppression, is key to how people experience their quality of life. The lockdown measures to curb the pandemic placed many small and medium-sized businesses under financial strain, resulting in temporary and permanent closures and many job losses. This negatively changed the economic conditions of many families, and low-income families with children were more vulnerable to the effects of a slower economy. Vulnerable groups are those who need special protection to ensure that they can enjoy their full human rights because their views are not automatically included in those of the dominant group. The history of structural, social and economic inequalities meant that a large portion of the world population who were already vulnerable were plunged into a state of extreme poverty and rights violation during the pandemic (Mubangizi 2021; Pereira & Oliviera 2020; UN 2003). The increase in social complexity resulted in a widening gap between the poorest and the wealthy. This has been the focus of development theorists who argue that inequality of outcomes is evident in people who do not possess the same or similar level of material wealth or the same or similar living conditions. As income inequality rose in many countries, the late 1990s saw increased levels of poverty (Alkire et al. 2015), with activists fighting for increased government support of poor households (Seekings 2020).

The economic fallout of the pandemic is likely to be felt for many years (Whitehead et al. 2021), while the full impact on poverty will only be known in a few years, as most poverty data are derived from household surveys, which have been difficult to carry out during the pandemic (Kharas & Dooley 2021). We do, however, know that for countries to reduce poverty, they need to experience economic growth, as economic recessions drive a rise in poverty. Economic growth also needs to go along with a reduction of inequalities. As inequality rises in many countries, poverty increases (Alkire et al. 2015), rendering certain groups of people socially vulnerable.

The sustainable development goals in the aftermath of the pandemic

The millennium development goals of the past decade, which hoped to contribute to the eradication of poverty, halting the spread of HIV and AIDS and ensuring the provision of universal primary education were not reached by many countries, and this further acerbating the gaps and inequality of poverty (UN 2022a). Unlike the millennium development goals that targeted only developing countries, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) agenda placed accountability in the hands of governments to manage the impact of services to support equality and ensure quality in health care, education and development. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (UN 2022a) stresses the importance of partnerships to raise equality, realise the need for human rights for all, achieve gender equality, and seek to end poverty and hunger.

Consequently, poverty is a concern for nations globally, which is evident in the fact that it has been the first target of the SDGs. While there has been a steady decline in poverty levels in many parts of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic basically eroded four years of poverty reduction progress (Kharas & Dooley 2021; UN 2022b). In a press release in April 2023, the Secretary-General of the UN warned that while we are halfway towards the deadline for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, more than half the world is left behind, with only 12% of the SDG targets being on track. Progress on 50% is weak and there is evidence that there is a reverse on progress made on more than 30% of the SDGs (Guterres 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and the triple crisis of climate, biodiversity and pollution are having a devastating impact, and according to current trends, only 30% of all countries will achieve SDG 1 on poverty by 2030.

The uneven experience of various measures of poverty continued as the COVID-19 containment and lockdown measures impacted poor families with young, developing children. The cost of having children at home without access to free services such as school feeding schemes placed a financial burden on economically vulnerable families (Whitehead et al. 2021) with similar scenarios playing out in South Africa when the National Government suspended the School Feeding Scheme during the initial months of the most stringent lockdown measures. This meant that about 9.6 million children, according to 2018–2019 estimates, were left without an important part of their daily nutrition as these meals provide at least 35%–40% of children's daily nutritional needs (Seekings 2020). The decision to suspend School Feeding Schemes in South Africa was heavily criticised by civil society organisations in South Africa, and Equal Education, one of these organisations, successfully took the National Department of Basic Education (and provincial education departments) to court, seeking an

order that the National School Nutrition Programme be resumed. In a country where poverty and inequality are rife, it is important for a government to have a holistic understanding of its responsibility towards the vulnerable sections of its population.

Social protection programmes and its role in creating a more equal society

Social protection programmes can go a long way in dealing with the chronic poverty of vulnerable families and individuals. Parekh and Bandiera (2020) indicate that out of the different kinds of social protection schemes, social assistance programmes have the highest coverage among vulnerable populations. Pereira and Oliveira (2020), however, allude to a concerning feature that in countries with high levels of poverty, social assistance programmes have not been successful in reducing social inequalities. The difference in the impact of social assistance programmes on poverty reduction is very stark between low- and high-income countries, and the research carried out by Parekh and Bandiera (2020) shows that once social assistance transfers are factored in, the poverty headcount reduced by 3% in low-income countries, as opposed to 6% in lower-middle-income, 8% in upper middle-income and 16% in high-income countries. Their research further shows that social assistance in low-income countries delivers approximately 14 cents in poverty gap reduction for each US$ spent on social assistance programmes, as compared to 29 cents in lower-middle-income countries, 32 cents in upper-middle-income and 45 cents in high-income countries. These figures are concerning as they reflect how historical inequalities between countries also impact the ability of nation-states to reduce poverty among their citizens. Lower-income countries are at a higher risk of poverty entrapment and find it harder to deliver on even the first SDG of no poverty.

South Africa, where ASASWEI held their successful conference on pandemics and their impact on poverty and inequality in 2020, serves as an example of the challenges involved in alleviating poverty. The risk of poverty entrapment is further illustrated when Futshane (2021) reminds us that when the country made the transition into a democratic dispensation in 1991, leading to the first democratic elections in 1994, the new government inherited a nation where most of its citizens were entrenched in deep poverty. The socio-economic injustices created through discriminatory policies of the previous government continue to exist, and the brainy quote by James Baldwin used in Futshane (2021, p. 1) saying ‘people seem to be trapped in history and history trapped in them’ seems to apply to the South African context. With a Gini coefficient of 63, a measure of income inequality, it means that most of the South African population does not benefit from

the country's economy and is excluded from participating in economic activities. This group of people live precarious lives and thus need assistance from the government through social assistance programmes to lift them from a state of chronic poverty and food insecurity.

We are unlikely to see large numbers of poor citizens successfully move from a state of poverty to being financially secure taking into consideration the research conducted by Parekh and Bandiera (2020). The South African researcher Futshane (2021) suggests that this form of social mobility is largely dependent on the social class status of the family that we are born into. People born into a poor family are at risk of inheriting that poverty. Gender, race and class further influence a person's likelihood to escape the entrapment of poverty in a country and these various dimensions of poverty were highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mubangizi 2021). This was also true for South Africa, and when the country went into a hard lockdown in March 2020, informal workers and those in precarious jobs, the majority being female and black, found themselves with little to no means to generate an income. Domestic workers are an example of a precarious job category that was especially hard hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 76% of paid domestic work performed in the world is carried out by women, while 12% of working women in South Africa are domestic workers (Pereira-Kotze 2022). Despite being recognised as workers, this category also faces very limited safety nets and struggles to fully exercise their labour rights.

During the lockdown alert levels in South Africa, domestic workers were unable to work from 26 March to 31 May 2020 (Mullagee 2021). For many of these families, this meant a loss of their main source of income, and the social assistance made available by the government at the time became an important source of basic food security. It continues to serve as a baseline for families with no income. For low-income families, it is important that their governments have the capacity to provide social security for the most vulnerable groups in society, as it serves as an important safety net during times of crisis. The findings of Parekh and Bandiera (2020) that in low-income countries, governments are less likely to have the capacity to do this are really concerning. Poverty and underdevelopment can create a form of entrapment where the government's inability to provide basic security to vulnerable sections of the population negatively impacts the overall prosperity of its citizens. Banovcinova, Levicka and Veres (2014) are of the impression that poverty disrupts family functioning as a whole and has the potential to negatively impact family cohesion. In their study, the researchers examined how long-term poverty exposure can impact seven dimensions of family functioning. These dimensions include problem-solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behaviour control and general family functioning. The findings of their research indicate that enduring the constant strain of long-term

poverty leads to conflicts between the parental role and the working role. Consequently, the stress caused by ongoing economic pressure results in instability within family relationships. Therefore, poverty can be seen as a detrimental factor affecting family functioning.

Poverty and the inability of nation-states to effectively move citizens from economic vulnerability to economic security have significant implications for human development. In 2023, the UN Secretary-General warned that many countries find it almost impossible to invest in the SDGs because of their dire financial situation. Buried under a mountain of debt, it is very difficult for developing countries to recover from the pandemic, while developed countries were largely able to do so. Guterres (2023) alludes to the fact that middle-income countries are denied debt relief and concessional financing, and when borrowing from the financial markets, they face eight times higher interest rates than developed countries.

It is thus clear that global markets respond punitively towards already vulnerable nations to protect their own financial interests. Guterres (2023) goes further to explain that in 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) allocated US$650 billion in special drawing rights, the main global mechanism to boost liquidity during crises. Based on current quotas, the countries of the European Union (EU) received a total of US$160bn in special drawing rights, while African countries with three times the population received US$34bn. He is thus concerned that while the 2030 Agenda is an agenda of justice, equality and dignity, inclusiveness, sustainable development and the protection of human rights for all, the way the global economy is organised is working against the sentiments of the SDGs. If the SDGs are the path to overcoming both economic and geopolitical gaps, to build solidarity and hope, Guterres (2023) argues that a need for deep reforms to the international financial architecture is non-negotiable to allow for a system that puts the needs of developing countries at the centre of decision-making and ensure all countries benefit equally.

For poverty alleviation to really take effect across the globe, structural reforms are essential. As Guterres (2023) stated, there is a need for transformation in the world order concerning global financial markets. This will allow governments of low-income countries the ability to support vulnerable sections of their populations more comprehensively. It can thus be argued that political will and a commitment to eradicate inequality at the macro and meso levels are key to the alleviation of poverty. The most vulnerable sectors of society and those professions dedicated to working with them, such as social work, need a commitment to change at these broader levels. Without this, we will continue to see slow progress and even outright failures in the achievement of the most basic SDGs, such as

poverty eradication. This is, in fact, a continuous violation of people's basic human rights, where inequality and vulnerability are continuously reproduced. Thus, inequality is often closely related to disparity and social injustice. The link between inequality and the abuse of human rights is frequently demonstrated to highlight the profound impact that this phenomenon has on society (Steen, Mann & Gryglewicz 2016).

SECTION A

Social work, vulnerability and inequality

Chapter 1

Complexities and barriers of multidisciplinary community development in South Africa

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Abstract

Multidisciplinary team approach has been the prevailing model in community development for many years, stemming from the historical context of South Africa's community development. Despite the recognition and support for collaborative partnerships and inter-professional teams working in social service professions, as outlined in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), it is the community that plays a key role at the community level. Collaborative partnership efforts remain a challenge in community development intervention. This chapter presents findings from a broader qualitative study that examined the complexities of professionalising community development in South Africa. The study examines the challenges and obstacles faced by multidisciplinary teams in community development, providing insights into their complexities and barriers to effectiveness.

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Multiple case study designs, interviews and documentary analysis were used as research methods to inform this study. A constructivist grounded theory method of data analysis is employed, which includes constant comparative analysis and coding. The results revealed numerous barriers to effective multidisciplinary team development, community participation and collaborative partnership functioning in community development. Recommendations are made for creating more inclusive and collaborative partnership arrangements in order to effectively address the complex challenges of multidisciplinary community development practices.

Introduction

Community development in South Africa is a multidisciplinary and multidimensional field that has evolved from the historical development of the community development sector. The diverse disciplines involved in community development necessitate cooperation between social service professionals and the communities they serve as the primary stakeholders. However, a significant challenge exists because of the lack of collaborative partnership efforts and models at the community level. This can largely be attributed to barriers such as communication failures, strained inter-professional relationships, and a lack of coordination among social service professionals (Ditlhake 2021). The extensive literature on multidisciplinary teamwork in health has identified shared goals, trusting professional relationships, and communication as necessary conditions for effective teamwork. However, the community development field faces numerous complexities and barriers. This chapter aims to investigate the experiences of barriers and intricacies of multidisciplinary community development in South Africa. It is part of a larger qualitative study that examined the complexities of the professionalisation of community development. One of the themes that emerged in this study is the multidisciplinary complexities and barriers to community development. This study explores the challenge of multidisciplinary community development in order to develop effective collaborative partnership teamwork. Effective interdisciplinary teams in the community development field can promote a better understanding of cross-disciplinary expertise, roles and perspectives, as well as develop specific communication strategies. However, barriers such as professional silos and fragmentation in service delivery gaps are discussed to inform practice and overcome the barriers to multidisciplinary community development intervention at the community level. The literature suggests that a multidisciplinary team brings cross-disciplinary expertise in a coordinated and collaborative way (Ditlhake 2022; Ndoro 2014). Interventions aimed at fostering multidisciplinary teamwork at the community level in the field of community development could be a major step forward in the people-centred and bottom-up participatory

approach to community development. Additionally, this chapter provides recommendations to address the barriers that hinder collaborative partnerships in multidisciplinary community development, thereby promoting effectiveness in the field.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is social development (Midgley 2014; Patel 2015). This theory connects the social and economic aspects of social welfare policies (Midgley [1995] 2014). The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) recognises the social development approach and community development in social welfare services. Midgley (1995, p. 25) provides a definition of social development 'as a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development'. This study adopts the following definition of social development. Social development is primarily inclusive in its approach and is informed by the United Nations Report of the World Summit for Social Development (1995) and developmental welfare theory (Midgley [1995] 2014; Patel & Hochfeld 2013). The key point is that social development initiatives should be aligned with well-defined community development. Community development has contributed to social welfare, drawing from various disciplines, theories and diverse practice contexts.

The White Paper on Social Welfare Policy (1997) recognises the significance of community development in social welfare and its valuable role. However, there is still a notable disparity between the policy's intentions and the actual implementation of developmental community development. A conceptual framework connects different concepts and serves as a catalyst for developing theories (Dickson, Emad & Joe 2018; Green 2014; Ravitch & Riggan 2016). Concepts were derived from inductive analysis and are used in this study as emergent concepts. The emergent concepts include multidisciplinary and developmental community development. The conceptual framework for this research is multidisciplinary developmental community development. Multidisciplinary and developmental community development is the new paradigm that emerged in this research. Developmental community development fosters the building of community strengths and participatory empowerment in decision-making to promote social and economic challenges, as well as social justice. This study adopts the definition of community development as a multi-professional approach, considering the community as a central key stakeholder. The transformation of social welfare in South Africa after 1994 adopted the developmental approach to social welfare, as stated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) and the IDP (RSA 2000). Community development plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall

well-being of a nation. It achieves this by fostering a social welfare system that enables individuals to develop their skills and become self-reliant. According to Zastrow (2010, p. 5), social welfare refers to the wide array of social programmes, benefits and services provided by a nation to meet the essential social, economic, educational and health needs of its citizens. Furthermore, Patel (2015, p. 19) emphasises that social welfare is deeply influenced by political and ideological factors, which continue to shape discussions surrounding its future direction.

Multidisciplinary team working at a community level

The term 'multidisciplinary' can be used interchangeably with 'interdisciplinary.' Both terms imply that professionals from different disciplines collaborate for a common purpose and share their expertise and knowledge. Ditlhake (2022) defines multidisciplinary as professionals from various disciplines sharing their work related to community intervention. In this study, multidisciplinary community development refers to a group of professionals from different disciplines and non-professionals working at the community level in various wards of local municipalities. The term 'interdisciplinary collaboration and partnership' is used in this study to describe the process of working together within a multidisciplinary community development at the community level. Several authors have provided critical insights into multidisciplinary teams in the health sector (Tredwell & Havenga 2013; Zwarenstein, Goldman & Reeves 2009). Existing models of multidisciplinary collaboration in South Africa often include common elements and characteristics in education (Treadwell & Havenga 2013) and forms of Private–Public Partnerships (Davids 2005; Grossman 2012), as well as health care programmes (Waggie & Laattoe 2014). However, limited literature and research studies exist on the processes of multidisciplinary working at the community level in the social development sector. Multidisciplinary professionals from different disciplines such as social work, health, education and other social service professions, including community development workers and community development practitioners, are working at a community level.

Often, professionals in this field have simply been encouraged to engage in interdisciplinary work without adequate training and support. Multidisciplinary working can manifest in various ways and may be referred to as inter-professional, multi-professional, interdisciplinary, inter-agency or multi-agency (Sellman & Snelling 2010). Hogston and Marjoram (2007) describe interdisciplinary work as the adjustment of professional roles to facilitate interaction with others. One of the main concerns expressed by all participants is that this complexity creates challenges. Collaborative

multidisciplinary work is difficult to achieve because of a lack of professional trust and working relationships among professionals. Building relationships with communities, social service practitioners and other key stakeholders at the community level is crucial for social capital. The development of these relationships requires multidisciplinary professionals to establish communities based on trust, empowerment, democratic decision-making, inclusive relationships, solidarity, care for others, community cohesion and the promotion of social change. Existing literature on inter-professional work, such as Waggie and Laattoe (2014), and partnership in social development identify shared purposes and goals as essential factors in collaboration and partnership (Lombard & Du Preez 2004, p. 239). However, there is limited literature and research on multidisciplinary community development, collaboration and partnership. The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) acknowledges the efforts of stakeholders in social welfare partnerships.

Research methodology

The research approach selected for this study is qualitative research, specifically using a case study design. Qualitative research focuses on understanding 'human actions from the insider perspective' (Babbie & Mouton 2011, p. 53). Qualitative research is suitable for this study as it aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. This study specifically adopts the explanatory qualitative approach. This study explored and explained the social workers', community development workers' (CDWs') and community development practitioners' (CDPs') views of the complexities and barriers of multidisciplinary community development functioning. This study utilised a qualitative case study research design. Case study methodology maintains deep connections to core values and intentions and is 'particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic' (Merriam 2009, p. 46). An explanatory multiple case study design is adopted to answer the why and how of the research question: How do social workers, CDWs and CDPs perceive the complexities and barriers to the functioning of multidisciplinary working at a community level? The research question underpinning the study is addressed in cross-case multiple-case studies.

Case study research investigates and analyses single or multiple cases to capture the complexity of a phenomenon or object of study (Stake 1995). This definition highlights the distinct characteristics of case studies in social science research and their significance in examining complex practices and contexts (Maree 2019; Thomas & Myers 2015; Yin 2014). The definition stated was adopted in this study to enhance the researcher's understanding and provide a clear framework for the case study. Yin (2014) emphasises its practical nature, while Simons (2009) focuses on complexity

and particularity. The case study unit of analysis in this study involves practitioners in the field of community development in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), higher education institutions (HEIs), the government Department of Social Development and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). The study received ethical approval from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical) (Reference no.: H14/03/04), and ethical considerations have been strictly followed.

Before collecting the data, we obtained permission to conduct the study and had participants sign consent forms. We collected data through in-depth interviews with 74 participants, including CDWs, CDPs and social workers. Each participant had an individual interview. This chapter is based on the findings from these interviews, and we removed any identifying details to ensure anonymity. The interviews are the main source of our data, while the documents we reviewed served as a secondary source and supported the findings from the interviews. The documents used were public records (Creswell 2014; Yin 2014, p. 79). A total of 74 participants, consisting of social workers, CDWs and CDPs, were interviewed. The data analysis was conducted using Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory inductive analysis, which aimed to identify and explain the latent perspectives of the participants across multiple cases. Inductive analysis refers to patterns, themes and categories that emerge from the data itself rather than being predetermined before data collection and analysis (Glasser & Strauss 1967). The data analysis process followed the two-phase approach outlined by Charmaz (2014) for analysing case studies. The first phase involved initial coding, followed by focused selective coding in the second phase. The analysis continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that no new ideas related to the developing theory were emerging from the data (Charmaz 2014). Numerous theoretical categories were generated from the broader study and were saturated. However, only a few theoretical categories that are relevant to the purpose of this chapter, namely complexities and barriers in the multidisciplinary field of community development, are identified and analysed here. To facilitate the coding and retrieval of coded information, the computer program ATLAS.ti was utilised.

Findings and discussions

Multidisciplinary community development contextual complexity

The study findings have revealed that community development in South Africa is a multidisciplinary field and a highly complex contextual factor. The complexities of the interdisciplinary field in community development

facilitation are intricately linked to this country's historical background in community development. The history demonstrates the multifaceted nature and distinctive interdisciplinary expertise associated with it. Moreover, the Community Development Practice Policy Framework (Republic of South Africa [RSA] 2014, p. 38) recognises the challenges posed by the complexities of interdisciplinary work in this sector. According to the participants, multidisciplinary practice brings about collaboration complexities. However, research in the health care sector indicates that it has a positive impact on successful multidisciplinary work by enhancing the practice of team members (Zwarenstein, Goldman & Reeves 2009).

Furthermore, the participants have shared their perspectives on their experiences with multidisciplinary work. They have pointed out that the field of interdisciplinary work has not matched its promises, especially when it comes to the relationship between social workers, CDPs and CDWs at the community level. Communication failures and a lack of professional relationships among social service professionals are significant obstacles for multidisciplinary teams working at the community level. This study's findings align with previous research that emphasises the difficulties associated with multidisciplinary collaboration in the health care sector, particularly when communication between interdisciplinary team members is ineffective (Hogston & Marjoram 2007). There are existing reviews that argue for the implementation of communication strategies to establish a democratic team (Zwarenstein et al. 2009). Consequently, it is crucial to establish a democratic communication framework for community development at the community level.

Moreover, participants expressed their views on the policy context of the community development field. They noted that the practice is unregulated, which adds to the challenges of gaining low-status recognition and having an unclear scope of practice. Although the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) emphasises the significance of collaboration and partnership in social welfare, there are very few collaborative efforts taking place at the community level.

Professional silos or silos approach barrier

The next theme that hindered multidisciplinary community development is the silos approach. Participants saw the interdisciplinary silos approach as a major challenge when it comes to multidisciplinary work in the community. It is said that practitioners and stakeholders work in isolation and do not collaborate at the community level. The silos approach leads to fragmentation and hampers the achievement of community social and economic development goals outlined in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) and envisioned by the IDP (RSA 2000). The silo approach highlights

a lack of professional relationships, communication, engagement, consultations and coordination efforts at the community level. Moreover, the silo approach acts as a barrier that hinders understanding of inter-professional roles, responsibilities, inter-professional teamwork and the necessary collaboration across disciplines. Additionally, opinions regarding the advantages of collaborative work in the community were:

- Community is a shared space, and intervention by the interdisciplinary team is more significant than intervention by a single discipline.
- Individual professionals are acting on their own.
- Leverage different skills and knowledge.
- Decreases duplication and service gaps.
- Advances the achievement of shared purpose and development of creative solutions to problems.

Role conflict and confusion barrier

Participants stated that a lack of collaboration leads to role conflict and confusion among practitioners. They noted that when interdisciplinary professionals have similar responsibilities, role blurring, duplication and fragmentation of services tend to occur. Furthermore, participants argued that not adhering to one's scope of practice results in turf issues, tensions, role conflict and confusion. The study's findings showed that social workers often take on community development responsibilities that overlap with those of CDPs. Thus, this exacerbates tension and turf issues, which in turn inhibits understanding of professional identity at the community level. The lack of a clear scope of practice for the evolving profession of CDPs further impedes understanding of the uniqueness and professional identity at the community level. In a study on the complexities of professionalisation in community development, Ditlhake (2021) suggests that fostering healthy relationships, partnerships and collaboration at the community level are significantly associated with role clarity, a better understanding and recognition of the value that multidisciplinary teams can offer.

Conclusion

Inter-professional working at a community level is challenging, but it is essential to have a foundation in valuing respect and diversity within the context of multidisciplinary practice. Understanding the complexities of multidisciplinary collaboration increases the potential to achieve shared purposes, processes and outcomes in community development. Community development involves mobilising people to engage in matters that affect them and build upon the strengths of the community. Communication enables communities and practitioners to initiate a dialogue and explore social issues, goals and objectives in democratic decision-making.

Therefore, open communication is crucial for successful collaborative partnerships. It is important to leverage and define existing or potential relationships, considering factors that can either enhance or hinder multidisciplinary collaborative efforts. In community-level multidisciplinary teams, collaboration with stakeholders who have a shared purpose is essential. As the field of community development becomes more complex and multidisciplinary, it is necessary to have inclusive and up-to-date practices that prioritise democratic structures. These structures should promote open teamwork and communication in order to overcome barriers to multidisciplinary collaboration at the community level. The extensive literature on multidisciplinary teams has consistently highlighted the importance of relationships and communication as prerequisites for effective team performance (Tredwell & Havenga 2013; Zwarenstein et al. 2009). This chapter has reviewed the complexities, barriers and challenges related to community collaboration and partnership at the community level. It highlights the importance of developing a substantive theory to address these issues (Ditlhake 2021, 2022, p. 64). Further research should focus on evaluating interventions that can effectively structure multidisciplinary collaborative efforts, professional relationships, democratic communications and decision-making processes. By improving these aspects, we can make significant advancements in community development at the local level.

Chapter 2

Poverty alleviation interventions by social workers through facilitation of financial capabilities

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Abstract[1]

Financial capability is one of the important strategies for poverty alleviation, and the social work profession plays a significant role in interventions that are aimed at alleviating poverty. However, such a role has not been adequately explored, especially in the South African context. This is despite social workers' contribution to the facilitation of financial capabilities

1. This chapter is based on the author's PhD dissertation: Bambeni, N 2021, 'The role of social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development of vulnerable households', for the degree of Doctor of Social Work in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, with Professor Lambert K Engelbrecht as promoter.

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development during their daily interaction with service users. A qualitative study was conducted utilising semi-structured interviews with 35 social work professionals (20 social workers, ten supervisors and five social work policy managers) in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development. The data and empirical findings were analysed in line with themes as identified in the interview schedule, namely conceptual understanding of financial vulnerability, causes of financial vulnerability, sources of referral for cases of financial vulnerability, interventions of social workers, success and effectiveness of social workers' interventions, challenges faced by social workers when facilitating financial capabilities development, relevance of social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development and capacitation of social workers. Themes were identified in accordance with the narratives of the participants from the empirical data.

The findings indicated that the social workers provided interventions in the facilitation of financial capabilities through their roles of educator, advocate, communicator, enabler and negotiator. The findings also revealed that some of the social workers' interventions were successful and effective in bringing about the desired financial behaviour and that this became possible through the co-operation of service users and relevant stakeholders. The findings also revealed challenges that include a lack of co-operation from non-voluntary service users and a lack of appropriate skills and knowledge among social workers. The findings indicated the relevance of the social work profession in the facilitation of financial capabilities development because of the correlation between financial and psychosocial vulnerability. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for the capacitation of social workers in financial management and financial capabilities development. The key recommendation of this study is that the development of a curriculum for social work students and practitioners alike on the facilitation of financial capabilities development (financial social work) is absolutely vital in the context of South Africa's social development approach towards social work service delivery.

Introduction

Notwithstanding all developmental interventions aimed at reducing poverty, they do not have any meaning if they do not increase the income and well-being of all (Ayoo 2022, p. 2). Financial capability is viewed as one of the innovative approaches to addressing poverty by providing access to savings and assets, as well as income support. Thus, financial capability could play a significant role in alleviating poverty among poor households because of its potential to contribute towards building assets and improving financial management skills. One of the goals and objectives of the

provincial Department of Social Development (DSD) is the empowerment of communities, groups and individuals through their active participation in developmental programmes for improved social functioning and quality of life (DSD 2017). The Provincial DSD in the Eastern Cape has poverty alleviation interventions through its community development programmes, which include poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods, youth development and women development (DSD 2017). The developmental social welfare programme that comprises social welfare interventions implemented mainly by social workers through individual, family, group and community work methods offers no guidelines on how to integrate poverty alleviation in social workers' interventions for individuals, families, groups and communities. However, social workers do participate in poverty alleviation during their day-to-day interaction with clients through psychosocial empowerment and facilitation of clients' financial capabilities, specifically social grant recipients.

Social workers are also not trained in financial management, neither in their training towards their qualification nor as part of their service training (Sherraden 2013, p. 2). Therefore, the financial skills, knowledge and therapeutic techniques applied by social workers employed by the Eastern Cape DSD when facilitating the financial capabilities of their clients are not known. The role of social work intervention in facilitating the financial capabilities of vulnerable households could bring great impetus to the sphere of facilitating financial capabilities. Social workers have also made remarkable progress in conducting applied research and contributing to policy and practice innovations that aim to improve financial capabilities and build assets in low-income and financially vulnerable families (Birkenmaier, Sherraden & Curley 2013b, p. 3; Huang, Nam & Sherraden 2013, p. 154). However, little is known about social workers who are interested or engaged in efforts to facilitate financial capability. To date, there is also no research on faculty and student responses to these incipient efforts to build professional competence in financial capability and asset building with financially vulnerable populations. (Sherraden et al. 2016, p. 3). In South Africa, significant scholarly work is being carried out on social work and financial capability, albeit on a limited scale. The scholarly work carried out includes financial vulnerability and indebtedness of people using social work services (Engelbrecht 2009, p. 154), social workers' perceptions of poverty and the construction of a conceptual framework for financial literacy programmes (Engelbrecht 2008a, p. 256). Engelbrecht (2009, p. 154) argues that research into the debt levels of social work service users and specific social work interventions in South Africa is non-existent. The research findings by Engelbrecht (2008b, p. 13) revealed that social workers in South Africa also lack clarity about their role and place in facilitating the financial capabilities of vulnerable

households in the continuum of services in a social development paradigm. The reason for this is that the underlying social development theory of integrating social and economic development goals does not figure prominently in social work practice (Patel & Hochfield 2013). This implies that frontline social workers do not readily act as facilitators or advocates for the financial capability of vulnerable households, as their interventions with over-indebted households focus on service users' symptomatic psychosocial well-being and vulnerability (Engelbrecht 2011, p. 49). Although social workers may play a role in facilitating the financial capabilities of their service users, there are no clear theoretical and practice guidelines informing their interventions. Indeed, no clear correlation exists between theoretical knowledge, skills and practice among social workers when facilitating financial capabilities, as they are often not fully prepared to integrate professional financial counselling and coaching into practice (Birkenmaier et al. 2017, p. 11). Therefore, more information about the social workers' role is needed to help identify needs and opportunities for education and professional development in finance and to examine the potential contribution social workers can make and their role in the financial field.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research question:

- What is the nature of the financial challenges that often face vulnerable households in the Eastern Cape?

The following sub-questions were also discussed:

- How do social workers perceive their role in the day-to-day facilitation of financial capabilities development of vulnerable households?
- What can be done to improve the role of social workers in facilitating the financial capabilities development of vulnerable households?

Goal

The goal of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the role that social workers play in facilitating the financial development capabilities of vulnerable households.

Problem statement

In the last decade, some schools of social work in the Western world have begun taking steps to integrate household financial issues into professional training (Sherraden et al. 2015b, p. 5). Social workers have also made

remarkable progress in conducting applied research and contributing to policy and practice innovations that aim to improve financial capabilities and build assets in low-income and financially vulnerable families (Birkenmaier et al. 2013b, p. 44). However, little is known about social workers who are interested or engaged in efforts to facilitate financial capability (Sherraden et al. 2015a, p. 3). To date, there is also no research on faculty and student responses to these incipient efforts to build professional competence in financial capability and asset building with financially vulnerable populations (Sherraden et al. 2015b, p. 6). Sherraden et al. (2015a, p. 4) affirm that the number of social workers who routinely engage clients in discussions about financial management and credit is small relative to other areas of social work practice. Social workers and other helping professionals often lack the knowledge and skills to tackle increasingly complex financial problems facing their clients (Sherraden 2013) because very few schools of social work teach personal finance content (Sherraden, Kaufman & Laux 2007). As a consequence, most social workers are unprepared to help clients resolve their financial problems (Despard & Chowa 2012, p. 348).

Research methodology

The research approach that was deemed to be most appropriate for this study was the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach was chosen in order to understand phenomena from the participants' perspective and to explore and discover them in depth and context (Mohajan 2018, p. 24). It is about persons' lives, experiences and feelings as well as about organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena and interactions between nations (Rahman 2017, p. 103). In this study, the researcher sought to explore and understand the role of social workers based on their experiences in facilitating the financial capabilities development of their vulnerable service users.

The study was conducted through exploratory and descriptive research designs. Exploratory research is applied when very little is known about the study topic (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole 2013), when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject itself is relatively new (Hunter, McCallum & Howes 2019, p. 2). Exploratory research is appropriate in the case of the present study in that very limited knowledge or information exists about the subject, and the purpose of the research is to gain a broader understanding of the social workers' role in facilitating financial capabilities. Descriptive research was also applied as detailed documentation of what was studied (Bhattacherjee 2012, p. 21). The descriptive research is relevant because this study provides detailed information about the role played by social workers in facilitating financial capabilities.

Population and sampling procedure

The population is an entire set of objects or people that comprise the focus of a research project, which includes individuals who possess specific characteristics (Vehovar, Toepoel & Steinmetz 2018, p. 327). In this study, they were frontline social workers, supervisors and social work policy managers employed by the Eastern Cape DSD. The Eastern Cape province was chosen as a case study as no previous study had been conducted on the focal research area, particularly among social workers employed by the government. Non-probability sampling was used in this study because qualitative research does not concentrate on the representation of the population at large but rather on the diversity of cases (Etikan, Musa & Akassim 2016; Vehovar et al. 2018, p. 328). Purposive sampling was used as a type of non-probability sampling. Through purposive or judgemental sampling, the social workers, supervisors and provincial social work policy managers studied were scheduled on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which ones were the most representative (Hunter et al. 2019, p. 3).

The sample for the study comprised 20 social workers, ten social work supervisors and five social work policy managers from the social welfare services stream at the Provincial Office of the DSD. The social workers were selected to form part of the sample because they work directly with vulnerable households, while the supervisors were selected to be part of the sample because they manage the policy and practice implementation by social workers. The five social work policy managers became part of the study because they are responsible for policy formulation in the department. The number of participants in this study was deemed enough to represent the study population, as the sample in qualitative research is considered to be adequate when good choices have been made in relation to the methods used and the purpose of the study (Subedi 2021, p. 10). The 20 participants among the social workers were chosen from two districts of the DSD, namely the OR Tambo District and the Buffalo City Metropolitan areas. The Eastern Cape DSD in the Eastern Cape province has eight districts that are structured in line with the local government demarcation of six district municipalities and two metros. The district municipalities are mostly rural, while the metros are largely urban. More than 90% of service users serviced by social workers in the OR Tambo District come from traditional rural areas, whereas the majority of those in Buffalo City are urban-based. The reason for the selection of urban- and rural-based districts is based on the assumption that service users might present different challenges of vulnerability that may be influenced by different socio-economic environments.

The criteria used for selecting social work participants was a minimum of three years of practising as a social worker in generic social work in the DSD at their various local service offices. Supervisors should also meet the criteria of a minimum of three years of performing the supervisory role of generic social work at their respective service offices of the DSD. The five social work policy managers were drawn from the sub-directories that have a role in the facilitation of financial capabilities, namely foster care, care and support to older persons, services to persons with disabilities, care and support to families, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The five social work policy managers also have a minimum of three years of working as social work policy managers.

The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with the intention of gaining a better understanding of social workers' experiences when assisting vulnerable service users in their professional practice (Mashuri et al. 2022, p. 4). Semi-structured interviews enable researchers to focus on topics at hand without constraining them to a particular format (Mashuri et al. 2022, p. 4). One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used in order to gain a detailed picture of participants' accounts of the research questions (Mashufi et al. 2022, p. 4). One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used and audiotaped in order to elicit individual responses from the social work supervisors. The semi-structured interviews were based on the identified themes relevant to each group category of participants that were interviewed. The interviews were conducted at times, dates and venues that were suitable to the participants. The interviews were held in three phases with the different categories of participants. The first phase was comprised of social work participants, while the second phase was for the social work supervisors. The third phase of the interview schedule was scheduled for social work policy managers from the provincial office.

In this study, the researcher conducted data analysis by planning for the recording of data in a systematic manner that was appropriate to the setting, research participants, or both, and that was able to facilitate analysis prior to the collection of data (Sutton & Austin 2015). The researcher generated themes based on the literature studies and, subsequently, generated codes that came out of the raw data (Sutton & Austin 2015). The analysis also included offering interpretation by evaluating the data for their usefulness and centrality (Sutton & Austin 2015). The research was conducted in three phases and data were analysed based on the themes identified for each category of participants during each phase. The phases for data analysis were not consecutive but rather supported each other as data of the different phases have not been compared; instead, they have been integrated into narratives and themes.

Credibility

Stahl and King (2020, p. 229) assert that studies with high credibility are those in which the researcher has convincingly demonstrated the appropriateness of the overall internal logic of the research question, the study design, the data collection methods and the data analysis approach used. Credibility of the study can also be achieved through accurate identification and description of the subject by ensuring that there is a match between participants' views and the researcher's construction and presentation of these views (Stahl & King 2020, p. 229). The researcher ensured that the study was credible by having clearly defined research methods that led to the attainment of the research goal and objectives and by answering the research question. The research methods applied included the selection of an appropriate qualitative explorative research approach, sampling procedures, a descriptive case study design, a relevant literature review, the use of one-on-one semi-structured interviews as data collection tools, and appropriate data analysis and interpretation techniques.

Ethical considerations

Ethics is a set of rules for proper behaviour during the thinking and action process of research, particularly for the protection of human research participants (DePoy & Gitlin 2016, p. 24). The nature of this study is such that it did not explore personal experiences; instead, it sought to explore the theoretical and practical experiences of social workers, supervisors and social work managers in their respective roles in facilitating the financial capabilities of financially vulnerable households. However, the following ethical issues were taken into consideration:

- **Informed consent** was sought through formal written consent. Each participant received a written request for participation in the study that provided the purpose of the study and the procedures to be followed during the study, including times and outlining the roles of the participants. The participants had to sign a consent form as a way of agreeing to voluntarily participate in the study. The principle of informed consent stresses the researcher's responsibility to completely inform participants of different aspects of the research in comprehensive language (Sanjari et al. 2014).
- **Deception of respondents** was avoided through a genuinely open introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the study, including the expected roles of the participants throughout the study. Deception involves concelling or misdescribing aspects of the research (Wendler 2022, p. 558). It also involves manipulating participants to believe things

that are false about the study in question and thus violates the participants' right to decide for themselves whether to enrol (Wendler 2022, p. 558).

- **Confidentiality** or safeguarding of confidentiality was ensured by the researcher when collecting data by using an audiotape recorder that was locked away safely in a place that was accessible only to the researcher. The assurance about safeguarding confidentiality was part of the consent form that was signed by the participants. The principle of confidentiality entails an obligation on the part of the researcher to ensure that any use of information obtained from or shared by human respondents respects the dignity and autonomy and does not violate the interests of the individuals and families (Bos 2020, p. 153).
- **Anonymity** was ensured by the researcher by not disclosing the identity of participants during the study and the findings (Bos 2020, p. 156).

As the study was conducted at the provincial DSD, permission for this study was sought from the provincial head of department. Permission was first sought from the Stellenbosch University Departmental Ethics Committee before commencing with the study. The researcher is registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and is thus committed to the code of ethics of the social work profession.

Limitations of the study

Limitations in a research study refer to constraints in a study based on the research methodology and design and are able to identify potential weaknesses in the study's research design and methodology (Miles 2019, p. 2). Firstly, the limitation of the study was the lack of conceptual knowledge of financial capability among participants. The researcher started by defining the concepts so that the participants could respond within the proper conceptual context. This was because of the fact that social workers facilitated financial capabilities development without conceptual knowledge of financial capability. Secondly, the study cannot be generalised to the rest of South Africa; however, similar contexts may exist in South Africa, and the study may be applicable to those contexts. Some of the participants, especially social work policy managers, had no deep insight into direct interactions with service users because of a long period of nondirect social work practice. However, they could reflect on poverty alleviation strategies and directives followed by their departments. The majority of participants who were social workers and social work supervisors had more insight as they provided direct services to service users. Despite all these limitations, the essence of the study regarding financial capability development is still applicable.

Research findings

The findings of the study encompassed eight themes, which include conceptual understanding of financial vulnerability; sources of referral for cases of financial vulnerability; causes of financial vulnerability; the role of social workers' interventions in facilitating financial capabilities development; successfulness and effectiveness of social workers' interventions; challenges faced by social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development; relevance of the role of social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development and capacitation of social workers.

Theme 1: Conceptual understanding of financial vulnerability

It was vital that all social workers had the same understanding of the concept to avoid any ambiguity, vagueness and misconceptions when investigating their role in the facilitation of financial capabilities development. Conceptualisation is a process that is expressed in words that belong to a particular language and enables people to communicate with one another because they know what is meant by the words that they are using in communicating (De Vos & Strydom 2011, p. 29). Service users' lack of financial knowledge, lack of financial skills and undesirable financial behaviour emerged prominently as factors that informed participants' conceptual understanding of financial vulnerability. Social workers identified a lack of financial knowledge as one of the key determinants of financial vulnerability. Most of the participants indicated that the financial expenditure of service users was not guided by prioritising household needs. According to Scalon and Sanders (2017, p. 1), it is through financial knowledge that individuals can learn new skills, knowledge and practices. The lack of knowledge about the difference between wants and needs was the first aspect to be identified that constitutes a lack of financial knowledge. Huffstertler (2019, p. 1) asserts that the secret to sustaining oneself from day to day while also realising financial goals is drawing up a budget that balances one's needs and wants. Ngo (2017, p. 1) suggests that the best way for one to gain control of one's money is to separate needs from wants.

The findings indicate that a lack of knowledge about available financial products and services is another cause of financial vulnerability. The significance of knowledge about available financial products and services is emphasised by Xiao (2016, p. 6) when he asserts that once there is improvement in the understanding of individuals of the products and services, they will be able to make informed choices, will know where to go

for help and will be able to take effective actions to improve their financial well-being and protection. The lack of budgeting skills was raised as one of the aspects that described financial knowledge. The type of budget that was relevant to this study was personal or family budget. Personal budget is significant because it helps one to track one's spending, to ensure that spending is less than earnings, to prepare for the future and to monitor financial health (O'Hagan 2019, p. 1). Lack of knowledge about financial concepts has been identified as one of the elements that depict financial vulnerability. Zait and Bertea (2014) describe the understanding of financial concepts within financial literacy as the ability to read about, analyse, manage and communicate about the personal financial conditions that affect material well-being and the ability to make informed judgements and effectively make decisions concerning money.

The study also revealed that a lack of personal financial management skills renders individuals financially vulnerable as they cannot manage their finances properly. Personal financial management skills may be evident when an individual has acquired both financial knowledge and budget skills. Personal financial management skills contribute towards the improvement of financial behaviour among individuals (Refera, Dhaliwa & Kaurj 2016, p. 5). The study findings demonstrate that although some individuals may have adequate financial knowledge, their financial behaviour may not reflect their level of financial knowledge. The study findings affirm the assertion from behavioural economics that undesirable financial behaviour is the result of emotions, instinct, previous experience and quick decisions aimed at shortcuts (Storchi & Johnson 2015, p. 2) and is sometimes aimed at achieving a hedonistic lifestyle. An individual's financial behaviour can be observed in terms of how good the person is at managing savings and expenses (Hilgert, Hogarth & Berley 2003, p. 309).

Theme 2: Sources of referral for cases of financial vulnerability

The study revealed that service users are referred to social workers by family members and sometimes access social workers through self-referral. Some of the services are referred by local authorities and government institutions such as clinics, schools, South African Police Services (SAPS) and South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). Most of the referrals from families, community members and government institutions lead to social workers engaging with involuntary service users. Non-voluntary service users find themselves with social workers against their wishes, and as a result, they are often reluctant to accept help and resist any form of intervention (Alketbi 2017, p. 1). The referral by community leaders through

local authorities concurs with Patel (2015) when she asserts that engagement in developmental social work can also be initiated by community leaders and, therefore, is not only expert-driven but may be community-led through various informal entry points. Furthermore, the referral by community members demonstrates an assertion by LeCray and Stinson (2004, p. 172) that the public has developed an improved awareness about a wide range of social work roles and activities and also, to a fairly large degree, is well aware of the function that social workers perform. Those who approach social workers through self-referral become voluntary service users. In the case of voluntary service users, there is no experience of external pressure to participate in intervention plans because contact between service users and social workers does not happen as a result of pressure from formal or informal (Rooney 2009, p. 3). There is an inter-sectoral collaboration between government institutions and social workers at the local level regarding the rendering of services to vulnerable households. The working relationship between social workers, local authorities and government institutions demonstrates the significance of social development partnerships in the facilitation of financial capabilities development.

Theme 3: Causes of financial vulnerability

Knowledge of the causes of financial vulnerability among service users is vital for effective intervention by social workers, and it is necessary to consider these causes when exploring the role of social workers in facilitating the financial capabilities development of vulnerable households. The causes of financial vulnerability include misuse of social grants, addictive social behaviours, unscrupulous loan sharks, poverty, and unstable marital and family relationships. The study findings point out that the Child Support Grant (CSG) is paid out to the biological mothers of children who do not stay with them and that the CSG is not spent for the benefit of the intended beneficiaries as it does not reach them. Despite the much-vaunted success of the CSG as the largest cash transfer payment in terms of the number of beneficiaries and also as the most successful in South Africa (Tanga & Gutura 2013, p. 128), the responses from the participants point out an undesirable outcome of the CSG, namely its misuse by the biological mothers of the CSG beneficiaries. Those who use alcohol take a portion of the grant to buy alcohol or to pay debts incurred by buying alcohol on credit from shebeens or taverns. Mabugu et al. (2014, p. 4) express a concern that because cash is exchangeable, poor people might be tempted to use the money from social grants on nonessential goods, including alcohol and drugs. Alcohol abuse is a serious threat to the financial well-being of vulnerable households, particularly those whose only source of

income is social grants. Gambling was also identified as another social factor that negatively affects the financial capability of many households whose income is derived from social grants. Khosa and Kaseka (2017, p. 362) discovered that some of the CSG recipients used the CSG money for gambling. The study also found that irresponsible lending by unscrupulous loan sharks is also the cause of excessive borrowing. Bel and Eberlein (2015, p. 28) argue that predatory lending takes advantage of financial illiteracy, whereby inappropriate loans are pushed onto consumers who cannot repay them. The study revealed that the effect of poverty on financial capability is examined in relation to two dimensions of poverty, which are illiteracy and low levels of literacy and low income among vulnerable households. According to Lusardi, Michaud and Mitchell (2017, p. 436), poorly educated and low-income respondents display lower levels of financial literacy and households with less income and wealth see no need for any benefit in investing in financial literacy. Unstable marital and family relationships may have a significant impact on the financial capability of households. One of the factors that is characteristic of unstable marriages is conflict, which often results in a lack of communication and a lack of mutual planning among couples. Low levels of economic well-being may exacerbate financial conflict as couples may struggle to make ends meet (Dew & Steward 2012, p. 43).

Theme 4: Role of social workers' interventions in facilitating financial capabilities development

Social workers implement these interventions through the different roles that they play during the process of implementing their interventions, and those roles depend on the nature of the cases of financial capability presented. These roles include that of an advisor, advocate, educator and enabler. The service users were provided with advice on financial products, efficient and effective use of income, and exploration of alternative sources of income. Service users were also advised about choosing the financial products that best suit their financial capacity and needs. In advisory counselling, questioning, motivation and exploration of choices and capacity may be appropriate and useful techniques to apply (Hill, Ford & Meadows 1990, p. 3). The role of educating service users on the purpose of social grants is implemented by utilising case work, group work and community work. The educator role of social workers focuses on teaching service users, especially low-income earners, about basic financial concepts and their application in the financial sector and in their own lives, including budgeting, savings and credit. The role of educator in social work entails developing and teaching skills to clients and other systems by providing relevant information, giving advice, identifying and modelling alternative

behaviour patterns and their consequences, imparting problem-solving techniques and clarifying perceptions (Patel 2015, p. 142). The study findings show that social workers play an advocacy role by acting on behalf of service users when loan sharks use illegal mechanisms to recover money owed to them, which may include threats against the lives of service users and confiscation of identity documents and SASSA cards or bank cards as forms of surety for repayment of the debt. In advocacy, social workers champion the rights of individuals and communities, either directly or through community action (Engelbrecht 1999, p. 114) with the goal of securing or retaining social justice and promoting fair and equal treatment. In the process of intervention, social workers enable service users to implement actions that have been agreed upon for implementation at the planning stage. The action plans include budgeting, saving and repayment of debts. The role of an enabler in social work is to encourage and facilitate the self-sufficient action of clients, which promotes interaction between individuals and the environment (Engelbrecht 1999, p. 113). Social workers play the role of negotiators when negotiating with credit providers for affordable repayment of debt. The role of a negotiator facilitates repayment of debts at affordable rates and thus leaves service users with finances to take care of their daily basic necessities. Negotiation involves finding a middle ground that all sides can agree to live with and achieving a consensus that is acceptable to everyone (Engelbrecht 1999, p. 114).

Theme 5: Successfulness and effectiveness of social workers' interventions

The success of the interventions can be measured by whether the professional working relationship between the social worker and the service user is able to sustain itself throughout all the phases, from engagement to termination. The effectiveness of social workers' intervention can be determined by whether the working relationship between social workers and service users yields the desired results and achieves the intended goal. The success of the intervention may be determined by the co-operation of the service user and that of key significant others or key actors. This is supported by Cabiati and Panciroli (2019), who state that the success of social work services depends not only on the service user but also on a secondary cast of characters or key actors because social work practice intervention always involves others. Effective social work practice designs essentially produce changes in social functioning, and therefore, it cannot be pretended that the social worker and client can act in isolation from other actors (Cabiati & Panciroli 2019).

Co-operation was experienced by both those whose engagement with social workers was the result of self-referral and those who had been

referred by family members, neighbours, community members and various institutions in the community. Co-operation by voluntary service users is supported by the assertion of Rooney and Mirick (2019, p. 2) that a voluntary client does not experience external pressure to participate in social work services and, as a consequence, is free to select service providers or fire them if not satisfied with the services provided. The success of social workers' interventions is realised through improvements in the psychosocial and financial circumstances of service users. These benefits can be realised within a short period during the intervention and after the intervention plan has been completed, and other benefits can be realised later and can also be of long-term benefit to vulnerable households. The immediate benefits for vulnerable households manifest themselves through the affordability of essentials that were difficult for the household to access before the interventions by social workers. These essentials include the ability to buy food and the ability to face financial emergencies. The long-term benefits for vulnerable households are realised when social workers' interventions contribute towards increased and permanent financial and economic well-being of households. The role played by social workers in facilitating the financial capabilities of Old Age Grant (OAG) recipients enables households to have a better life with higher food security and, importantly, have a greater capacity to help children in their households who then enjoy higher food security and better schooling (Gomez-Olive et al. 2010, p. 24).

Theme 6: Challenges faced by social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development

The role of facilitating financial capabilities development of vulnerable households by social workers is not without challenges. The challenges faced by social workers include a lack of co-operation from service users, a lack of financial skills and knowledge, and a lack of policy and practice guidelines. The findings reveal that abuse of alcohol negatively affects service users in the implementation of intervention plans. Poverty, as one of the end results of unemployment, is at a high level in South Africa, and it has to be noted that many communities are living below the poverty line and tend to spend the little money that they have on alcohol (Setlakentoa, Ryke & Strydom 2015, p. 97). The nonadherence to financial capability action plans was also found to be most prevalent among non-voluntary service users. It is argued that the resistant behaviour of the service user reflects their different definition of the situation and the service user's attempts to protect their own interests and to enhance or protect their status (Cingolin 1984, p. 1). The study findings reveal that social workers do not have the necessary skills for intervention when facilitating the

financial capabilities development of service users. There are no clearly defined intervention approaches and intervention skills for facilitating financial capabilities development, and social workers use and apply whatever they presume is appropriate for a particular case. Sherraden (2013, p. 3) asserts that social workers and other helping professionals often lack the skills and knowledge to tackle the increasingly complex financial problems facing their clients. The study showed that social workers intervened in facilitating financial capabilities development without any policy and practice guidelines. The lack of practice and policy guidelines is a big challenge for social workers when facilitating financial capabilities development. A social work practice without guidelines may be viewed by the public as largely dependent on the individual worker, and service users may be perceived as being without any clear protection from incompetence, unfairness and malpractice (Howard & Jenson 2014, p. 284). The lack of policy guidelines is a matter of serious concern, especially when it relates to the management of income from social grants. Practice guidelines are one promising approach to increasing the empirical basis and effectiveness of social work practice and enabling social workers to be more effective in their practice and in influencing the policy development process (Howard & Jenson 2014, p. 284).

Theme 7: Relevance of the role of social workers in facilitating financial capabilities development

Despite the lack of skills and knowledge in financial management and in the field of financial capability, social workers continue to assist people faced with financial challenges. It has been noted earlier that it is inevitable for social workers not to become involved in financial capabilities development because vulnerable households approach social workers when they need assistance to deal with socio-economic challenges because social workers are particularly capable of helping people achieve behavioural change in the financial area (Wolfsohn & Michaeli 2014, p. 3). Social workers may also come into contact with clients because of their financial challenges or psychosocial difficulties that may be connected to their financial situation and low-income status (Barczyk & Lincovn 2010, p. 210). There is a need for social workers to become involved in household financial capabilities development because of an increasing number of households in poverty and households that are struggling to make financial decisions within an increasingly complex financial environment (Sherraden 2013, p. 3).

The study findings reveal that the facilitation of financial capabilities development of vulnerable households by social workers is inherent in their daily practice because of the linkage between social ills and financial vulnerability faced by service users. Firstly, during the intervention process,

the social worker facilitates financial capability, inclusive of the social and psychological causes and consequences of financial vulnerability. The study reveals that social work skills enable social workers to deal with different client groups and their diverse social and psychological needs. The social work skills applied include empathy, active listening, communication and persuasion. Social workers can also play a role in providing financial counselling to resolve conflicts in families about financial circumstances (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2017, p. 6).

Secondly, social workers have professional skills that have been acquired through professional training that enable them to assist service users with financial challenges. Through these professional skills, social workers may have an important perspective to offer the kind of help to inform financial education, counselling and financial therapy practice (Sherraden et al. 2015a, p. 3). The study discovered that the empathy skills applied by social workers helped the service users to develop more confidence in the social workers because they understood how the service users felt about their situation. The application of empathy skills is crucial in the engagement phase when service users are likely to have feelings of ambivalence about seeing social workers, especially non-voluntary service users. It is widely acknowledged that empathy is an important skill in social work (Grant 2013, pp. 1–2) because of its vital role in developing the relationship between social workers and families (Forrester et al. 2008, p. 4). Through active listening, social workers are able to maintain trust and strengthen their working relationship with service users during the process of intervention in the facilitation of financial capabilities development. Active listening means that the receiver of communication actively assumes the role by expressly following the understanding of the transmitted message (Rodat 2020), and it is a therapeutic micro-skill that involves listening attentively and responding emphatically so that a client can feel heard (Weger et al. 2014, p. 13). Through active listening, social workers are able to maintain trust and strengthen their working relationship with service users during the process of intervention in the facilitation of financial capabilities development. Social workers have been able to intervene in cases of financial vulnerability by utilising communication skills across diverse types of financial capability among service users and in different phases of intervention processes. Communication is regarded as an element that plays an important part in direct social work practice to promote, enhance and ensure social welfare services for individuals, groups and communities with multiple problems across societies (Farukuzzaman & Mahbubur 2019, p. 32). Social work communication skills strengthen the intervention processes in the facilitation of the financial capabilities development of vulnerable households. According to this study, social workers also utilised techniques that facilitated the persuasion of service

users to refrain from undesirable behavioural practices and tendencies that caused financial vulnerability and to follow a new behavioural path aimed at achieving financial well-being. The application of persuasion skills by social workers is essential for the facilitation of financial capabilities development, as service users need a great deal of support to be able to move along a continuum of financial behaviour change. The overall objective of motivational interviewing is to establish a client-centred relationship, which discourages styles such as confrontation, directives and criticism (Miller & Rollmick 2022, p. 1).

Theme 8: Capacitation of social workers

Another finding was the need for the capacitation of social workers through training and reorientation of social workers on financial capabilities and the development of policy and practice guidelines. Intrinsic to the capacitation in relation to the crucial role of the social work profession is training and reorientation of social workers on facilitation of financial capabilities, and these include the inclusion of financial capability in the social work curriculum and in-service training on facilitation of financial capabilities for practising social workers. Despite the role played by social workers in facilitating the financial capabilities development of vulnerable households, few social workers received education and training on helping clients with household finances (Sherraden 2013, p. 3). Without practice and policy guidelines, it will remain difficult to measure the efficiency and efficacy of social workers' interventions in the facilitation of financial capabilities. Rosen and Proctor (2003, p. 1) assert that adherence to guidelines for desirable practice is intended to promote the effectiveness of practice, reduce variability in implementing practice, increase the predictability of practice behaviour and enhance confidence in intervention planning and meeting professional standards. The development of practice and policy guidelines will ensure effective and efficient interventions and that professional standards are adhered to when facilitating financial capabilities development.

Discussion

Without acquiring adequate financial skills, knowledge and practices, people remain financially vulnerable. Lack of knowledge about the difference between wants and needs is one of the factors that expose vulnerable households to financial vulnerability. The social workers' responses highlighted that the lack of budgeting skills prohibits individuals from becoming financially capable as they do not know how to budget for the fulfilment of household needs within the available income. The lack of budgeting skills is also the cause of financial vulnerability, as individuals

are likely to suffer from financial stress because of expenditures that are not informed by a personal budget. A personal budget is significant because it helps one track one's spending, ensuring that spending is less than earnings and preparing for the future, as well as monitoring financial health (O'Hagan 2019).

Lack of personal financial management skills because of low financial knowledge might cause unsecured personal loans (Wang, Kou & Peng 2021, p. 923), financial hardship and possibly bankruptcy (Bourova et al. 2018). Amagir et al. (2018, p. 57) refer to financial literacy as ways in which individuals understand, manage and plan their personal finances. This lack of understanding may imply a person's minimal knowledge of financial terms such as 'money', 'inflation', 'interest rate', 'credit', and so forth (Oanea & Dornean 2012, p. 113). Lack of personal financial management skills leads to unwise spending by individuals, which may deprive them of the opportunity to improve their financial situation through savings, investments and so on. The application of personal financial management skills is essential for the daily management of personal finances regardless of the income earned. Undesirable financial behaviour contributes to financial vulnerability because it leads to mismanagement of personal finances because of the negligence of individuals in applying effective financial practices despite having adequate financial resources and knowledge.

The spending of social grants on buying alcohol leaves many households with meagre financial resources to meet the basic financial needs of the households or social grant beneficiaries. The relationship between financial bankruptcy and alcohol abuse because of the relationship between debt and excessive drinking is widely documented (Haotanto 2016, pp. 1–4; Labello 2013, pp. 1–3). Because of the limited research available on the spending of social grants on substance and alcohol usage in South Africa, there is no adequate literature on the relationship between the two variables. However, the research findings by Khosa and Kaseka (2017, p. 362) reveal that some of the CSG recipients utilise the grant to buy alcohol for their own consumption and leave their children without food. The misuse of social grants on alcohol by some of the social grant beneficiaries negatively affects their ability to honour their obligation of ensuring the availability of essential basic household necessities.

The spending of fairly large amounts of money from the income derived from social grants and wages go towards payment of stokvel contributions and formal and informal funeral insurance. Stokvels in the form of rotating savings, credit associations and burial societies are some examples of the semiformal instruments in South Africa that low-income earners utilise for savings (Matuku & Kaseke 2014; Storchi 2018, p. 2). The spending of the Foster Care Grant (FCG) by some of the recipients on social activities such as stokvels and household wants is against the intended purpose as these

activities do not benefit the foster child. The excessive spending of social grants on funeral insurance also defeats the objective of ensuring the provision of social security services against vulnerability and poverty, as the households remain financially vulnerable because money is not spent on their daily basic needs. Some of the biological mothers of children on CSG payment misuse the grant by spending it for personal benefit as they do not stay with the children, and thus, the children are a burden to their grandparents as they take care of their needs utilising their already strained OAG. The migrating parents sometimes take care of both economic and household responsibilities that stretch across long distances and generations, and children often remain at the rural home of origin where an arrangement for substitute care is made; in many instances, the grandparents or other relatives such as aunts (Seepamore 2016, p. 572).

Some of the social grant recipients spend their grants on gambling and end up borrowing money from loan sharks to sustain their habit or to buy basic necessities when all their social grant money has been spent on gambling. Irresponsible lending by loan sharks leaves many vulnerable households financially vulnerable because of over-indebtedness, and they remain trapped in poverty as they do not have money at their disposal for basic necessities. These loan sharks take advantage of the rising cost of living, which means that disproportionately large numbers of poor households have become committed to consumption expenditure rather than saving (Ssebagala 2016, p. 7). Poor households are prevented from accessing credit services and are marginalised (Mjuza & Ntsalaze 2019, p. 99). Such alienation and marginalisation often result in most households' dependence on formal micro-lenders and informal local money lenders for the provision of credit (Mjuza & Ntsalaza 2019, p. 99). The rate of borrowing has also been characterised by an increase in the number of social grant beneficiaries who have accessed unsecured loans (Fanta et al. 2017, p. 3). According to Fanta et al. (2017, p. 3), the increase in the number of social grant recipients who access unsecured loans could be attributed to the various financial services, such as loans and insurance, provided to them by the distributors of social grants.

Illiteracy as a form of poverty is another cause of lack of financial capability. The relationship between poverty and levels of literacy is supported by The World Bank (2018, p. 22), stating that poverty declines with higher levels of education and that households headed by a person with no education or a low level of education tend to be poorer than those headed by persons with higher levels of education. This is because, without the ability to read and write, many illiterate people become trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for employment or income generation (World Literacy Foundation 2018, p. 5).

The low income of vulnerable households coupled with a large number of household members and dependants acts as a barrier to achieving financial capability as it makes it difficult for them to afford the cost of living, particularly in the current economic meltdown. The pressure to purchase food merely with social grants can push financially vulnerable households below the survival point and far more susceptible to economic shocks (The Conversation 2020, p. 1). As a result of the pressure for consumption, low-income households do not borrow for things that will yield a return in the future (De Bruijn & Antonides 2021, p. 5). Vulnerable households borrow to buy consumer durables to face emergencies or to meet subsistence needs and very often borrow spontaneously without thinking about the consequences (De Bruijn & Antonides 2021, p. 5).

Advice on the efficient and effective use of income is a way of intervention by social workers in order to ameliorate the misuse of income by social grant recipients and low-income earners. Advisory counselling helps those who are truly open to guidance to develop better solutions to problems than they would have on their own (Garvin & Margolis 2015, p. 60). When rendering interventions in facilitating the financial capabilities development of service users from vulnerable households, social workers also play the role of educators. The educational role of social workers is largely focused on educating social grant recipients on the purpose of social grants and financial literacy. The role of the advocate of social workers is a result of the exploitation of the Disability Grant (DG) by those who are entrusted with receiving the DG on behalf of the beneficiaries who are persons with disabilities. Some of the DG beneficiaries are exploited by loan sharks who use illegal means of lending to service users. The social workers enable service users to perform activities aimed at achieving financial capabilities. The role of the negotiator contributes towards reducing the levels of financial vulnerability among vulnerable households.

The success of social workers was made possible by the co-operation of service users. Teucher, Brelt and Gunia (2013, p. 493) suggest the utilisation of negotiation skills whenever possible and that, when applied honestly, have the ability to persuade others without using manipulation or hurting others, thereby recognising the service user's legitimate rights and competence to make decisions and agreements to live up to their end of the working relationship in the interest of both the individual and society. The success of service intervention plans in the facilitation of financial capabilities development of vulnerable households without the co-operation of other stakeholders or key actors, as referred to by authors such as Cabiati and Panciroli (2019), may remain antagonistic and lead to damaging trust. These stakeholders play different roles, including the enforcement of some elements of the intervention plans in instances where

other stakeholders or the service users themselves do not co-operate. Social workers' interventions in the facilitation of financial capabilities development have been proven to yield positive results for vulnerable households in the form of improvements in their psychosocial and financial situations.

The lack of co-operation from service users was most prevalent among those who abused alcohol and manifested in their failure to implement the activities agreed upon as part of the intervention plan with the social workers. Alcohol abuse is the reason why service users do not reach the termination stage of their working relationships with social workers. Poverty is one of the end results of high levels of unemployment and inadequate skills development in South Africa, and it has to be noted that many communities are living below the poverty line and tend to spend the little money that they have on alcohol (Setlakentoa et al. 2015, p. 97). Non-voluntary service users remain a challenge for the successful and effective implementation of social workers' interventions for the successful and effective facilitation of financial capabilities development. Despite the need for social workers' intervention in facilitating the financial capabilities of vulnerable households, social workers did not have any knowledge of financial management and financial capability before their exposure to social work practice. None of the participants had any qualifications or in-service training in these two aspects. This knowledge gap among social workers raises concern about the bedrock for their intervention strategies. As a result, social workers are left to explore their own strategies for how best to support the individuals, families and communities that they serve (Birkenmaier et al. 2013b, p. 5).

The centrality of financial challenges is embedded in the interconnection between social and financial challenges and the interconnection between financial well-being and psychosocial well-being. Therefore, the role played by social workers in the facilitation of financial capabilities development is relevant because financial challenges are an integral part of the social challenges faced by individuals, families and communities. The facilitation of financial capabilities development of vulnerable households by social workers is inherent in their daily practice because of the linkage between social ills and financial vulnerability faced by service users. There is a need for social workers to become involved in household financial capabilities development because of an increasing number of households in poverty and households that are struggling to make financial decisions within an increasingly complex financial environment (Sherraden 2013, p. 3). Because money is an important aspect of life, it has a direct impact on the daily functioning of individuals, families and communities. Karger (2015, p. 426) asserts that the symptoms of financial stress can manifest themselves in various ways, including anxiety, depression, domestic violence, eating

disorders, insomnia, marital discord, child abuse and other physical symptoms. As financial vulnerability is the cause of many negative psychological outcomes, facilitation of financial capabilities development by social workers is essential in order to curb the increase in psychosocial ills and to enhance their interventions in dealing with service users who are already suffering from psychosocial ills. Social work skills are also important in the facilitation of financial capabilities development as they enable social workers to interact with service users throughout all the phases of the intervention process. The social work skills enable them to deal with different client groups and their diverse social and psychological needs. Social workers can also play a role in providing financial counselling to resolve conflicts in families about financial circumstances (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2017, p. 6). There is a need for student social workers to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge by ensuring that financial capability is part of social education. Karger (2015, p. 426) suggests that social work education programmes can take the lead by providing academic training, field placement experiences, research opportunities and continuing education that promote and support financial literacy. There is a need for professional development-based training for practising social workers in order to bridge the gap between knowledge and skills acquired through their professional training and role expectations in practice within the area of financial capabilities development. Karger (2015, p. 426) states that academic training through field placement experiences, research and continuing education that promote and support financial literacy can also be accompanied by professional development courses in financial literacy for social work practitioners. Lastly, there is also a need for the development of policy and practice guidelines regarding the facilitation of financial capabilities by social workers. Guidelines are key in any social work practice because practice guidelines can increase empirically based practice and improve clients' outcomes (Howard & Jenson 2014, p. 284), while policy guidelines enable social workers to be more effective in their practice and in influencing the policy development process, which is ratified at a higher level (Ambrosino et al. 2012, p. 151).

Conclusion

The facilitation of financial capabilities development of vulnerable households may have a significant role in poverty alleviation. The government spends billions of rands on payment of social grants for the poor. If financial capabilities development targeting the social grant beneficiaries is not prioritised, the provision of social security through social grants may not achieve the intended purpose of alleviating poverty among some of the vulnerable households because of a lack of financial capability. Social workers provide psychosocial support to vulnerable

households through financial capabilities development. They render financial capability interventions without any formal training on financial matters, especially personal financial management. The lack of knowledge and skills from social workers in this field may also thwart their interventions. Because money is central in the daily lives of human beings, including members of vulnerable households, it is essential that social workers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge through in-service training and or inclusion of financial social work in the social work curriculum. There is also a need to develop practice guidelines and policy guidelines that will inform and guide social workers' interventions when facilitating the financial capabilities development of vulnerable households.

The DSD provides a conceptual framework for financial capability in order to develop more insight among social workers and enable them to align it with practice. The development of a conceptual framework could be a step in the right direction for developing a theoretical framework for practice guidelines that are currently not in existence.

The DSD and the non-profit organisation (NPO) social welfare sector increase awareness about financial social work services and further strengthen social bonds that exist within families and communities for continuous referral of cases. It is further recommended that the DSD and the NPO social welfare sector continuously embark on awareness-raising campaigns in communities about the role of social workers, specifically in terms of the facilitation of financial capabilities and the services rendered by social workers in order to enhance the self-referral of cases**.** It is recommended that the DSD strengthen partnerships with local authorities and other government institutions at the community level in order to enhance social development partnerships focused on financial social work, specifically in facilitating referrals.

The DSD, in collaboration with SASSA and the NPO social welfare sector, develops educational programmes targeting communities with the purpose of raising the levels of awareness of social grant misuse and the purpose of social grants. The DSD, in collaboration with the NPO social welfare sector and the Eastern Cape Gambling Board, should roll out prevention programmes against alcohol abuse and involvement in gambling activities, targeting social grant recipients. It is recommended that the DSD, in collaboration with SASSA, financial services institutions and the NPO social welfare sector, initiate financial literacy programmes to educate vulnerable households about issues pertaining to personal finances. Furthermore, it is recommended that the DSD and SASSA work in collaboration with the National Credit Regulator regarding the prohibition of unlawful and irresponsible lending by loan sharks to vulnerable households. The DSD should work specifically in collaboration with other relevant national

departments, such as the Department of Small Businesses, Trade and Industry and provincial departments, such as Rural Development and Agrarian Reform, Economic Development and Environmental Affairs, Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) and relevant state agencies responsible for the creation of economic opportunities. Lastly, it is recommended that the DSD, in collaboration with the NPO social welfare sector, enhance the implementation of the current marriage and family preservation programmes with a specific focus on the facilitation of financial capabilities.

The DSD has developed a practice manual that stipulates and clearly defines the roles of social workers, as well as specific parameters for these roles when facilitating the development of financial capabilities. These practice guidelines should be an integral part of the theoretical toolbox that informs social workers' interventions in facilitating the development of financial capabilities. The DSD has developed a monitoring and evaluation framework that serves as a yardstick for scientifically measuring the success and effectiveness of social workers' interventions in relation to both short-term and long-term benefits. This framework also helps facilitate ongoing improvements in the intervention strategies being applied.

The SACSSP, in partnership with higher education institutions, works towards developing a social work curriculum that includes knowledge of financial literacy, a fundamental understanding of economics, familiarity with mainstream financial institutions and informal financial service institutions, and knowledge of relevant social work practice interventions for facilitating the development of financial capabilities. It is further recommended that the DSD, in partnership with higher education institutions, to integrate social work skills and knowledge with the development of financial capabilities for practising social workers. Lastly, it is recommended that the DSD and higher education institutions provide in-service training and continued education on financial literacy and relevant social work practice interventions. This will help capacitate social workers in facilitating the development of financial capabilities. The key recommendation of this study is that it is absolutely crucial to develop a curriculum for both social work students and practitioners on how to facilitate the development of financial capabilities (financial social work). This is particularly important in the context of South Africa's social development approach to delivering social work services.

Chapter 3

Social work mental health and psychosocial support to vulnerable groups during COVID-19 in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Free State, South Africa

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Abstract

This study sought to establish whether social workers in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality were able to render adequate resilience-focused interventions to vulnerable groups to optimise their mental health and psychosocial well-being during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic from March to September 2020. A total of 159 social workers across three sectors participated in an anonymous online survey. One would expect that social workers' mental health and psychosocial support services to vulnerable groups would increase during a state of disaster marked by increased unemployment, poverty, domestic violence and mental health stressors. However, the data show that large proportions of social workers did not render services to children (*n* = 42; 36%); women (*n* = 47; 35%; frontline responders (*n* = 70; 50%); the disabled (*n* = 77; 58%); the elderly (*n* = 74; 57%); people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (*n* = 78; 59%); the homeless (*n* = 83; 66%); lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) persons (*n* = 90; 72%); and sex workers (*n* = 107; 85%). Many of the participants themselves thought that they had provided poor or very poor services (*n* = 41; 27%) or were neutral about the quality of services rendered (*n* = 96; 23%). A likely explanation for this is that social workers are not adequately trained to deliver services during disasters. From the study results and given the high likelihood of recurring waves of COVID-19, it can be recommended that further research, especially qualitative research, is necessary to understand and guide disaster social work.

Introduction

The novel COVID-19 outbreak highlighted the importance of providing adequate mental health care services to all vulnerable groups in order to prevent a concomitant mental health disaster (Nguse & Wassenaar 2021, p. 305; Van Hoof 2020). Recognition of the importance of mental health services has increased over recent years, and mental health care has been included in the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs)

(World Health Organization [WHO] 2018b, p. 1), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) (UN 2015, p. 22) and the Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (WHO 2018b, p. 15). The South African National Disaster Management Framework (NDMF) was developed as a policy framework for disaster management in South Africa and set four key performance areas (KPAs) and three supportive enablers to achieve the objectives set out in the KPAs (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005). The NDMF requires all the stakeholders to take a holistic and organised approach in order to plan and operate during the disaster risk response phase through the implementation of policy and legislation (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005, p. 15). The NDMF refers to the Department of Social Development (DSD) as one of the stakeholders.

The *Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002* (DMA) (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2002), as amended in 2015 (South African Government 2015), and the NDMF primarily focus on disaster relief services. These services are aimed at addressing the physical, economic, health and safety challenges experienced by communities. However, there is no specific mention of mental health or psychosocial services in this act and framework. The NDMF (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005, p. 112) does refer to human well-being, but then in the context of defining development as a 'process for improving human well-being through reallocation of resources that may involve some modification to the environment. It addresses basic needs, equity and the redistribution of wealth'. According to the NDMF (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005, p. 35), the DSD can assist during Disaster Risk Assessment (KPA 2) with disaster event tracking and contribute to Disaster Risk Reduction (KPA 3) by reducing the need for social relief in disaster-prone and economically vulnerable communities. The DSD releases annual reports providing information on the number of households receiving social relief assistance (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005, p. 52), so that the dependency of these communities can be evaluated to plan for sufficient funding. Enabler 3 of the NDMF (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005, p. 98) focuses on funding arrangements for disaster risk management. The DSD is the national stakeholder responsible for the disaster relief budget, and these funds are budgeted in the DSD vote. Assisting the DSD, the provincial departments of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and most municipalities also provide financial and food parcel relief to affected communities during disasters (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2005, p. 106).

Ashcroft et al. (2021, p. 2) stated that in Canada, the importance of social work service delivery has led to proposals for the expansion of social workers' involvement in policy-level choices to address psychosocial issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social workers can provide valuable services by utilising the eco-social practice model (Ashcroft et al. 2021, p. 2; Boetto 2017, p. 51) to provide holistic mental health and psychosocial assistance to vulnerable COVID-19-stricken groups. These vulnerable groups can also be equipped with skills to improve their resilience (Van Breda 2018, p. 3; Webb, Stone & Shrestha 2015, p. 5) so that they can maintain and improve their mental health well-being during and after the COVID-19 pandemic disaster.

Social workers advocate and engage for social justice and can assist to combat the severe impact that COVID-19 had on the human rights of vulnerable groups. Not only have the vulnerable groups suffered financial losses, but their human dignity has been negatively affected by the lack of resources, health care and psychosocial services (Okafor 2021, p. 3; Redondo-Sama et al. 2020, p. 2). In order to develop a guideline for social work disaster mental health support to vulnerable disaster-struck communities, it is necessary to combine insights from the disciplines of disaster management and social work. The Sphere handbook provides South African humanitarians with guidelines and duties that assist with service delivery during disasters in order to adhere to the minimum standards in humanitarian response (Sphere Association 2018). Djalante, Shaw and De Wit (2020, p. 5) provided recommendations on how the SFDRR strategies for disaster resilience can support aspects of humanitarian coordination and strengthen community-level preparedness and response, particularly during epidemics. Social workers can use these recommendations to ensure that they render the needed mental health and psychosocial services during COVID-19 and future pandemics.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased pressure on social workers to provide basic services to vulnerable groups with limited resources. There is a significant gap between the legislation, policies, and directives from the DSD and what actually happens at the ground level, as the profession of social work is highly undervalued and undermined (Amadasun 2020, p. 1). The British Association of Social Workers (2020), Redondo-Sama et al. (2020, p. 3) and Okafor (2021, p. 5) emphasise that social workers' roles during pandemic disasters include adequate social support to the general public, especially to vulnerable groups, advocating for social inclusion for the most vulnerable, raising awareness about the pandemic and implementing community-based mental health support strategies to support resilience. Social workers are trained to provide psychosocial services to individuals, families, groups and communities and, therefore,

can provide valuable services during disasters. According to the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) (2004), social workers are ethically obligated to assist during public emergencies. The SACSSP (2004, p. 42) states that 'social workers should provide appropriate professional services in public emergencies to the greatest extent possible'. Social workers are, however, not explicitly trained in disaster management at the undergraduate level (Hugenote College 2020; University of South Africa 2020; University of the Free State 2020; University of the Western Cape 2020; University of Zululand 2020). This gap in social workers' training is not unique to South Africa and has also been reported by Rowlands (2013, p. 130) in Singapore; Cooper and Briggs (2014, p. 38) in the Asia Pacific region; Drolet et al. (2018, p. 64) in Australia, Pakistan and the United States of America (USA); Okafor (2021, p. 3) in Nicaragua; Nhapi and Dhemba (2020, p. 11) in Eswatini, Lesotho and Zimbabwe; and Agwu and Okoye (2021, p. 762) in Nigeria.

International and national guidelines and legislation for the general humanitarian mental health response, as well as for the COVID-19-specific response, were used to identify the gaps in the actual psychosocial services rendered during the COVID-19 outbreak by social workers in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) in the Free State province of South Africa. The social workers were categorised according to their sector of employment, namely government (DSD, Department of Basic Education, Department of Health, Department of Justice, Department of Correctional Services, South African Police Service [SAPS]), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Free State Care in Action and Childline) and the private sector (social workers in private practice and social workers employed by school governing bodies and Group Four private prisons and private hospitals). Vulnerable groups in this study included people with disabilities, the elderly, homeless people, sex workers, people living with HIV (PLHIV), LGBT+ people, women, children and health professionals (frontline responders).

Problem statement, aim and objectives

The problem identified relates to the gap between policy, legislation and guidelines and the actual services rendered by social workers during disasters – such as COVID-19 – in South Africa. Therefore, the study aimed to establish whether MMM social workers working in the government, NGOs and private sectors were able to render adequate resilience-focused interventions that adhere to disaster legislation and policies to the aforementioned vulnerable groups to optimise their mental health and psychosocial well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic from 27 March to

30 September 2020. The objectives were to describe: (1) the extent of non-delivery of social work services in the various employment sectors to the different vulnerable groups during lockdown Levels 5 to 2; (2) social workers' own assessment of service delivery and operations during the lockdown; and (3) the media used to render social work services during the lockdown.

Methodology

The research followed a cross-sectional quantitative web-based survey design involving MMM social workers as participants. The cross-sectional period for this study was from the start of lockdown Level 5 (27 March 2020) to the end of lockdown Level 2 (30 September 2020). Ethical clearance from the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC), University of the Free State (UFS-HSD202018161201) and the Health Science Research Ethics Committee (HSREC) (UFS-HSD202021892004) was obtained. Except for the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), all the employers permitted their social workers to participate in the study. As a result, SANDF social workers were excluded from the study. The most important ethical issues were addressed: confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent and the 'do no harm' principle. All MMM social workers (government departments, NGOs and specialised private social work services) were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire. According to Nayak and Narayan (2019, p. 33), the response rate for self-administered questionnaires is low; therefore, the researchers sent the questionnaires to the whole population (n = 337) to increase the likelihood that more data would be obtained. The advantage of self-administered questionnaires is that they are inexpensive to circulate and unpretentious. The researchers sent follow-up communication to increase the response rate and encouraged senior social workers to motivate their juniors to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was developed by using international and national minimum standards and guidelines for humanitarian service delivery (Sphere Association 2018; UN 2015). It was divided into the following sections: Section 1 – General information; Section 2 – Social workers' role during disasters, such as COVID-19; Section 3 – Social workers' role during the COVID-19 pandemic in MMM; Section 4 – Service rendering to clients (individuals, families, groups or communities); and Section 5 – Service rendering to COVID-19 frontline responders affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the various lockdown levels. The data were analysed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 29) to provide descriptive statistics.

Social work sectors participating in this research

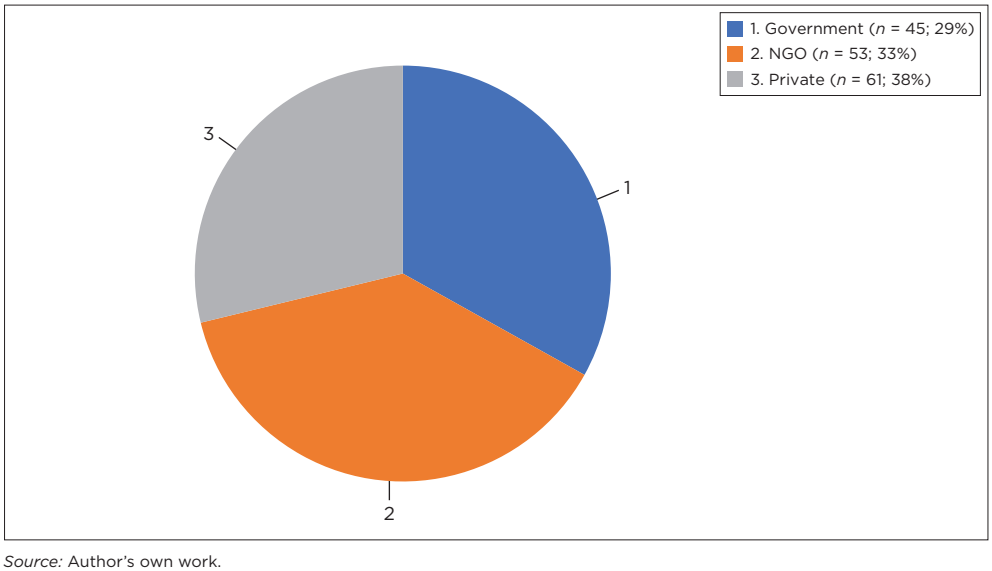
A total of 159 MMM social workers across three employing or work sectors (Government *n* = 53, 33%; NGO *n* = 61, 38%; private practice *n* = 45, 29%) participated in the anonymous online survey (Figure 3.1).

Findings and discussion

The figures used in this section illustrate the findings of this research, followed by a brief discussion thereof.

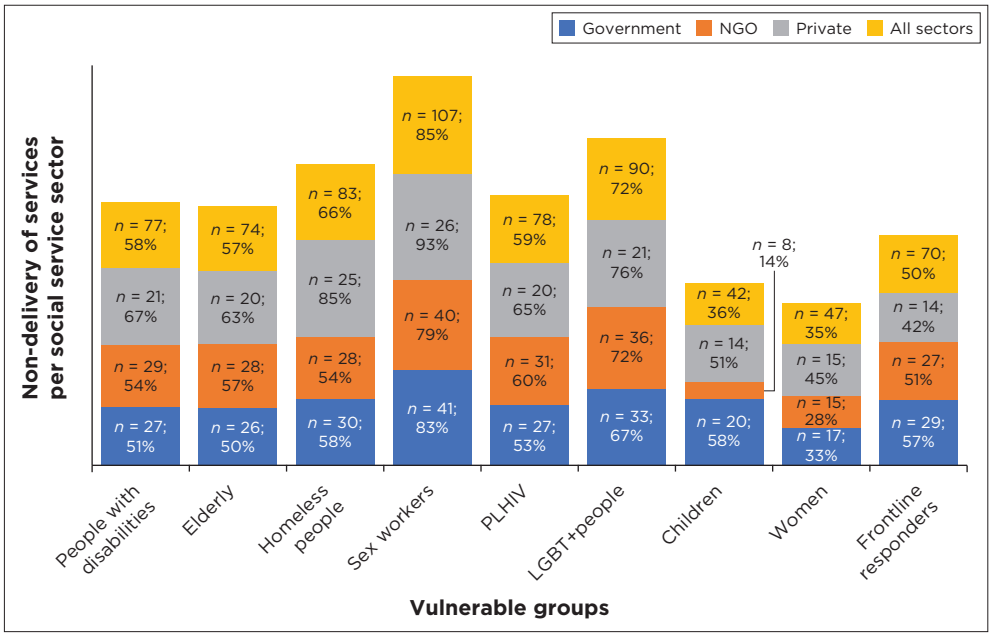
Non-delivery of services to vulnerable groups during the lockdown period of COVID-19

One would anticipate that after a disaster characterised by increased unemployment, poverty, domestic violence and mental health stressors, social workers' mental health and psychosocial support services to vulnerable groups would increase. However, as illustrated in Figure 3.2, from 27 March to 30 September 2020, the majority of social workers who usually provide such services had not provided services to sex workers (*n* = 107; 85%), LGBT+ people (*n* = 90; 72%), homeless people (*n* = 83; 66%), PLHIV (*n* = 78; 59%), people with disabilities (*n* = 77; 58%) and the elderly (*n* = 74; 57%). Half (*n* = 70; 50%) of the social workers who usually do so had not provided services to frontline responders. Around one-third of



Source: Author's own work.
Key: *n*, sample size; NGO, non-governmental organisation.

FIGURE 3.1: Work sectors of participants (*n* = 159).



Source: Author's own work.
Key: NGO, non-governmental organisation; *n*, sample size; PLHIV, people living with human immunodeficiency virus; LGBT+, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

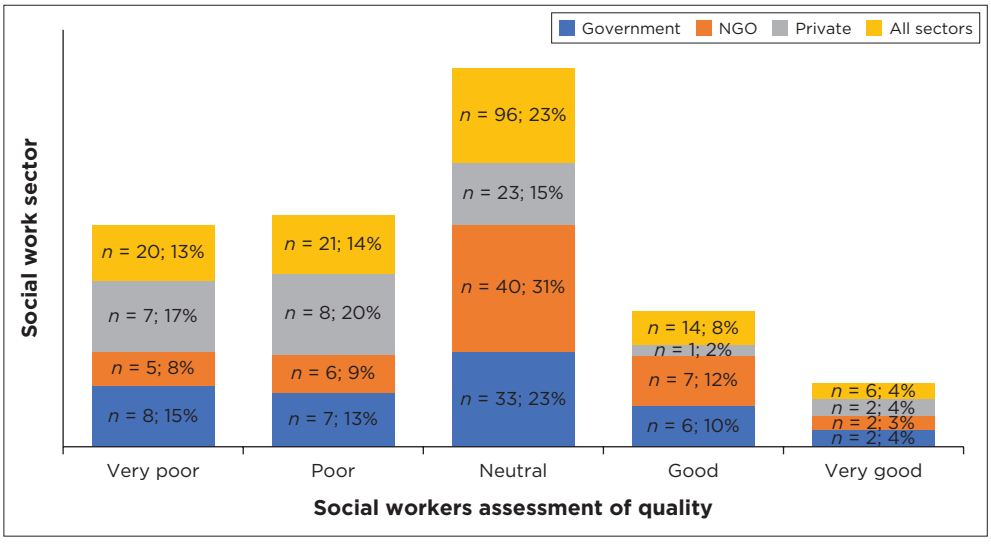
FIGURE 3.2: Social workers' non-delivery of services to vulnerable groups they usually provide services to in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality.

social workers who usually do so had not provided services to children (*n* = 42; 36%) and women (*n* = 47; 35%). The data thus illustrated that the most vulnerable groups that needed services during the most stringent lockdown measures were effectively not assisted. The vulnerable groups most likely to continue receiving services during COVID-19 were women, followed by children. The provision of services, or lack thereof, to various vulnerable groups remained relatively similar across the different sectors.

Social workers' views on the quality of services during the lockdown period of COVID-19

As illustrated in Figure 3.3, the largest proportion of social workers (*n* = 96; 23%) indicated that they were neutral about the quality of service delivery and operations rendered to vulnerable groups from 27 March to 30 September 2020, while close to a third of the participants (*n* = 41; 27%) felt that the services rendered were poor or very poor.

In a similar study conducted by Turner (2020) in England, most of the participants indicated that their social work services were negatively affected by the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, and 40% stated that they were unable to deliver adequate legal services to children. Agwu and Okoye



Source: Author's own work.
Key: *n*, sample size; NGO, non-governmental organisation.

FIGURE 3.3: Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality social workers' assessment of the quality service delivery and operations during lockdown.

(2021, p. 766) reported that in Nigeria, social workers were asked to remain at home or to continue normal services, excluding COVID-19-related services. Kodom (2023, p. 4) emphasised that because of a lack of resources and recognition, social workers may find it challenging to collaborate with other core health care professionals to meet the psychological requirements of vulnerable groups. The suffering and hardships of the majority of South Africans continued despite the government's response efforts to curb COVID-19 (Turton et al. 2020) and the creation of the COVID-19 relief grant. The gross earnings paid for the quarter ending in June 2020 decreased by 11.3% when compared to the second quarter that ended in March 2020 (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] 2020c). Although gross earnings paid to employees increased by 5.5% between July and September 2020, the total gross earnings still decreased by 6.1% between September 2019 and September 2020 (StatsSA 2020b). These financial losses resulted from employment decreasing by 6.4% between March and June 2020 (StatsSA 2020c), with a small increase of 0.8% between April and September 2020, resulting in a net employment decrease of 6.0% between September 2019 and September 2020 (StatsSA 2020b).

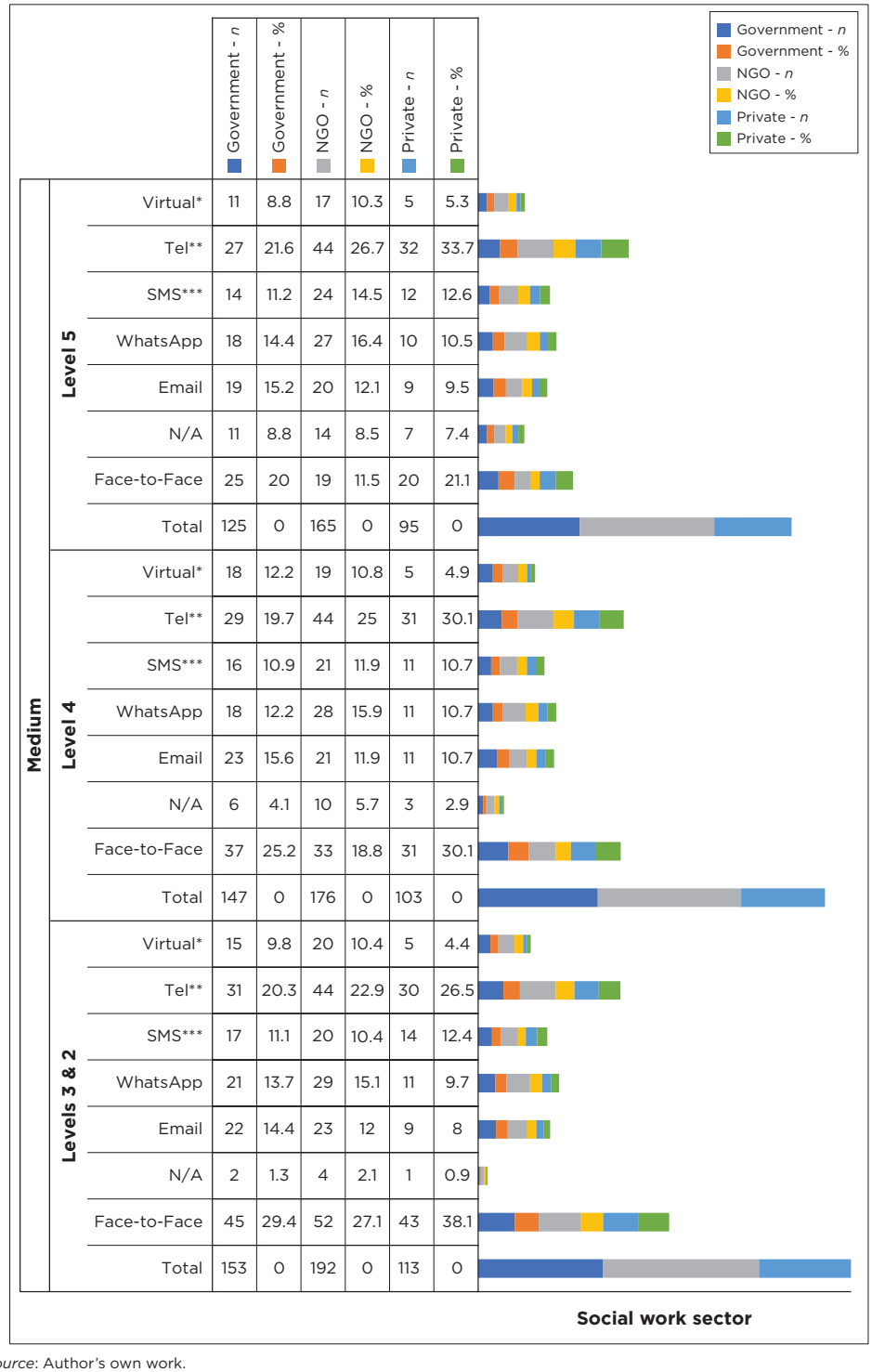
Increasing and distributing more social grants is only a temporary solution as South Africa is not in a financial position to sustain payments of such grants into the future. In addition, these grants, while increasing the vulnerable population's dependency, do not serve to build capacity

and resilience. Social workers can advocate for the inclusion of vulnerable groups and policy change so that service systems during pandemics can be all-inclusive (Okafor 2021, p. 1). Already in 1996, Zakour reported the need for research in the field of disaster social work. More recently, Huebner (2016, p. 17) identified the need for countries to not only have social service policies and legislation but also to research the applicability, feasibility and impact of these policies and legislation for the population and social workers.

Mediums used to deliver social work services during the lockdown

During the various lockdown levels, substantial numbers of social workers in MMM were not working at all (Level 5 *n* = 48, 30.2%; Level 4 *n* = 23, 14.5%; Levels 2 and 3 *n* = 13; 8.2%), while others were working on a rotation schedule which resulted in decreased service delivery. As depicted in Figure 3.4, MMM social workers indicated that as the lockdown levels eased, they were mostly able to return to face-to-face service rendering (Level 5 *n* = 64, 40.3%; Level 4 *n* = 101; 63.5%; Levels 3 and 2 *n* = 140; 88.1%). Although they employed various methods to work with clients, the vulnerable groups do not always have access to technology and resources (virtual sessions [*n* = 38; 23.9%] and e-mail [*n* = 52; 32.7%]), which could be another reason for poor service delivery. Traditional phone calls were the method mostly used (*n* = 104; 65.4%), while WhatsApp and Telegram (*n* = 57; 35.8%) and short message services (SMSs) (*n* = 49; 30.8%) were also used as methods to have contact with clients during lockdown Levels 5–2. Interestingly, social workers working in the NGO and government sectors used virtual sessions more than social workers in the private sector. Beaunoyer, Dupéré and Guitton (2020, p. 2) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the digital inequalities of vulnerable groups. These authors argue that vulnerable groups were even more adversely affected by COVID-19 because of their lack of access to digital services. Although Reamer (2020) found that social workers embraced virtual service delivery, Turner (2020) and Ashcroft et al. (2021, p. 3) reported that social workers experienced difficulties in employing electronic sources to render needed services. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has created technological demands in South Africa that far exceed the supply (Ndung'u and Signé 2020, p. 61). Therefore, technological upgrades would contribute to improving the delivery of social work services.

No South African tertiary institution currently provides undergraduate social work training in disaster management. Indeed, 108 (67.9%) participants indicated that they had never received training in disaster



Medium		Government - *n*	Government - %	NGO - *n*	NGO - %	Private - *n*	Private - %
Level 5	Virtual*	11	8.8	17	10.3	5	5.3
	Tel**	27	21.6	44	26.7	32	33.7
	SMS***	14	11.2	24	14.5	12	12.6
	WhatsApp	18	14.4	27	16.4	10	10.5
	Email	19	15.2	20	12.1	9	9.5
	N/A	11	8.8	14	8.5	7	7.4
	Face-to-Face	25	20	19	11.5	20	21.1
	Total	125	0	165	0	95	0
Level 4	Virtual*	18	12.2	19	10.8	5	4.9
	Tel**	29	19.7	44	25	31	30.1
	SMS***	16	10.9	21	11.9	11	10.7
	WhatsApp	18	12.2	28	15.9	11	10.7
	Email	23	15.6	21	11.9	11	10.7
	N/A	6	4.1	10	5.7	3	2.9
	Face-to-Face	37	25.2	33	18.8	31	30.1
	Total	147	0	176	0	103	0
Levels 3 & 2	Virtual*	15	9.8	20	10.4	5	4.4
	Tel**	31	20.3	44	22.9	30	26.5
	SMS***	17	11.1	20	10.4	14	12.4
	WhatsApp	21	13.7	29	15.1	11	9.7
	Email	22	14.4	23	12	9	8
	N/A	2	1.3	4	2.1	1	0.9
	Face-to-Face	45	29.4	52	27.1	43	38.1
	Total	153	0	192	0	113	0

Source: Author's own work.
Key: *n*, sample size; %, percentage; NGO, non-governmental organisation; N/A, not available; *, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GotoWebinar, Skype, etc.; **, telephone; ***, short messages services.

FIGURE 3.4: Mediums used to render social work services during the lockdown.

management practices. Some participants indicated that services rendered to vulnerable groups might improve if they receive training in disaster management practices (*n* = 110; 69.2%) and refresher courses on loss and trauma (*n* = 56; 35.2%). The need for social workers to be trained in disaster management is not new (Cooper & Briggs 2014, p. 40), but the COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the important requirement for undergraduate and graduate training in disaster social work (Okafor 2021, p. 3).

Almost half of the participants (*n* = 67; 42%) believed that particular social work regulations and policies were required to direct social workers in rendering adequate resilience-focused interventions during disasters. The International Federation for Social Workers (2020) recommended in a global social work study that COVID-19-specific ethical guidelines, policies and regulations need to be provided for social workers, especially relating to the rendering of virtual services. A shift in social work policies and guidelines is needed from the rigid conservative view that social workers mainly assist with financial relief when social workers should be fully competent to render the needed mental health support and psychosocial services to vulnerable groups, especially during disasters.

Limitations of the study

Although illegal immigrants can form part of some of the vulnerable groups, the researchers realised after the quantitative data were obtained that illegal immigrants should have been included as a separate vulnerable group. The COVID-19 relief fund is only provided to unemployed South African citizens, and most other social work services, including the distribution of food parcels, are also only delivered to persons with valid identity documents or refugee papers.

Due to the lack of permission from the SANDF for their social workers to participate in the research study, the services provided to vulnerable groups by social workers employed by the SANDF could not be assessed.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that policies implemented to mitigate and relieve the effects of COVID-19 prioritised financial relief in the form of grants and food aid. Social workers' services were reduced to giving material aid and neglected their core function to render mental and psychosocial assistance to vulnerable groups. As a result, vulnerable groups in MMM were underserved by the social work profession during the COVID-19 pandemic from March to September 2020. Though the policy framework on disaster management states the need for providing social services to take care of

the community's well-being, this was wholly insufficient during the pandemic. Communities did not receive adequate mental health and psychosocial services that were in line with international and national minimum standards and guidelines for humanitarian service delivery (e.g. the Sphere Standards). There was also a lack of technology to afford social workers an opportunity to render services during lockdowns, as the main recipients of the social services are the poor, who mostly do not have access to such technology. The reality is that most social workers do not know how to provide adequate mental health and psychosocial services to vulnerable groups and have never received appropriate training in relevant disaster management legislation and practices to understand and enact their role.

Following this quantitative study, qualitative research to better understand the identified gaps and how to close them is recommended. It is further proposed that social workers should receive adequate basic training in both disaster management relevant legislation and practices, as well as appropriate mental health and psychosocial service delivery. Concise policy reviews would be beneficial so that disaster social work services are included in the DMA and NDMF in South Africa.

Chapter 4

Analysing service delivery gaps in National Strategic Plans implementation in the City of Ekurhuleni (previously Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality)

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Abstract[2]

Since the first cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) were identified almost four decades ago, these epidemics have had an enormous impact on socio-economic development globally, with South Africa being no exception. In response, the South African government, in consultation with various stakeholders, developed and rolled out National Strategic Plans (NSPs) aimed at reducing new infections, employing a comprehensive treatment and care strategy, monitoring and evaluation, research and respecting the rights and dignity of people living with HIV. Despite government and non-government organisations' intervention efforts, the country still grapples with new infections, an increasing antiretroviral (ARV) programme and comorbidities. Though various stakeholders, including social workers, have been involved in providing a wide range of services to people living with HIV (PLHIV), the roles and skills of social workers in addressing this social, educational, and health issue are underutilised when it comes to engaging and caring for those affected by HIV and AIDS. Ethical clearance was obtained. An analysis of service delivery challenges faced by social workers and stakeholders working in the field of HIV and AIDS was conducted through a qualitative methodological approach. A social development approach served as the theoretical framework. The data collected through focus group discussions and individual interviews were analysed following Creswell's analytical spiral steps. The findings highlighted that stakeholders in HIV and AIDS service delivery focus primarily on disease management while neglecting prevention services and a comprehensive bio-psycho-social approach. Moreover, unequal partnerships coupled with poor communications and leadership among stakeholders, particularly with governmental structures, were found to have affected the successful implementation of the HIV/AIDS NSP. Furthermore, the study established the necessity for understanding and implementing social workers' roles in dealing with HIV and AIDS and how they can be infused into the teaching of the Social Work curriculum in South Africa while bridging the implementation challenges and barriers.

2. Parts of this chapter represent a reworking of Dhlamini, VH 2014, 'The alignment of faith-based organisations' (FBOs) services with the HIV AND AIDS National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2007–2011 in Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM)', submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Social Work degree (Social Development & Policy) in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, with Prof. Antoinette Lombard as supervisor, https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/43318/Dhlamini_Alignment_2014.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1

Introduction

Since the first cases of HIV and AIDS were identified almost four decades ago, these epidemics have had an enormous impact on socio-economic development globally, with South Africa being no exception (Johnson, Dorrington & Moolla 2017; Oramasionwu et al. 2011; Taraphdar et al. 2011). Various medical professionals, including social workers, have witnessed the devastating consequences of HIV and AIDS on individuals, communities and countries, which have affected the already strained health care, social, education and financial systems (Sesane & Geyer 2017). Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) recommends that the right to health can only be fulfilled by a robust and accessible health care system.

HIV and AIDS were initially identified almost four decades ago with devastating consequences on individuals, communities, countries, health care, social, education and financial systems globally, with South Africa being no exception. Consequently, the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) in 2016 reported an estimated 7 million South Africans were HIV-seropositive and 3.9 million were enrolled and participated in one of the largest public ARV programmes globally (South African National AIDS Council [SANAC] 2016; UNAIDS 2016). According to WHO, UNAIDS and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2009), this has been evident in the exceptional progress made in the availability and provision of antiretroviral therapy (ART). It is worth mentioning that ART in South Africa is an essential component in the quest to improve the well-being and health of PLHIV.

Furthermore, to deal with the impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemics, specifically the diseases and other social problems it creates, the South African government has since developed and implemented many policies and rolled out country-led NSPs (2000–2005, 2007–2011, 2012–2016) (Hopkins, Doherty & Gray 2018; Vawda & Variawa 2012). In addition, the researchers conducted the study to explore these legislative frameworks and policies for enhancing the social work profession and education. This was evident with the 2010–2030 vision of 'zero' new HIV and tuberculosis (TB) infections because of vertical transmission of HIV. This implied zero preventable deaths associated with HIV and TB and zero discrimination associated with HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and TB (Ngene & Moodley 2015).

In this chapter, the roadmap begins with a broad background that tracks the South African health policy position in responding to HIV and AIDS epidemics following the start of the country's democratic era (1994 onwards). This background outlines NSP as a policy programme and a guide to winning the battle against HIV and AIDS. Thereafter, the article

presents social work education and training by highlighting the NSP policy gap for practice in the HIV and AIDS landscape. This section proffers the context of social work education in a country with unique socio-economic and political factors that impact learning. Subsequently, the theoretical framework of study – social development, is discussed in relation to its capability to build competencies rather than bringing a cure, which is hoped to turn the tide of HIV and AIDS, and the service delivery challenges faced by the stakeholders of this policy. Before drawing a conclusion, this chapter presents the methodology followed during the research in terms of an area-setting of study which covers the research aim and objectives. Furthermore, study sample, ethical considerations, data collection with data analysis, discussion, study limitation and discussion of key findings in a summary of themes with participants' quotes that are supported by the literature are pursued. After presenting the article's conclusion, an implication for social work teaching, learning, and practice regarding HIV and AIDS and service delivery challenges is provided.

Background

In South Africa, when the ANC-led democratic government came to power in 1994, health care policies were among the first policies to be given attention (Grut et al. 2012). This was in line with Section 27 of the South African Constitution, that everyone has the right to health care services (Daly, Spicer & Willan 2016). Therefore, the NSP underpins the government's response to HIV and AIDS and highlights the state of these epidemics and the strategies aimed at achieving the desired outcomes, together with indicators addressing them during the five-year lifespan of each NSP (Simelela & Venter 2014). This roadmap focuses on four enablers to ensure the plan's success and to address the structural and social barriers that predispose individuals to TB, STI and HIV infections. These enablers are the prevention of these infections, the sustaining of individuals' wellness and health, and the protection and respect for the rights and dignity of PLHIV through a comprehensive treatment and care strategy (www.gov.za). Nankwanga (2013) indicates that while various interventions have been made by governments to reduce the effects of HIV and AIDS, it still remains one of the major challenges of the 21st century.

The NSPs were not developed nor executed in isolation but rely on partnerships with local, national and external stakeholders to provide assistance and guidance to ensure an effective implementation (SANAC 2011). The international stakeholders include UNAIDS, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), WHO and the Global Fund for funding, guidance and technical assistance (Sharp et al. 2017).

The local and national stakeholders associated with the NSPs are civil society organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), SANAC, and the provincial and local spheres of government, including civil society groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs), projects (RSA 2012–2016) and business associations. The success of South Africa's NSPs is important because they play a pivotal role and form the basis of HIV-related funding applications and processes (Mahlangu, Goudge & Vearey 2019). Additionally, they constitute an important component of the UNAIDS 90–90–90 targets and sustainable development goals (SDGs) being achieved (Granich, Gupta & Williams 2018; Mthembu, Khan & Manengela 2018).

The South African NSPs play a pivotal role in planning, strategies and interventions and have noted successes and challenges, with millions of people still bearing the brunt of service delivery challenges and limitations in South African governmental departments (National Planning Commission [NPC] 2011). Additionally, despite the government, NPO and community-based organisation (CBO) intervention efforts, the country still grapples with new infections, an increasing ART programme and comorbidities. Critics of the NSP highlight a disjoint between NSP development and its implementation. While there are many praises sung about the NSP being a dynamic and comprehensive policy document, it is argued that a more holistic policy content is necessary to effectively address the prevailing conditions and challenges of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, the plan is often viewed as too narrow in scope and lacking inclusivity, which ultimately hinders the plan's aims (Hopkins et al. 2018).

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explore the service delivery challenges experienced by various stakeholders implementing the NSP while providing HIV and AIDS social work services. The social work profession is working in various fields of practice and service such as health, disability and HIV and AIDS. One of the biggest challenges in social work education and training is to prepare graduates to address local realities, such as the HIV and AIDS epidemics. The training and practice of the social work profession should be conducted in the context of rapid national, regional, and global transformations. Within an increasingly interconnected global framework, these transformations have a significant impact on people's lives and livelihoods, shaping them in profound ways (Lombard & Viviers 2020).

Consequently, the training of social work students and other social services professionals should assist them in gaining broad knowledge and skills in policies dealing with HIV and AIDS, especially on the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration and teamwork across disciplines and among social service professionals (Mahlangu et al. 2017). Training social workers

on social work skills and roles can be seen as key to developing reflective social work practitioners to practice in an interdisciplinary manner (Ferguson 2018). Our argument is that the role of social work education in the care of people affected and infected with HIV and AIDS is underutilised, though social workers possess the necessary skills and knowledge to engage and care for people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS (RSA, NSP 2012–2016).

HIV and AIDS: Social work education context

In the South African Social Work Education context, there are unique socio-economic and political factors that impact the teaching and learning of social work and HIV and AIDS. Within the context of these epidemics, social workers have provided a range of services to PLHIV and to those affected by HIV and AIDS, that is, families, caregivers, etc. For instance, the Department of Social Development (DSD) (2007) has a sub-programme intended for social workers to provide care and services to people affected by and living with HIV and AIDS. However, the social worker's roles are underutilised in this programme. The programme is aimed at providing integrated and developmental programmes, services and facilities to promote the well-being and protection of persons. This includes support to welfare facilities in partnership with other stakeholders and civil society. The levels of social work services are designed to provide integrated care, support, and protection for seropositive individuals. These services include prevention, early intervention, statutory and residential care, as well as alternative care or reintegration.

In line with the new South African Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme, social work students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of how social policies such as the NSPs and other legislation focus on social issues and their impact on these issues. Additionally, they are anticipated to use legislation such as the Constitution (RSA 1996) ethically and accountably to protect and improve the quality of life of client systems from a social work perspective. The BSW qualification is designed in line with the global definition of the social work profession to equip graduates to engage people in problem-solving, promote social change and development, social cohesion and empowerment, including the liberation of people (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] 2018). Therefore, a South African social work graduate must demonstrate core social work knowledge in dealing with various social work issues. The range of these social issues is pertinent to the social work profession when dealing with various social issues such as poverty, unemployment, HIV and AIDS, drug abuse and disabilities, among others. Social workers are in

strategic positions to contribute to the development of humane and just social policies as well as to challenge those that are malevolent to provide proper social work interventions.

Bearing that in mind, searches of various databases and search engines on the NSP were conducted and showed that studies have been conducted on NSPs in southern and east Africa (Willan et al. 2019). However, these searches highlighted that no social work education studies nor published articles were conducted on the service delivery challenges faced by various stakeholders in implementing the NSP within the Ekurhuleni Municipality, South Africa. The CHE (2015) asserts that social workers are on a coalface of the effects of political decisions and policies that impact the lives of people on a daily basis.

The theoretical framework of study

The social development theory, also known as the development approach, was chosen to provide the theoretical framework for the study (Patel 2015). A developmental approach was preferred because of its focus on strengths rather than on pathology, on building competencies rather than attempting to cure, and its belief in the potential of people and to guide them towards healthy functioning (Lombard 2008; Patel 2015).

The social development approach has been successfully utilised in several HIV-related studies (Gombachika et al. 2012; Harris, Luke & Wood 2016). It reinforces a multidisciplinary approach that is suitable for working with other stakeholders in social development and is an end goal for developmental social welfare services (Muleya 2020). This is because it intersects across sectors such as health care, education, economic development, social security and welfare services (Lombard 2008; Patel 2015). Moreover, it provides a broader explanation of the challenges and barriers that stakeholders experience in implementing the NSP for HIV and AIDS service delivery.

In the context of this study, social development theory, which is known as the developmental approach, was applied to empower social workers to maximise the capacity of households and communities affected by HIV and AIDS to effectively participate in their socio-economic development. In addition, the developmental approach incorporates capacity building and empowerment that anchors the participatory involvement of social work service recipients (Patel & Hochfeld 2012). These social work services are expected to be person- and community-driven and should include a rights-based approach that is relevant to understanding and assisting the implementation processes of the NSPs (Amadasun 2020; Osami 2019). In essence, this approach is affirmed by the Integrated Service Delivery Model

(ISDM), which highlights four levels of intervention: prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention and reconstruction and aftercare and welfare service delivery (DSD 2006, pp. 18–19). Additionally, it is critical that stakeholders involved with the implementation of the NSP adopt this approach to achieve the SDGs (Levi et al. 2016).

The SDGs applicable in the study context are (RSA, 2012–2016; SDGs, 2030; NDP, 2030):

1. ending poverty
2. ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (critical for the creation of a foodbank)
3. ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being of all people
4. achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls
5. strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

Hence, the use of this theory and approach allowed the relationship and the interrelatedness between the NSP and stakeholders' services to be explored, challenges and barriers to be identified and interventional strategies and recommendations provided. Moreover, attention was paid to socio-economic factors that included relationship indicators aimed at identifying and promoting the elements necessary to bridge service delivery barriers and challenges to promote and ensure effective implementation of the NSP implementation in the future.

Research area

This study's aim was to investigate the HIV and AIDS service delivery challenges and barriers in the implementation of the NSP 2012–2016 in three regions (Northern Service Delivery Region, Southern Service Delivery Region and Eastern Service Delivery Region) in nine townships of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM). The EMM is one of three metropolitans in Gauteng province, which is one of nine provinces in South Africa. This metropolitan area is home to Africa's busiest airport, OR (Oliver Reginald) Tambo International, and it is also a major economic hub for the southern economy (EMM IDP, 2017/18). The objectives which assisted in achieving the aim of exploring the service delivery challenges experienced by various stakeholders' implementation of the NSP while providing HIV and AIDS social work services were:

1. To explore and examine HIV and AIDS challenges and barriers confronting faith-based organisations implementing the NSPs.
2. To critically analyse the NSP principles and strategies for faith-based implementation of the NSPs.

3. To identify and describe the interventions necessary and required to address faith-based organisations' HIV and AIDS service delivery challenges and barriers when implementing the NSPs.
4. To make recommendations on the NSP implementation by faith-based organisations in the HIV and AIDS landscape.

Methodology

The study utilised a qualitative research approach that was informed by an interpretivist paradigm (Creswell 2014; Thanh & Thanh 2015). The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to embrace the real representation of the participants' meanings as it 'elicits participants account of meaning, experiences, conceptions and produces descriptive data in the participants own spoken words [...]' (Fouché & Delport 2011, p. 65). The epistemological stance adopted in the study assumed a socially constructed perspective of relativism, which purports that people construct meanings differently, even of a similar phenomenon. This is a result of realities manifesting in multiple mental constructions based on individuals' social interactions, experiences and their reality. Being cognisant of the importance of participants' realities, the data collection embraced participants without any preconceived ideas or biases, thereby allowing them to freely express their views on the challenges and barriers in the HIV and AIDS service delivery of the NSPs (2012–2016). These included the personal experiences, understanding, interpretations and realities of the challenges and barriers faced in service delivery. A collective case study design was employed to gather data from HIV and AIDS stakeholders. This study design assisted the primary investigator (PI) in generating rich data and subsequently contributed to the robustness of the study by allowing the data collector to gain an in-depth understanding and to perceive the world through the lens of the population (stakeholders) being studied.

Sample

The research study was supported by a non-probability sampling strategy using a purposive sample (Fouché, Strydom & Roestenburg 2021). The Gauteng Provincial Department of Social Development (GDSD) referred 21 stakeholders (organisations) to participate in the study. The study sample is '[...] a small representative part of the population for the purpose of drawing inferences from the analysis of the sample characteristics to the population as a whole' (Brueggemann 2016, p. 56). The study's inclusion criteria were that participants had to be managers, coordinators and project managers working for three years or more in faith-based

organisations (FBOs) who were involved with implementing HIV and AIDS service delivery. Such service delivery was in line with the NSP in nine townships of EMM. The sample that met the inclusion criteria consisted of 21 participants from various FBOs comprising ten HIV and AIDS project managers, eight coordinators and three chairpersons who were directly involved in the strategic planning and monitoring of the FBOs' HIV and AIDS service delivery in Ekurhuleni as data saturation was achieved (Fusch & Ness 2015).

The eighteen participants participated in three focus group discussions (FGDs), comprising six participants per group. To broaden the knowledge base of stakeholders' views on the implementation of HIV and AIDS services in alignment with the NSPs, the researcher further purposively sampled three FBOs' chairpersons (one from each of the three EMM regions) to participate in one-on-one individual interview discussions. This method allowed each chairperson to freely express themselves in response to the study enquiry. All the participants worked in organisations that serviced the following areas: Tembisa, Kempton Park, Mandela (informal settlement), Edenvale, Duduza, Etwatwa, Kwa Thema, Katlehong, Thokoza and Germiston (informal settlement) townships in the EMM. The coordinators constituted less than half (44%) of the participants and had lower-level qualifications (Grade 12 plus a certificate), whereas the manager participants were qualified social workers. The three chairpersons' qualifications varied and ranged from having a degree to possessing a certificate. The demographics of the study's participants are depicted in Table 4.1.

Ethical considerations

To ensure a rigorous study, the researchers adapted the steps outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1994) to achieve trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity. The researchers perused credibility by familiarising themselves with the stakeholders and attending forum meetings to interact with the gatekeepers, who then assisted the researcher in sourcing the relevant participants (purposive sampling). Moreover, the inclusion of African languages alongside English as the languages of communication during the interviews, which were both audio-recorded and transcribed and the presence of a co-facilitator, greatly facilitated the overall process. Transferability was achieved by key concepts being defined to avoid ambiguity, and the descriptive nature of this study ensured transferability (Elo et al. 2014).

Dependability included detailed records being maintained at all phases of the study to enable it to be replicable (Lincoln & Guba 1994). Confirmability was established through the use of three FGDs and interviews as data

TABLE 4.1: Demographic information of the study's participants.

#	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Qualification	Years of experience	Position
1	Zulu	40–50	F	Bachelor of Social Work	3	Manager
2	Zulu	30–40	F	Bachelor of Social Work	5	Manager
3	Xhosa	20–30	M	Grade 12 plus Human Resource	3	Coordinator
4	Zulu	20–30	F	Grade 12	3	Coordinator
5	Xhosa	30–40	F	Grade 12 plus certificate	4	Coordinator
6	Zulu	30–40	F	Bachelor of Social Work	6	Manager
7	Zulu	30–40	F	Grade 12 plus administration	7	Coordinator
8	Xhosa	20–30	M	Grade 12	4	Coordinator
9	Xhosa	30–40	M	Auxiliary Social Worker certificate	5	Coordinator
10	Zulu	40–50	M	Bachelor of Social Work	3	Manager
11	Ndebele	50+	M	Bachelor of Social Work	6	Manager
12	Zulu	40–50	M	Bachelor of Social Work	5	Manager
13	Ndebele	50+	M	Bachelor of Social Work	7	Manager
14	Zulu	20–30	F	Bachelor of Social Work	5	Manager
15	Zulu	20–30	F	Bachelor of Social Work	5	Manager
16	Zulu	40–50	M	Auxiliary Social Worker certificate	5	Coordinator
17	SiSwati	20–30	M	Bachelor of Social Work	6	Manager
18	Pedi	40–50	M	Grade 12	7	Coordinator
19	Zulu	40–50	M	Degree in Developmentology	16	Chairperson of FBOs
20	Zulu	50+	F	Certificate in HIV/AIDS	12	Chairperson of FBOs
21	Tswana	50+	F	Certificate in HIV/AIDS	12	Chairperson of FBOs

Source: Authors' own work.
Key: F, Female; M, Male; AIDS, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome; HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; FBO, faith-based organisation.

collection methods, which ensured that different viewpoints were accommodated (Bengtsson 2016). The presence of a co-facilitator also ensured that the coding of the transcripts was objectively conducted. The data collection process only commenced once ethical clearance was received, permission was received from the relevant gatekeepers, and all participants' consent forms were voluntarily signed. A comprehensive description and carefully analysed research process ensured the trustworthiness of the study.

Data collection

Qualitative data collection instruments comprised of three FGDs comprising of project managers and coordinators. Additionally, the collected data were triangulated through one-on-one individual semi-structured interviews. Unique interview guides were used to solicit the participants' experiences on the implementation of HIV and AIDS services (Stuckey 2013). Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted with three persons for FGD and one person for semi-structured interviews to ascertain whether these instruments were conducive to attaining the

study's aim and objectives. In addition, the pilot study was conducted to ascertain whether the participants could easily and effectively respond to the questions in order to obtain comprehensive data. The pilot study participants were of similar characteristics to the main study participants. Though the pilot study participants were excluded from participation in the main study, the process assisted in fine-tuning the interview guides' questions.

Both FGDs and individual interviews took place in the boardroom of the Ekurhuleni Municipality's Germiston South Clinic. Permission for utilisation of the study implementation venue was granted by the Ekurhuleni Municipality Administrative Manager. This venue was easily accessible and central for all participants who (participants) came from three regions of the Ekurhuleni Municipality. The FGDs preceded the interviews as some participants (chairpersons) felt more comfortable speaking in the individual interviews as they had more information to share.

To guarantee a culturally sensitive approach, all data collection was conducted according to the component participants' language preference (English and other African languages: IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsiNdebele, IsiSwati and SePedi) and ensured free expression and flow of discussions. This was possible as the PI and assistant were multi-lingual and proficient in English and several African languages. The interview guides differed as the FGD guide consisted of ten questions, while the individual interview guide had five questions drawn from the ten questions. This difference in the number of questions responded to by participants was basically to gauge the views shared by the different categories of the participants in relation to the phenomenon studied. The first author, with the assistance of the co-facilitator, conducted the dual audio-recorded FGDs to ensure that both the participants' verbal and non-verbal expressions were accurately captured. The FGDs lasted between 60 and 90 min, while the individual interviews lasted for an hour each. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by an experienced transcriber. Codes and fictitious names were assigned to all participants in the Ekurhuleni Municipality Germiston South Clinic Boardroom with a view to ensuring the anonymity of the participants.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed through Creswell's (2014) analytic spiral steps of data analysis, as depicted in Figure 4.1. Following the steps ensured that the planning for recording the analysis was affected, as well as arranging, reading and writing memos. The data were then sorted and categorised into emerging themes. The themes were identified, and emerging patterns were recorded in preparation for coding. This enabled

Source: Author's own work based on Creswell, JW 2014, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*, 4th edn., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

FIGURE 4.1: Analytic spiral data analysis steps with modification.

the researchers to analyse emerging patterns and explore alternative explanations.

Because of the richness and thickness of the data, the researcher had to carefully sift through it, and as a result, three condensed themes were generated. These include namely Theme 1: comprehension, possession, familiarity and usage or application of the NSP 2012–2016 by organisations. Theme 2: monitoring and evaluation of the NSP 2012–2016 and its performance; and Theme 3: partnership and collaboration of the NSP 2012–2016 implementation of HIV and AIDS programmes.

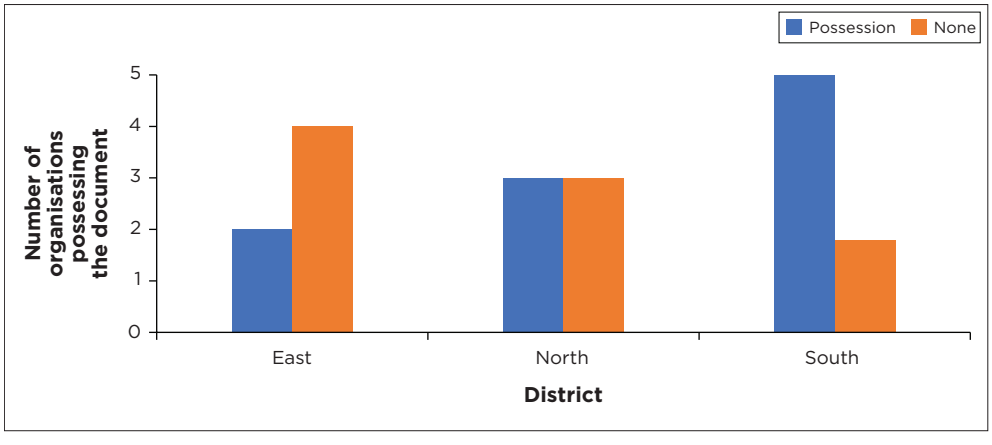
Summary of themes

In summary, the three themes which were generated showed the following: Theme 1: Comprehension, possession, familiarity and usage or application of the NSP 2012–2016 by the organisations rendering HIV and AIDS services (Figure 4.2). In the study, most of the participants who are the stakeholders in the application of the NSP indicated that they neither had possession of the NSP nor used it in their organisations. As the NSP is the prerequisite for the stakeholders' implementations of their programmes, the possession of the NSP document is critical in shaping their organisations' policy programmes and projects for HIV and AIDS. This sentiment was more expressed by the HIV and AIDS coordinators, as captured by this quote:

> 'We have an idea on how it should be, although, we do not have it in the organisation.' (Participant 20, location unspecified, date unspecified)

However, the possession of the NSP by the organisation does not necessarily imply comprehension, which will inform the usage by the participants interviewed. A few participants expressed their role in the context of implementation, which was stipulated as wellness, outreach programmes, networking, in-service training to their staff members, home-based care programmes, advocacy in mediation, and conflict resolution to facilitate access to government services and resources. A few were specific on their responsibilities and roles as an HIV and AIDS coordinator or manager. Participants expressed their roles in the following remarks:

> 'My role in the organisation is to conduct outreach programmes for the center and within that role networking for me as the auxiliary worker, becomes very important because I do wellness talks at various places.' (Participant 18, location unspecified, date unspecified)



Source: Author's own work.

FIGURE 4.2: Stakeholders' possession of the National Strategic Plans 2012–2016 document.

> 'As a coordinator, I deal a lot with orphans and work with social workers for them to access grants.' (Participant 16, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The statements indicate that the experiences of the participants are in contrast with the view of the government on FBOs' role in HIV and AIDS service delivery.

Theme 2: Monitoring and evaluation of the NSP 2012–2016, which was to ascertain the possession of the monitoring and evaluation plan and its implementation, showed that the participants had the plan but was used by auxiliary social workers and volunteers.

Views on monitoring and evaluation by the participants were captured:

> 'There is a document that guides our day-to-day activities which we use for monitoring our activities.' (Participant 1, location unspecified, date unspecified)

> 'In my organisation, there is the document which was handed to me by the chairperson which guides me on my day-to-day activities.' (Participant 8, location unspecified, date unspecified)

Finally, Theme 3: Partnership and collaboration of the NSP 2012–2016 was to establish the relationship and communication among all the stakeholders, including the South African Nursing Council (SANC). The study showed that a higher percentage of participants indicated that there is poor communication among the stakeholders. The majority of participants conveyed a top-down pattern of communication for partnership and collaboration in the implementation of the NSP, particularly between them and the structures of the government's departments. Additionally, they described communication patterns to be focussing on the government's interest as opposed to having a robust dialogue to turn the tide of the HIV and AIDS pandemics.

Participants expressed their views on partnership and collaboration as stakeholders in the following quotes:

> 'There is no mutual communication, something critical for building partnership.' (Participant 18, location unspecified, date unspecified)

> 'We work in clinics, local government offices, especially the ward counsellor, and the community development workers. But for them to be found is difficult and sometimes is difficult to find people to assist us, and yet is important to work together.' (Participant 9, location unspecified, date unspecified)

> 'There is a big gap between us and government.' (Participant 15, location unspecified, date unspecified)

When exploring the nature of these partnerships, the findings revealed a non-reciprocal relationship with their partners, in particular government departments. For the development and sustenance of partnership, communication is essential, as anchored by the Department of Health (2015), and deliberate efforts are required to promote the openness of stakeholders' communication channels for greater participation by all.

Limitations

The study has two major limitations that merit discussion. Firstly, the research population comprised 21 stakeholders from FBOs who participated as the managers, coordinators and chairpersons of HIV and AIDS projects. However, the voices of the PLHIV, who are the primary recipients of HIV social work service delivery, were not included. Secondly, the NSP custodian is the South African government's three spheres of operations for service delivery. This important structure at the local level, in the form of AIDS councils, was also omitted from participation in this study. Further limitations are those typically found in qualitative studies. These include the researcher's subjectivity or bias in developing the research questions, theme coding and categorisation, the interviewer and interviewees' personalities and backgrounds, language terminology and interpretation, and sectarian and cultural polarisation.

Study findings

Finding 1: HIV and AIDS service delivery challenges and barriers in the National Strategic Plans 2012–2016 in Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality

The main goal of the NSP 2012–2016, as previously stated, was to reduce the rate of new HIV infections by 50% using combination prevention approaches. The implication is that 80% of eligible patients on ART will be initiated, with 70% still alive and on treatment after five years of initiation. Moreover, the NSP is essential to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on individuals, families, communities and society by expanding access to treatment, care and support to 80% of all people diagnosed with HIV. Furthermore, ensuring an enabling and accessible environment that protects and promotes human rights while supporting the NSP 2012–2016 implementation will finally reduce the self-reported stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS by 80% (RSA 2012).

The importance of the NSPs cannot be disputed, especially in relation to South Africa achieving the 90-90-90 targets, which implies that 90% of all PLHIV will know their HIV status as they would have tested. In addition, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained ART. Furthermore, 90% of all the people receiving ART will have viral suppression. The findings are in concert with the research findings conducted by Marinda et al. (2020) on measuring progress towards the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) that 90–90–90 treatment targets

are key to assessing progress towards turning the HIV epidemic tide. Therefore, the authors concur with the 90-90-90 plan as it supports social work professionals in monitoring and evaluation, accountability and funding and grants opportunities aimed at ending the AIDS pandemic by 2030, which in turn will generate profound health and economic benefits for all the people. For the reasons stated, modelling exercises demonstrate that achieving these ambitious targets could significantly reduce the number of new infections, ultimately leading to the control of the HIV and AIDS epidemic by 2030.

The findings highlighted that stakeholders in HIV and AIDS service delivery primarily focus on disease management while neglecting prevention services and a comprehensive bio-psycho-social approach. Moreover, the lack of equality in partnerships, as well as ineffective communication and leadership among stakeholders, especially with governmental structures, have been identified as factors that hindered the successful implementation of the HIV and AIDS NSP.

The study further revealed that government funding has been inconsistent, negatively impacting HIV and AIDS service provision by the studied stakeholders, which in turn results in stakeholders employing underqualified human resources. Furthermore, unequal partnerships coupled with poor communications and leadership among stakeholders, particularly within governmental structures, affected the successful implementation of the NSP. Inadequate administrative coordination, monitoring and evaluation were sadly lacking, alongside the government's failure to provide financial resources and support for relevant service delivery.

Nevertheless, the social developmental approach postulates that combating HIV and AIDS requires an integrative partnership of all stakeholders. This approach should be multidisciplinary, cutting across sectors such as health, education, economic development, social security and welfare services. It further requires input from civil society, the government and the private sector. The social development approach includes the principles of rights-based, economic and social development, democracy and participation, partnership, and the micro-macro divide. The bridging of the micro-macro divide confirms the relevance of the social development approach in assisting the NSP to address the long-standing HIV and AIDS service delivery challenges and barriers.

The study findings concluded that poor communication resulted from inadequate and inconsistent application of elements of the NSP. This presented challenges and barriers for stakeholders' service delivery to align with the NSP (2012–2016).

Finding 2: Principles and strategies for implementing the National Strategic Plans 2012–2016

The underpinning principles of the rights-based and the multi-sectoral approaches, respectively, determine the priorities of the NSP 2012–2016, the design of its elements and the methods for programme implementation. It is stipulated in the NSP 2012–2016 'that the respect for human rights underpins all HIV and AIDS initiatives in South Africa'. Furthermore, the NSP 2012–2016 and NDP 2030 state that 'the denial of human rights increases the risk of HIV infection'. This serves as a barrier and, in turn, amplifies the risk of human rights violations.

As stated in one of the principles of social development, democracy and participation in socio-economic development are crucial aspects of the developmental approach to social welfare, including HIV and AIDS. This implies the engagement of service users in a manner that reflects human agency and active citizenship, recognising their rights and responsibilities. The NSP was originally founded on the principle of democratic citizen participation, acknowledging that PLHIV should be at the forefront of its development initiatives. For example, the TAC campaign groups have played a significant role in policy development and other contributing roles.

As the NSPs are revised every five years, subsequent plans could build upon the findings of this study to ensure that targets such as the 90-90-90 and the SDGs are attainable. Achieving the goal of ending HIV as a public health threat requires strengthened stakeholder engagements and relationships, patient-centred care and accountability. This will enable social work educators to comprehensively teach their students to identify their respective roles and responsibilities when dealing with various stakeholders involved with HIV and AIDS to enable them to promote transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

The study concluded that stakeholders involved in HIV and AIDS service in the three regions of the Ekurhuleni Municipality are not in full alignment with the NSP 2012–2016. Furthermore, the study found that it will be difficult to achieve the effective implementation of the elements of the NSP 2012–2016, namely effective communication, partnerships, service coordination, monitoring and evaluation and alignment of stakeholders' service delivery, without applying the social development approach. Consequently, it could lead to delays in the attainment of the NDP goals

and the SDGs. In the context of this study, social development is about maximising the capacity of households and communities affected by HIV and AIDS to effectively participate in their socio-economic development. Additionally, the developmental approach incorporates capacity building and empowerment. It emphasises participatory involvement, with service recipients expected to be at the forefront. The approach is person and community-driven and includes a rights-based approach that is relevant for understanding and assisting the implementation processes of the NSP.

The study further established the necessity for a social developmental approach (model) to bridge the challenges experienced by the stakeholders while implementing the NSP. This is to facilitate integrative HIV and AIDS service delivery among government departments and stakeholders on a broad range of interrelated development issues caused by the pandemics.

Additionally, upcoming NSPs ought to incorporate social developmental themes to enhance the harmonisation of HIV/AIDS service delivery. These themes encompass a rights-based approach, partnerships, economic and social development, participation and a focus on both macro and micro levels (Dhlamini 2014). In particular, constitutional arrangements by the government are required to strengthen effective partnerships and leadership among stakeholders. Moreover, the study established the necessity for social workers' roles and responsibilities to be broadened in the interdisciplinary service provision with stakeholders to bridge implementation challenges and barriers. Also, FBOs' service delivery in the field of HIV and AIDS in EMM is not fully aligned with the NSP 2012–2016. Therefore, it is established that without an application of the developmental approach, FBOs aligning their HIV and AIDS service delivery with the NSP 2012–2016 will experience challenges in achieving positive outcomes with implications for practice.

Social workers play various roles in addressing and helping individuals who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. Therefore, it is essential that social workers receive appropriate training to practice in diverse settings. Such settings range from clinical practice to political advocacy, so the options for electives and majors are wide, within a range of cognate disciplines. Teaching and learning of social work practice should be aligned with the purpose of the new South African BSW. This is in terms of providing well-grounded, generic and professional education that prepares reflexive graduates who are able to engage with people from micro- to macro-levels of social work within a dynamic socio-political and economic context (CHE 2015). This is in agreement with Lavender-Bratcher et al. (2018) that social work students should be introduced to various aspects of HIV and AIDS and the effects of poverty in their undergraduate classrooms and practice.

According to the UNAIDS (2017) and Marinda et al. (2020), many strategies are required to close the book on the AIDS epidemic; however, one thing is certain. It will be impossible to end the epidemic without bringing HIV treatment to all who need it. There is a need to integrate the complexity of HIV and AIDS to strengthen the teaching of social work education and practice. Furthermore, service learning or practicals conducted in interdisciplinary settings with other stakeholders 'may be a better way to expose them to the realities of the experience of people living in poverty' and affected by HIV and AIDS, among others (Bratcher et al. 2018, p. 59).

The social workers may conduct crisis interventions, case management, and participate in creating awareness and educating people and communities by providing information related to HIV and AIDS. They can provide psychosocial support through counselling for individuals affected and infected with HIV. Importantly, the roles of social workers can also involve ensuring adherence and monitoring of ARVs, conducting home support visits to locate individuals who have stopped treatment, and advocating and lobbying for the rights and needs of PLHIV.

Chapter 5

Solidifying evidence-based practice through Ecometrics

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Abstract

Ecometrics is a concept defined in South Africa that encompasses a body of knowledge about the use of quantitative measurement scales, qualitative protocols and procedures, and scientific practices for assessing client systems in social work. An Ecometric approach emphasises the generation

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and use of metrics for informing practice decision-making. Starting with a brief background on Ecometrics in the South African context, this chapter aims to inform readers about the current status of Ecometrics and recent instrument development projects to contribute towards strengthening interest in the field of Ecometrics. The chapter also discusses the key benefits of inter-disciplinary collaboration among different social service professions in the joint development of assessment instruments that can benefit the social work and child and youth care (CYC) professions. The chapter argues in favour of adopting Ecometric practices in the social service professions and outlines the benefit of such adoption to solidify evidence-based assessment towards accountable practices.

Introduction

As Lishman (2015) confirms:

> [*T*]here continues to be a professional and policy requirement that we need to demonstrate how we account for our practice and how effective we are, i.e. how we examine and account for the outcomes of our practice for service users. (p. 455)

She clarifies this point by emphasising that, as professionals, we must show accountability and responsiveness to our clients. She also highlights the importance of meeting statutory and policy requirements (Lishman 2015). Therefore, it is crucial that we integrate practice evaluation, which should encompass user feedback, insights from research and performance indicators. Additionally, we must acknowledge how resource and organisational issues can affect individuals' or teams' practice (Lishman 2015).

The need for accountable practice, and the unfortunate lack thereof, was blatantly demonstrated in South Africa by the Life-Esidimeni tragedy. In 2015, a total of 144 psychiatric patients died due to starvation and neglect when they were transferred from Life Healthcare centres to cheaper non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that were ill-equipped to provide the specialised services these patients required. Investigations into this matter are currently ongoing, and criminal charges have yet to be filed. The plan has been described by Arbitrator Justice Moseneke as 'irrational and in blatant breach of the law and the Constitution', an 'irrational and arrogant use of public power' (Dhai 2018, p. 3). Although this event can be described as an extreme example of unprofessional and negligent practice, it remains unthinkable that trained medical personnel, nurses and social workers willingly engaged in such practices. This event has underscored the importance of accountability and the role of scientific practices for all professions.

Extensive developmental work in scale development and the promotion of Ecometrics by a stalwart core team of measurement activists led to the acceptance of a policy for Ecometric instruments by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) in 2008. Working towards the broader adoption of measurement practices, a gathering of assessment metrics and information management in general in social work, proteges of Ecometrics continue to argue towards regulated adoption of assessment instruments in social work practice. We believe that measuring the person-environment functioning is core to best practices, and the development and use of Ecometric instruments are key elements to this endeavour.

This chapter provides a discussion of the background and progress towards instrument usage in South Africa, demonstrating three examples of developed Ecometric instruments. These include the ChildPIE classification system, the Outcomes that Matter© (OTM) technology and the ZETA scale. Discussing their aims and benefits to practice will showcase the promise held for instruments like these to be adopted as validated Ecometric assessments. While various methodologies were used in the validation process of the instruments, further details on these projects can be found in other publications, some of which are referenced in this chapter. The aim of this showcasing will therefore be to provide samples of existing tools and their contribution to accountable assessment practices, discussed parallel to the process of the professional council to accredit such instruments.

Background and status of Ecometrics in South African social services

The concept of Ecometrics was developed during the late 1990s by Prof. Michiel Adriaan van Zyl and Prof. Anna Catharina Faul, mostly because of intensified scale development practices, theory development and methodological development by the late Prof. Walter W Hudson from the United States of America (USA) (Hudson 1978, p. 65). The term Ecometrics gained traction in South Africa in 1995 when the idea of measurement in social work became a reality in the form of a measurement tool demonstrating how client systems can be assessed scientifically and in an evidence-creating manner (Faul 1995, p. 17; Van Breda 1996; Van Zyl 1995, p. 31).

Ecometrics refers to the use of quantitative and qualitative instruments and approaches in the assessment of client systems in social work practice (Faul 1995, p. 31). Specifically, the theoretical orientation in Ecometrics is grounded on social functioning as a research construct which underpins the essence of the social work profession. The introduction of several

social functioning scales by Hudson in the late 1970s and 1980s provided research traction during the mid-1990s for South African researchers such as MA van Zyl, AC Faul and A van Breda, who demonstrated how social functioning could be assessed and directly informing subsequent social work practice and interventions on the grassroots level. These efforts paved the way towards formalising the implementation of the concept of Ecometrics within the social work practice of South Africa (Roestenburg 2007, p. 60).

Ecometrics was an effort to bring science and technology to the practice of social work, thereby fulfilling the objectives of evidence-based practice, where evidence is created in practice and used to improve the accuracy and reliability of interventions. The formation of an Ecometrics pressure group in 2000 and subsequent negotiations with the SACSSP led to a recognition of the value of Ecometrics for social work as a profession. Finally, this led to a formal task team being set up by the SACSSP to drive Ecometrics towards formal adoption by the profession. Some milestones in developing Ecometrics involved the design of a mechanism through the SACSSP that would recognise, evaluate and accredit local, indigenously developed scales, measurement instruments and procedures for assessing client systems (SACSSP 2011). This would not only give recognition to the development efforts of scholars but would ensure that developed instruments would be disseminated to social work practitioners and contexts for active integration into practice.

The first two authors of this chapter served on the initial task committee and as members of the fourth council and the professional board of social work, respectively. They can therefore report that this task team succeeded in having the SACSSP formally approve the first policy on Ecometric technologies in 2011, with the adoption of the procedures by the fourth council in 2016. The Ecometrics policy and procedures, governed through the SACSSP, enable scale developers to submit and have their instruments evaluated by expert panels, and to have these formally adopted in a repository of instruments at the SACSSP. These efforts would assist in promoting the use of Ecometric instruments in the South African social services context. The policy and its administration are under the Education and Training Division of the Professional Board for Social Work (PBSW).

The Policy for Social Service Practitioners has, since its 2013 draft and approval in 2017, expanded the recognition of social service practitioners by formally recognising child and youth care work (CYCW) as a profession (Department of Social Development [DSD] 2017). During the same period of the development of Ecometrics, large-scale advocacy for the professionalisation of CYC was driven

mainly in South Africa (through professional council registration) and North America (through licensing). The North American Certification Project defined (Derksen 2010):

> [...] necessary competencies in the following five domains for professional practice: professionalism; cultural and human diversity; applied human development; relationship and communication; and developmental practice methods. Within the applied human development competency domain, emphasis is placed on child and youth care practitioners being "...well versed in current research and theory in human development with an emphasis on a developmental-ecological perspective"' (p. 326).

This demonstrates that CYCW also operates within an ecological framework and that their assessment practices will also benefit from developments within Ecometrics.

With their services also being dependent on government funding, the accountable measurement of the impact of interventions calls for the same consideration of adopting Ecometrics. Since the integration of the Professional Board for Child and Youth Care (PBCYC) into the SACSSP, the connection between Ecometrics and this separately recognised profession has been investigated. Further enactment of the policy is required, not only for the adoption by the social work profession but also to address the need for CYC to formalise their assessment practices within their unique scope of practice.

■ Accreditation of Ecometric scales

The formalisation of Ecometrics as a necessary practice in social assessments now allows social service professionals to submit scales and measures that are regularly used in practice for evaluation and accreditation, as well as new scales that are either under development or already developed and introduced to practice. Along with each submission, a certain amount of validation evidence needs to be provided to review these instruments for accreditation. Accredited instruments would then be placed on the register and made available to social service practitioners for use in practice. Required information includes validation study evidence, scale items, the methodology used for developing the scale and administration requirements. These are but some of the critical aspects of each submission. In addition, a scoring manual or procedural manual with operating steps should be submitted, along with training requirements and demonstrations of the user-friendliness of the instrument. To ensure further development of the instrument, accreditation is limited to five years, after which updated information should be provided to further substantiate the evidence of the tool. This ensures that developed scales continue to be refined for practice conditions. The developer or scale service provider determines the required

technology for using such scales and also ensures the quality of training for using an instrument (SACSSP 2011).

Unfortunately, to date, it would seem that none of these policy guidelines have been actioned, and the SACSSP still needs to provide a list of available instruments as suggested by the policy. Multiple reasons exist for this situation. Discussions with SACSSP personnel indicate that Ecometrics competed with several other teaching and learning activities during the past five years and that lack of capacity and other organisational matters led to Ecometrics being placed on the back burner. The authors also realised that the complex nature of the 'instrument issue in social work' requires technical abilities over and above the normal, probably accounting for the lack of attention to the matter. From our observations, we have realised over time that social workers tend to shy away from using technology and, specifically, assessment instruments in practice. This is in contrast with a finding by Roestenburg (2021) from a study involving about 120 social workers that social workers were ready to adopt and accept technology (precisely information technology) in the workplace and were willing to change over from paper-based administrative systems to using electronic information systems. Although this study did not focus on scales, further anecdotal evidence indicates that social workers often do not know how to use scales in practice and prefer to use qualitative methods that cater for in-depth conversations over quantitative methods that are more distant and not reliant on interactions with clients in the same manner. As scale developers, we understand that the use of measurements and scales in local social work is not widely adopted, and there are only a few individuals interested in promoting the use of scales in practice. Currently, social workers are not legally required to use instrumentation in their work. Therefore, it is left to the discretion of each individual to decide whether to utilise scales.

When social service practitioners begin utilising assessment instruments and technologies, they are likely to experience the following benefits in their practice (Roestenburg 2007; Swanzen 2011):

- They will be enabled to use more rigorous and systematic assessment procedures for assessing client systems that they did not have before.
- There may be a significant reduction in the margin of error in their findings that eventually benefit the client system and services to clients – in turn increasing ethical practices.
- More systematic and rigorous assessment outcomes may contribute to quality improvement in social service outcomes, providing measurable evidence for programme funding.
- Social Service Practitioners may gain an improved ability to account for specific findings and conclusions they make and the interventions they introduce into practice.

- Gaining the ability to conduct assessments enables social workers to triangulate their findings and sources of information, which once again leads to improved interventions with client systems.
- A benefit for the management of social service organisations is an improved ability to count and account for practitioner actions. Gaining the ability to measure worker performance and organisational goal achievements contributes to better planning of services and monitoring of effort. Information technology systems then become critical decision support systems that improve the planning and funding of services.

Overall, the authors believe that the use of measurement in practice will contribute to better and more scientifically founded practices with clients. Where measurements are used, the possibility of 'metrics' or numerical estimates increases, and this produces much-needed evidence that is useful for the profession.

In the 'Showcasing samples of Ecometric instruments' section, we will demonstrate some examples of recent measurement scales with local and international application values.

Showcasing samples of Ecometric instruments

At the core of Ecometric, measurement is the assessment of the client's fit within their environment. From a person-centred approach, the actualising tendency is depicted as an intrinsic and universal human motivation towards the individual's growth, development and autonomy – leading to integrated functioning. This is, however, moderated by the right social–environmental conditions, which, if lacking, results in thwarted growth and destructive adaptation (Murphy, Duggan & Joseph 2013). Person-in-environment (PIE) practice is a model of direct practice that makes strategic use of time to accomplish three things (Kemp, Whittaker & Tracy 1997):

> (1) Improving a client's sense of mastery in dealing with stressful life situations, meeting environmental challenges, and making full use of environmental resources; (2) Achieving this end through active assessment, engagement, and intervention in the environment, considered multi-dimensionally, with particular emphasis on mobilisation of the personal social network; (3) Linking individual concerns in ways that promote social empowerment through collective action. (pp. 2–3)

The Service Delivery Model for Developmental Social Services stipulates the responsibility of social service professionals to be the improvement of social functioning (Davids et al. 2005):

> Social functioning means the role performance of an individual in its entirety at all levels of his or her existence, in interaction with other individuals, families, groups, communities and situations in his or her environment. (p. 22)

In general, these theoretical concepts provide the operationalisation base for items to be measured through Ecometric instruments.

Three Ecometric instruments that meet these aims in different ways are showcased in this chapter to demonstrate the versatility of the instruments and their benefits to practice. The three examples discussed in the chapter each represent different types of assessment instruments placed on a continuum ranging from purely qualitative instruments with an emphasis on the generation of textual assessment data and requiring a qualitative appraisal mechanism to highly quantitative measures that rely on scoring systems and the generation of metrics such as clinical cut-off levels that quantitatively inform decision-making. Example 1 is a broad classification system that offers a unifying language between social service professionals and practitioners in various social service settings. This is followed by Example 2, a demonstration of a practice solution for daily tracking required by CYC centres. Then, moving to Example 3, a scale that explicitly measures interventive change in a client.

ChildPIE classification system: Unifying assessment of social functioning

In 1984, pioneers in the United States helped to provide a unifying construct for social workers to explain to other professions and society in general what the profession entails. By 1994, the PIE classification system, developed by Karls and Wandrei (2008), was published:

> [...] PIE creates uniform statements of social role; environmental, mental, and physical health problems; and client strengths. The system seeks to balance problems and strengths; it delineates problems pertinent to both person and the environment and qualifies them according to their duration, severity, and the client's ability to solve or cope with them. (p. 3)

The PIE classification system was intended to provide social work with a unifying language. Still, it only applied to the assessment of adult social functioning. In 2006, the ChildPIE was developed and tested in South Africa as part of a doctoral study to provide a classification system for the 0–18-year-old client (Swanzen 2006). An initial exploration of the usefulness of the system to CYC was carried out (Swanzen 2011), but a wider study is needed to determine the extent to which the scope of practice for CYC is covered.

Practice rationale for the use of a classification system and its validation

A classification system communicates the theoretical foundations to which the profession subscribes. It unifies a profession in its focus and

delineates its area of practice. This increases the professional status within the multi-disciplinary team. A classification system needs to include most explanations of problems recognised by members of a profession, ensuring that a standardised method of reporting can be used that reflects the profession and not the funders' templates. To ensure the face validity of such an instrument, social service practitioners need to recognise the embedded theory it is built on. A comprehensive design and development methodology was followed to work from relevant theoretical frameworks to conceptual variables for testing (Swanzen 2006). An initial draft of the classification was tested as a pilot, resulting in a refinement of the childhood problem classification system. Inter-rater reliability testing followed where five practitioners, identified as experts based on their experience, had to assess the same 25 case studies. From their classifications of the same case studies, the results showed high inter-rater reliability on the social role categories, with lower inter-rater consistency with the problem type (Swanzen 2011). The practitioners acting as reviewers also completed a questionnaire on their perspectives of the system, and these were used to further refine the instrument. Key to the findings from this feedback was the agreement of the majority that the theories used are known to them, confirming the face validity of the tool (Swanzen 2011).

☐ Description of the ChildPIE classification system

Saleeby (2004 in Swanzen 2011, p. 254) 'claims that the profession of social work has long claimed its niche as that space where the traffic between the environment and individuals, families, and groups occurs'. The vast number of theoretical constructs incorporated into the design of the descriptions used in the classification system included childhood development, parenting styles, abuse types, inter- and intra-personal skills, resilience, gender, behaviour management and special needs. As a core construct, the *developmental niche* was defined as the (Swanzen 2006):

> [*P*]hysical and social setting children are found in the culturally regulated customs for childcare, socialisation, and behaviour management; and the psychology of caretakers, including beliefs and values about the nature of development. (p. 111)

The ChildPIE provides role descriptions for the different areas of social interaction with consideration of the intricacies of problems in these roles and the influences of child maltreatment with an indication of the duration of the problem and the coping strengths the child may possess (Swanzen 2006).

An illustration is provided of some of the ChildPIE manual pages to demonstrate the face validity that has been found through two inter-rater reliability studies on this instrument. Figure 5.1 shows factor 1, which

FACTOR I: CHILD SOCIAL FUNCTIONING PROBLEMS
SOCIAL ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP
FUNCTIONING (1–4)

Child's Name: _____
Child's D.O.B.: _____/____/_____
Caregiver's Name: _____
Contact number: _____
Interview date: _____/_____/_____
Evaluator: _____

INDICATE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE
A Infant to two years B Three to Six years C Seven to twelve years D Thirteen to eighteen years

FAMILIAL ROLES	CODE	PROBLEM TYPE	ABUSE TYPE	DURATION	STRENGTH	RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION
□ Natural child	11					
□ Surrogate child	12					
□ Sibling	13					
□ Caregiver (role reversal)	14					
□ Relative	15					
OTHER INTERPERSONAL ROLES	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**ABUSE TYPE**	**DURATION**	**STRENGTH**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
□ Playmate	21					
□ Friend	22					
□ Partner (girl/boyfriend)	23					
□ Peer	24					
□ Member	26					
□ Other interpersonal role (specify)	27					
OCCUPATIONAL ROLES	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**ABUSE TYPE**	**DURATION**	**STRENGTH**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
□ Pupil/Student	31					
□ Paid worker	32					
□ Volunteer	33					
□ Other occupational role (specify)	34					
SPECIAL LIFE SITUATION ROLES	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**ABUSE TYPE**	**DURATION**	**STRENGTH**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
□ Client	41					
□ Special care recipient	42					
□ Juvenile	43					
□ Other special life situation role (specify)	44					

TYPE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION PROBLEM
01 Milestone delay 02 Routine
03 Inhibition 04 Pro-sociability
05 Performance 06 Frustration
07 Opposition/Defiance 08 Loss
09 Conduct disturbance 10 Other (specify

TYPE OF ABUSE
1 No Maltreatment evident
2 Ineffective discipline
3 Inappropriate exposure
4 Neglect
5 Emotional insult & threats
6 Intimidation by peers
7 Physical harm
8 Sexual Violation

DURATION OF PROBLEM
1 More than five years
2 One to five years
3 Six months to one year
4 One to six months
5 Two weeks to one month
6 Less than two weeks

COPING STRENGTHS
1 Outstanding 2 Above average
3 Adequate 4 Somewhat inadequate
5 Inadequate 6 No coping strengths

PRIORITY CODE
P-Primary S-Secondary R-Relevant

© 2005 ChildPIE Rika Swanzen

Source: Swanzen, R 2006, A classification system for categorising problems in childhood social functioning, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg, Auckland Park, p. 330.

FIGURE 5.1: Illustration of the factor 1 classification sheet.[3]

describes role performance, while Figure 5.2 illustrates one of the ten environmental systems.[3]

The sheet with tick boxes and category codes describes the various roles in which functions are measured, while the boxes at the bottom serve as indexes to describe the type of interaction problem and allow for the identification of the intensity of the problem. The combined outcomes of

3. The authors can be contacted if social service practitioners wish to be trained in any of the instruments shown in this chapter, for adoption in their practice or research.

FACTOR II: PROBLEMS IN THE ENVIRONMENT ECONOMIC / BASIC NEEDS SYSTEM PROBLEMS (5)

FOOD/NUTRITION	CODE	PROBLEM TYPE	SEVERITY	DURATION	RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION
☐ Lack of regular food supply	5101				
☐ Lack of food / water supply	5102				
☐ Nutritionally inadequate food supply	5103				
☐ Other food / nutrition problems (specify)	5104				
SHELTER	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**SEVERITY**	**DURATION**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
☐ Absence of shelter	5201				
☐ Substandard or inadequate shelter	5202				
☐ Other shelter problems (specify)	5203				
EMPLOYMENT	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**SEVERITY**	**DURATION**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
☐ No work available	5301				
☐ Insufficient employment (not adequate)	5302				
☐ Inappropriate employment (not legally/ socially acceptable)	5303				
☐ Other employment problem (specify)	5304				
ECONOMIC RESOURCES	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**SEVERITY**	**DURATION**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
☐ Insufficient community resources for basic sustenance	5401				
☐ Insufficient community resources to provide resources	5402				
☐ Regulatory barriers to economic resources/ funds	5403				
☐ Other economic resource problem (specify)	5404				
TRANSPORTATION	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**SEVERITY**	**DURATION**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
☐ No transportation to school/job/ needed services	5501				
☐ Inadequate transportation	5502				
☐ Other transportation problem (specify)	5503				
DISCRIMINATION	**CODE**	**PROBLEM TYPE**	**SEVERITY**	**DURATION**	**RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION**
☐ Select discrimination type from list below. Write in box to right	56_ _				
NO PROBLEMS IN ECONOMIC/ BASIC NEEDS SYSTEM	0000				

TYPE OF DISCRIMINATION
01 Age
02 Ethnicity, Race, Culture, Language
03 Religion
04 Gender
05 Sexual orientation
06 Lifestyle
07 Non-citizenship
08 Veteran status
09 Dependency status
10 Disability
11 Marital status
12 Body size
13 Political affiliation
14 Other: _____

TYPE OF COMMUNITY REACTION PROBLEM
01 Power
02 Ambivalence
03 Responsibility
04 Dependency
05 Loss
06 Isolation
07 Victimisation
08 Mixed
09 Other (specify)

DURATION OF PROBLEM
1 More than five years
2 One to five years
3 Six months to one year
4 One to six months
5 Two weeks to one month
6 Less than two weeks

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COPING STRENGTHS
1 Outstanding 2 Above average
3 Adequate 4 Somewhat inadequate
5 Inadequate 6 No coping strengths

SEVERITY INDEX:
1 No problems 4 High
2 Low 5 Very High
3 Moderate 6 Catastrophic

Source: Based on Wandrei, KE and Karls, JM (2008). 'Structure of the PIE system', in JM Karls & KE Wandrei (eds.), *Person-in-environment system: The PIE classification system for social functioning problems*, NASW Press, Washington, Eighth Impression.

FIGURE 5.2: Illustration of one of the environmental system classifications.

the assessment will guide intervention planning that will inform the prioritisation of the allocation of resources.

The same premise is used for factor 2, in Figure 5.2, and several environment systems are used to fully cover all contextual scenarios involved in clients' realities. The interaction types also differ from factor 1 to align with the nature of the person-in-environment-fit to be assessed.

The classification system provides a user-friendly scoring sheet that assists the practitioner in obtaining a code that represents the multiple levels of assessment carried out (Karls & Wandrei 2008). It ensures that information can be shared without personal identifying particulars to another professional who understands how to decipher the code.

Reflection on the innovation value of the technology

A key benefit of the instrument is the user-friendly score sheet that allows for a transfer of the codes from factors 1 and 2 to use the classification code obtained for the referral of a client to another social service practitioner. This can not only reduce the need for lengthy practice notes and narrative reports but also allow for a higher level of confidentiality in the communication about client problems.

The benefits of using a classification system include (Swanzen 2006):

- Its implementation is applicable across a variety of practice settings, from mental health to community work.
- It incorporates several theoretical orientations used in social services.
- Its foundation is open to culturally friendly descriptions, allowing for indigenous assessment.
- The system classifies and does not diagnose problems, thereby assisting with avoiding labelling.
- Measuring the person-environment interaction is enabled by considering the various environmental systems in which human development occurs and the role the individual plays in them, thereby allowing the measurement of this interaction.
- With the focus on identifying coping ability, the clients' strengths are acknowledged.
- It allows for accurate referrals and statistical reporting.
- Tracking and updating of the client's case is facilitated in a user-friendly way.
- No calculation is required. The problem descriptions are quantified through the transfer of category numbers to a capture sheet.

Ensuring the accurate use of the system requires sufficient training. Once training is over, there is no continuous cost to the organisation or practitioner.

Outcomes that Matter©: A new solution to a consistent challenge

Outcomes that Matter© is an innovative web-based solution providing real-time and confidential recording and measurement by social service practitioners of observations and commentary specific to each child or

young person. Leon Fulcher of New Zealand designed OTM with Thom Garfat of Canada, resulting from the four-decade-long careful monitoring of research with children and young people (Fulcher & Garfat 2012). 'Outcomes measurement has become a contemporary requirement for child, youth and family services in state-funded work with children and young people in out-of-home care' (Fulcher & Garfat 2013, p. 33), requiring consideration of a tool that will measure the outcomes that are relevant to the social service professions.

Overview of the care recording and reporting tool and its validation

The meta-analysis conducted by the Search Institute involved research on over 3 million young people across North America, through which 20 developmental assets were refined into achievement outcome statements (Fulcher & Garfat 2012; Fulcher, McGladdery & Vicary 2011). Further cultural relevance was found with the New Zealand Maori development metaphor of Hauora, which offers parallels with the four quadrants of the Circle of Courage (Fulcher & Garfat 2012). Constructed around a single-case replication research design, the OTM recording instrument provides a baseline of achievements that further allow for the evaluation of changes pre- and post-intervention (Fulcher & Garfat 2012):

> The Outcomes that Matter© Reporting forms gather the voices of Carer(s) and the young person. These 'voices' are reinforced and given prominence throughout! Weekly narratives and the Carer's reporting about how often achievements occurred make it possible to track development achievements over time, whether measured in weeks or months, Outcomes that Matter© Reporting thus reinforces 'practice-based evidence', to promote 'evidence-based practice'. While there is often a lot of talk about the need for 'evidence-based practice' – normally derived through large, quasi-experimental-control group studies or meta-analysis of multiple studies – it is less common to find 'practice-based evidence' that confirms or helps to refine as 'evidence-based practices' with specific children. (p. 33)

Outcomes that Matter© emphasises a strengths-based approach that is participatory in nature and supports the development of resilience through relationships (Fulcher & Garfat 2012, 2013). As such, it follows a relational paradigm where the co-created relationship and meaning-making that occurs between the practitioner and the child or young person is of importance. Outcomes that Matter© can be used by social service practitioners who have received training in its use. It can be used to monitor the weekly developmental achievements of children and young people in alternative care. The structure of the recordings is based on the developmental needs identified in the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern 2002, pp. 43–60), namely belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (Fulcher & Garfat 2012).

☐ The purpose of and practice needs addressed by Outcomes that Matter©

Outcomes that Matter© addressed several necessary practice requirements, including the need for accountability, cost-effectiveness, accurate recording, effective measurement and meaningful and collaborative engagement with the children and young people who are at the centre of service delivery. Increasingly, service providers must demonstrate how they meet outcomes for programme targets and policy requirements as well as the needs of children and young people. Outcomes that Matter© not only provides a means for offering the accountability required in-service evaluations and audits but also for guiding the developmental planning and care interventions of children and young people. The OTM outcomes for children and young people are their developmental achievements realised within the relationships developed with those who care for them (Fulcher & Garfat 2012, 2013). Outcomes that Matter© provides a means to engage with children and young people and have meaningful conversations about what is important to them and what personal achievements they seek. Such interactions with children and young people are as meaningful as the recordings and measurements. Each child or young person is located at the centre of the process. Outcomes that Matter© provides a template for recordings and uses the data from weekly measurements to provide developmental profiles and each young person's progress towards personal achievements. Engaging with young people in this structured manner to record their developmental achievements has therapeutic value. Such developmental achievements are the OTM outcomes, going beyond inclusivity and participation to true collaboration and mutual meaning-making with each child or young person.

☐ How the technology works and its usability

Outcomes that Matter© provides a user-friendly, web-based online interface that is easy to use with various devices, including computers, laptops, tablets and even smartphones. It is web-based and does not require the download of an application, thereby eliminating the need for regular updates or compatibility issues. As data are recorded and uploaded, it provides instant reporting and profiles at the click of a button. The interface allows for the capture of narrative reports and Likert-scaled quantitative measures. Secure cloud-based storage is provided, thereby eliminating the need for local servers. It makes use of unique identifiers to ensure privacy of information. Technical support is provided through a virtual help desk. Practitioners can log into their database from anywhere and with any device, eliminating the need to carry old-school client files with notes that can be lost or misplaced. In addition, the recordings can be shared among multi-disciplinary team members where appropriate or made available to a supervisor without handing over paperwork. This means that more than

one practitioner can view the recording or developmental progress made with a young person without needing to be in the same physical space at the same time to share a physical file. Because all information is password-protected, only approved practitioners can access the information. Furthermore, professional support and consultation can be obtained easily from experts in the field without sharing any client information over less secure email.

Reflection on the innovation value of the tool

Outcomes that Matter© provides social service practitioners with a significant leap in technology as far as recording and measurement are concerned. The tool is unique in its use for mentoring children in out-of-home care and for NEET (not in employment, education or training) youths (Fulcher & Garfat 2012). It is a safe, easy-to-use and accessible technology. Still, perhaps its biggest advantage is that instead of being a time-out from relational engagement, it allows the practitioner to fully utilise a recording and measurement session as an intervention, further supporting the relationship and providing an opportunity for a child or young person to be at the centre of their own development. Although the Circle of Courage model is viewed as depicting universal, cross-cultural needs, the instrument will benefit from exploring its adoption within a South African context.

The ZETA scale: Quantifying and monitoring change in clients

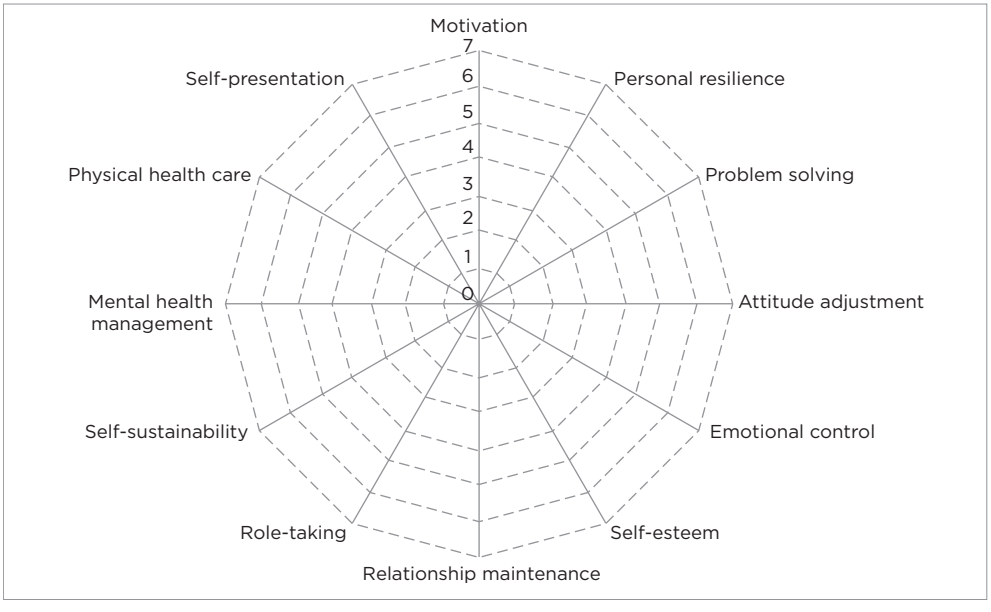
Overview of the ZETA scale

The aim behind developing the ZETA is to provide a universally acceptable scale to social workers that can be used across different practice contexts and settings. It enables users to adapt the scale to their own needs to observe client systems in practice. The scale development methodology followed general guidelines as proposed by authors such as De Vellis (2012), with the main difference being that the ZETA conceptualisation started from an empirical exploration of social workers' conceptualisation of 'change' in their client systems. The ZETA Global Social Work Outcomes rating scale was developed between 2013 and 2015 by Roestenburg and Loubser as a local research effort towards the creation of indigenous assessment technologies (Roestenburg & Loubser 2017). The rating scale is based on a formulated, universally acceptable logical model of therapeutic change, which was consistent with the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM) philosophy (Mander et al. 2014; Moore, Tambling & Anderson 2013; Prochaska et al. 1997). The scale is therefore used to evaluate change in client systems. Based on an initial design formulated by multiple focus groups consisting mostly of practising social workers, the developers found

that the ZETA appeared to be an excellent practitioner rating scale for determining client levels of change motivation. Based on the scale's associative relationship with TTM, it is suggested that it should ideally be tested in a context where social work services are focused upon behavioural change objectives. One such environment is a correctional services context.

How the ZETA scale addresses practice needs

Based on the researcher's assessment of the practice gap in social work, the ZETA scale may indeed answer the need in practice for a simple tool that can be used in various practice contexts because it is rated by the social worker and not the client as in other self-completion format scales. This feature may be highly useful as practice is hampered if clients are unable to understand or complete scales themselves. The ZETA scale concretely helps with identifying the client's stance towards change in his situation, and this, in turn, helps the social worker identify what the client needs to begin changing his situation. The ZETA also assists with evaluating progress in the change process and even identifies aspects that work against change. This capability increases the efficacy of the intervention. Lastly, because measurements are taken across twelve dimensions of client functioning, a more balanced total score can be achieved that provides different indicators of change, which is believed to be more balanced than can be achieved with other uni-dimensional measurement instruments. These twelve dimensions are illustrated in the following diagram (Figure 5.3).



Source: Adapted from Roestenburg, W & Loubser, H 2019, *Scoring manual for the ZETA® scale,* Afri.yze Publications, Carletonville.
FIGURE 5.3: Twelve dimensions of the ZETA scale.*

☐ The underlying logic or theoretical model of the technology

The ZETA scale was retrospectively found to be closely associated with the principles of the well-established model of behavioural change identified as the TTM developed by Di Clemente and Prochaska (1982) and refined by Casey, Day and Howells (2005), Polaschek, Anstiss and Wilson (2010), Wodarski (2011) and Moore et al. (2013). Di Clemente and Prochaska (1982) (as cited in Wodarski 2011) developed the TTM from a comparative study based on some 300 theories from psychotherapy and behaviour change, which included Freud's idea of consciousness raising, Rogers's helping relationship and Skinner's contingency management, emphasising its trans theoretical character. The TTM assumes that behaviour change unfolds through a series of six stages of change, each associated with specific change processes and levels of change. Accordingly, change occurs during six cognitive stages: a *pre-contemplation stage, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and termination* (Wodarski 2011). Based on this work, social change is promoted by raising consciousness, promoting self-assessment and helping client systems develop mechanisms for helping themselves by introducing new forms of behaviour, which are then reinforced by conditioning and reinforcement efforts. Transtheoretical Model of Change principles were tested in various contexts and for various problems, such as drug rehabilitation and correctional contexts and found to bring about an effective standard deviation change of between 0.56 and 1.00 in about 50,000 participants, according to a review study involving 120 databases and 48 different behaviour types (Casey et al. 2005; Hall & Rossi 2008). In these instances, self-efficacy and decisional balance played an important role. These results seem to support the importance of self-awareness and behavioural mobilisation as change concepts that often coincide with social work intervention objectives.

The ZETA rating scale algorithm is based on principles of behavioural change through self-awareness and behavioural mobilisation. It uses a seven-point rating scale to capture the change readiness and process in clients, starting from a position of lack of self-awareness and subsequent inability to change oneself at one extreme and ending with awareness and the ability to initiate and mobilise new problem-solving behaviour. At the upper end of the scale, the client is highly self-aware, able to adjust their behaviour according to situational demands and does not require support from a counsellor or social worker. The ZETA scale helps identify areas for awareness creation and growth and can be calculated as often as necessary to assess the client system. The most severely socially dysfunctional client is typically not aware of their social disability, and intervention attempts should be focused on developing awareness in preparation for behaviour change and, finally, independent functioning.

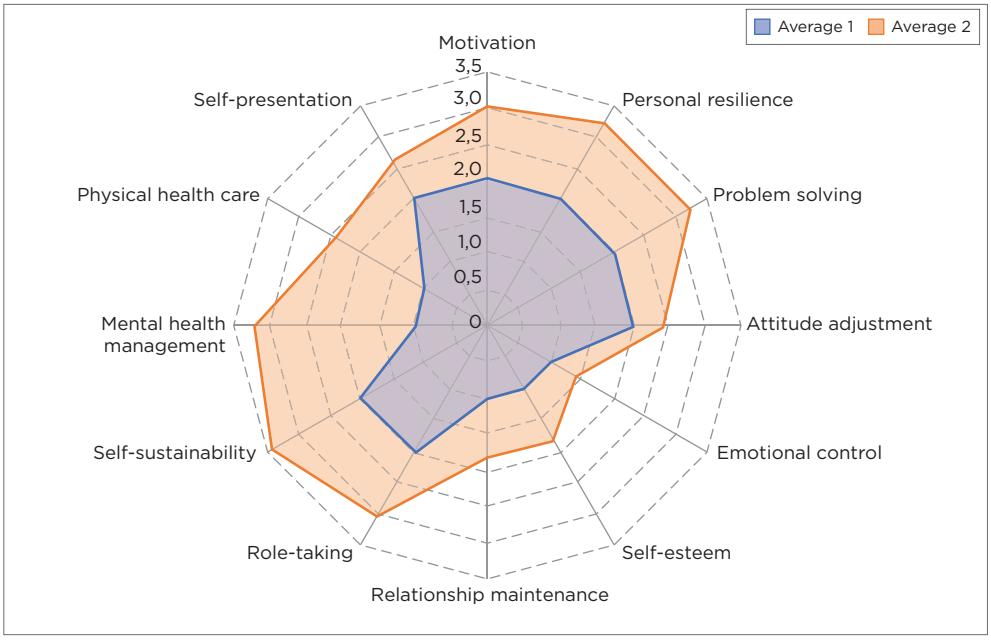
The ZETA assessment uses a seven-point scale to evaluate a client's readiness for change and level of action, as illustrated for one of the dimensions in Figure 5.4. Unlike the TTM principles, ZETA principles recognise that change can occur at multiple levels of client functioning simultaneously. This multi-dimensional construct is characterised by twelve dimensions of social functioning, including motivation, personal resilience, problem-solving, attitude adjustment, emotional control, self-esteem, role-taking and relationship management, self-sustainment, mental health management, physical health care and self-presentation. The ZETA model simplifies evaluation and identifies areas for further awareness creation and growth. Scores can be calculated as often as necessary to assess the client system. Ultimately, the final ZETA rating reflects the transformation achieved throughout the helping process and the level of self-actualisation reached. By using a spreadsheet or specially designed Web App, the scores are displayed as a spider diagram with overlays showing each assessment, as illustrated in Figure 5.5.

Over time, each overlay in the ZETA assessment represents progress towards self-actualisation across the twelve dimensions of change. The visual display simplifies evaluation and highlights areas for further awareness creation and change. As the process unfolds, the expansion of each data point towards a seven indicates improvement, while low-scoring areas remain opportunities for growth. Ultimately, the last ZETA rating will show the extent to which the client has reached self-actualisation, reflecting the transformation achieved throughout the helping process.

Can the client perform all social tasks in the *Self-Esteem?* definition without any help?	1
Does the client occasionally seek S/W support in accepting responsibilities to overcome poor *Self-Esteem?*	2
Does the client actively participate with a S/W in their restoration plan to gain insight and restore poor *Self-Esteem?*	3
Is the client willing to cooperate and committed to changing their poor *Self-Esteem?*	4
Is the client receptive to changing their poor *Self-Esteem?*	5
Is the client unaware but not actively resisting to attempt to correct their poor *Self-Esteem?*	6
The client is unaware and actively resisting to correct their poor *Self-Esteem?*	7

Source: Adapted from Roestenburg, W & Loubser, H 2019 *Scoring manual for the ZETA® scale,* Afri.yze Publications, Carletonville.
Key: S/W, social worker.

FIGURE 5.4: The ZETA seven-point rating scale applied to the self-esteem dimension.



Source: Adapted from Roestenburg, W & Loubser, H 2019, *Scoring manual for the ZETA® scale,* Afri.yze Publications, Carletonville.
FIGURE 5.5: Multiple ratings using the ZETA scale.

Validation evidence

A single validation study was conducted by Marietjie Smit, a PhD candidate working in a correctional context. The study on this scale during 2018–2022 included 28 social workers recruited from a correctional context. These participants were first trained in using the scale in practice, completing a training session and completing assessments on a number of test cases until they correctly completed the test case studies and received accreditation to use the scale. They were then required to use the scale in their daily practice. Every first assessment was included in the study, and a total of 206 observations were obtained. Each worker submitted their assessments to an online platform specifically developed for this study. The aim of the study was to determine the fit of the scale to the Rasch Model and RUMM 2030 software was used. The following aspects were evaluated: overall instrument and item functioning, unidimensionality of the measurement construct, local independence of items, category and threshold functioning, differential item functioning, as well as person and item alignment. The overall instrument and item functioning were satisfactory according to the person separation index and Cronbach Alpha that returned 0.95184, while the person fit residual of -0.4039 and item fit residual of 0.4457 were within the ideal range of ± 0.50, but the person fit residual standard deviation of 1.6065 and item fit residual standard

deviation of 2.6501 were larger than required and indicated possible problems. Item 10 (Mental health functioning) and Item 11 (physical health) indicated a misfit and needed to be investigated further. The ZETA scale showed good multi-dimensionality, and the constructs were clearly discernable. The items were sufficiently locally independent, with a few exceptions where items were over-correlated. Items 10 and 11 showed non-uniform DIF, which once again underscored the poor performance of these items. Participants generally struggled to uniformly select categories for these two items, and further investigation is needed to determine how these two items can be improved. The scale seems less effective in use for younger and older than 60 years of age categories. Overall, the scale was found to contain good validity and reliability.

☐ Reflection on the innovation value of the technology

The developers conclude that the ZETA scale is a useful addition to social work practice. Its neutrality and lack of theoretical perspective make it versatile and universally applicable. Assessing readiness to change or ability to change is a universal concern for social service practitioners. The ZETA scale helps evaluate progress and produces metrics for practice evaluation purposes and staff development. The scale features as an assessment tool in the author's case management system, a web-based application enabling social workers to manage their clients using an electronic platform. Training in the ZETA is provided by arrangement and requires an extensive trial period, as well as completion of a case study in order to obtain accreditation for using the ZETA.

■ Conclusion

In the wake of the impact that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) will continue to have on the sector in the coming years, the debate on whether social service practitioners should adopt Ecometric measurement becomes even more critical to ensure the survival of service delivery in under-resourced sectors.

There is a dire need to continue transforming social work and CYC, among other helping professions, into the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) context to ensure the professions remain competitive and relevant in the world context. Adopting technology at the same time as a set of standardised instruments may significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of practice. Combining the use of assessment instruments with information technology will largely disrupt what we have been familiar with in social service practice and open new worlds of knowledge we did not have access to in the past. It is likely that technology adoption will lead to

exponential growth and change in how we do our work and influence the lives of clients. This has been the trend in most contexts – technology changes the way we do things and leads to exponential change. The adoption of Ecometric instruments can combine and streamline these influential forces.

In addition to this, the long-standing necessity for ethically accountable practice and integrated service delivery will be enhanced by the ability to describe in measurable terms to other professions and service users what the essence of our work is.

Chapter 6

Contributory factors to the scourge of abuse and ruthless murder of people with albinism in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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Abstract

This chapter looks at the high prevalence of violence manifested through ritual murder, abuse, forced amputations and the sale and trafficking of human body parts of people living with albinism. Through a phenomenological qualitative approach, the study focused on the contributory factors to the scourge of abuse and ruthless murder of people

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with albinism in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The ecological systems theory was followed as the theoretical framework of study. The sample consisted of 26 people with albinism and ten social workers. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to explore their experiences, perceptions, observations and opinions of the topic. Data were thematically analysed, and findings confirmed that people with albinism are discriminated against based on their skin colour. They endure emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and are often killed. The motives for these include cultural beliefs such as the idea that the body parts of people with albinism have healing powers and can be sources of good fortune. The claims that having sexual intercourse with a person with albinism cures human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) were also refuted. Despite their fearful lives, persons with albinism enjoy a strong support system for their families and cases of their abuse are known because of consistent reporting to social workers, schools and the police. Recommended intervention strategies include the following: the government should be involved in raising awareness of the plight of people with albinism, educating the public to stop these heinous acts, enforcing respect for their human rights and dignity and allowing social workers to intervene in culturally sensitive ways.

Introduction

Globally, people living with albinism (PWA) are confronted with various social and societal challenges, such as discrimination, abuse and violence because of the colour of their skin. Albinism is regarded by the United Nations (UN) (2022) as a rare, non-contagious, genetically inherited difference present at birth, which results in a lack of pigmentation (melanin) in the hair, skin and eyes. The high prevalence of violence manifested through ritual murder, abuse, forced amputations and the sale and trafficking of the human body parts of PWA is a global concern as such acts demonise and dehumanise human dignity and the human body. However, elevated statistics within the African context are more widely reported, with studies conducted in Africa highlighting the abuse and murder of PWA. Such acts are more pronounced in Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa (Baker 2018; Masanja, Mvena & Kayunze 2015; United Nations 2022).

Research studies conducted on the rising number of heinous atrocities occurring in South Africa have raised significant concerns (Cele 2017; Khumalo 2016; Mswela 2017). Khumalo (2016) reported that many cases of abuse and the murder and sale of PWA body parts occur in KwaZulu-Natal, where the study was conducted. Furthermore, Cele (2017) reports that cases of abduction, rape and witchcraft are exacted by African people

against PWA. These cases of abuse are also reported throughout Africa, with several studies focusing on the existence and causes of the abuse of PWA (Cele 2017; Mswela 2013; Uromi 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, identifying the contribution factors and how they can be minimised is crucial. The researchers' interests in the topic were triggered by a high number of cases reporting on the abuse and killing of people with albinism in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Moreover, cases are recorded of trauma and emotional and physical abuse because of PWA body parts being harvested for medicinal purposes so that illnesses of others can be cured, to win court cases and elections and for good luck and favour. It is in this light that the researchers plan to uncover social factors associated with the abuse and killings of PWA in KwaZulu-Natal.

Theoretical framework

The ecological systems theory was applied in the study to uncover social factors associated with the abuse and killings of PWA in KwaZulu-Natal. This is a seminal theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005). The Ecological systems theory was selected for its suitability to establish how people relate, interact and treat one another within communities and environments and highlight the impact of these systems on individuals (Gaias et al. 2017). The significance of the ecological systems theory is its focus on how all people on Earth relate to their environment and their interactions with one another. This interaction usually commences from one's own home, community and society, and when living in an environment as a whole system. The environment in this study was the way in which PWA and their own communities are treating one another. This theoretical framework was essential to understand the environment where the PWA reside as the environment might have a negative or positive influence on them.

Research methodology

The researchers applied the interpretivism paradigm coherently following a qualitative research approach. The interpretivism paradigm was selected because it assumes that reality is multiple, intangible, dynamic and socially and historically constructed by the human mind based on peoples' experiences of the world. The qualitative research approach was significant for the participants to share their unique experiences and perceptions of the abuse and brutal killing experienced by PWA through in-depth interviews.

This study was conducted in two municipalities, namely eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality (TMM) and uMgungundlovu District Municipality

(UDM), situated in KwaZulu-Natal. The two municipalities remained preferred as the study setting as they have recorded large numbers of PWA who have been abused and murdered (Mswela 2017). Furthermore, there are approximately 5,000 PWA recorded in KZN, with most living in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality and UDM (Cancer Association of South Africa [CANSA] 2021; Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] 2017).

The study adopted non-probability sampling, where both snowball and judgemental sampling were simultaneously applied. This assisted the researchers in carefully selecting participants based on their own experience with the subject being researched. The purposive sampling was beneficial to get a suitable sample, as this technique allows the selection of participants with similar characteristics to comprehensively answer the study's research questions. The adoption of snowball sampling was because they were able to make sound referrals to other participants who were well-versed in the subject under study. The researchers used this sampling technique with an aim of developing a small group of participants who would be in a position to give names of possible sample associates to contribute to a study. There were 26 PWA who once experienced or witnessed abuse of PWA. The study profiled participants are indicated in Table 6.1. The data for the participants in the study are summarised in Table 6.2.

TABLE 6.1: Participants' demographic profiles – People living with albinism.

Variable	**eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality: *n* = 17**		**uMgungundlovu District Municipality: *n* = 9**		**Total *n* = 26**
Gender	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
	11	**6**	**7**	**2**	**26**
Age	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
41–50 years old	0	0	0	0	0
18–30 years old	9	4	4	2	19
31–40 years old	2	2	3	0	7
Older than 50 years old	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**11**	**6**	**7**	**2**	**26**
Education level	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
Grades R–3	0	0	0	0	0
Grades 4–6	2	0	1	0	3
Grades 7–9	0	1	2	0	3
Grades 10–12	4	1	3	2	10
Tertiary education	5	4	1	0	10
Total	**11**	**6**	**7**	**2**	**26**

Table 6.1 continues on the next page→

TABLE 6.1 (cont.): Participants' demographic profiles – People living with albinism.

Variable	eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality: *n* = 17		uMgungundlovu District Municipality: *n* = 9		Total *n* = 26
Duration participants have lived in KZN	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
24 months and less	0	0	0	0	0
2–3 years	0	0	0	0	0
4–6 years	1	0	2	0	3
7–10 years	10	6	5	2	23
Total	**11**	**6**	**7**	**2**	**26**
Employment status	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
Student	5	3	1	1	10
Employed	3	2	2	0	7
Unemployed	3	1	4	1	9
Total	**11**	**6**	**7**	**2**	**26**

Source: Authors' own work.

TABLE 6.2: Participants of the study.

Participants	Victims	Age	Gender	Ethnic group	Language
Participant 1	Victim 1	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 2	Victim 2	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 3	Victim 3	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 4	Victim 4	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 5	Victim 5	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 6	Victim 6	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 7	Victim 7	18–30	F	BA	English
Participant 8	Victim 8	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 9	Victim 9	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 10	Victim 10	31–40	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 11	Victim 11	31–40	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 12	Victim 12	18–30	M	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 13	Victim 13	18–30	M	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 14	Victim 14	18–30	M	BA	English
Participant 15	Victim 15	31–40	M	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 16	Victim 16	31–40	M	BA	English
Participant 17	Victim 17	18–30	M	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 18	Victim 18	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 19	Victim 19	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 20	Victim 20	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 21	Victim 21	18–30	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 22	Victim 22	31–40	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 23	Victim 23	31–40	F	BA	English
Participant 24	Victim 24	31–40	F	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 25	Victim 25	18–30	M	BA	IsiZulu
Participant 26	Victim 26	18–30	M	BA	IsiZulu

Source: Authors' own work.
Key: F, female; M, male; BA, black African.

Data collection methods

The researchers utilised semi-structured interviews to collect data from participants. It is noteworthy that prior to the interviews, in addressing the cause of abuse and brutal killings of PWA, it was necessary to ascertain the level of participant awareness of the causes of abuse against PWA and the types that they had experienced as a result. In order to address these phenomena and to further facilitate an open dialogue on the topic, two questions were asked to initiate a free-flowing conversation and tease out the phenomenon under study as follows:

- Are you aware of the abuse and brutal killing of people with albinism?
- Have you experienced abuse because of being a person living with albinism?

Level of awareness of the abuse and murder of persons living with albinism

In the first question, the participants were asked about their level of knowledge of the maltreatment directed towards people with albinism. The responses to the first question on the level of awareness of the abuse and killings of PWA are depicted in Table 6.3.

The findings revealed that all 26 PWA are fully aware of the abuse and killings of PWA in KZN. These findings demonstrate a strong awareness of the abuse and killing of PWA, implying that the participants could have experienced, observed or heard about these senseless acts. In Africa, it is argued that PWA endure severe discernment and difficulties compared to other ethnic groups (Reimer-Kirkham et al. 2019). Additionally, Franklin et al. (2018) also noted that awareness of maltreatment of PWA is growing in Africa.

Have you experienced abuse because of you being a person with albinism?

In the second question, the participants were required to provide their perspective on this question, which required 'yes' or 'no' answers regarding them experiencing abuse because of being a PWA. Table 6.4 summarises the findings.

TABLE 6.3: Level of awareness of the abuse and killing of people living with albinism.

Variables	Frequency
Yes	26
No	0
Total	26

Source: Authors' own work.

TABLE 6.4: Personal experience with abuse.

Variables	Frequency
Yes	26
No	0
Total	26

Source: Authors' own work.

According to the data in Table 6.3, all 26 people with albinism had experienced abuse as a result of a condition of albinism. This information was critical to the study as participants had to have extensive knowledge of the subject to yield thick, rich data and for it to be aligned with the literature review and theoretical framework for analysis and conclusion purposes. Though the types and causes of abuse experienced by PWA were not objectives or research questions, participants felt the need to share the types of abuse they have experienced, heard about or witnessed, as well as the causes from their perspective. The researchers believed because the study was about PWA experiences, opinions and concerns they should allow for self-determination by respecting their input.

Therefore, respect was an important component of the researcher-participant and the social worker-client relationship. The study findings concur with Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010, p. 12) that ecological systems theory focuses on people within a society who are putting pressure on one another, and that is considered as an input to the victim. Furthermore, the study's findings also corroborated Tambala-Kaliati, Adomako and Frimpong-Manso (2021), who also found that people with albinism have been subjected to brutal attacks in several African countries, particularly Malawi, throughout history for a variety of reasons. Mswela (2013), Benyah (2017) and Mswela (2017) also argued that PWA have lived with and experienced persecution, as well as various forms of abuse.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborne, 2015). This method was adapted to analyse the data and involved six steps:

1. familiarising and Being Immersed in the Collected Data
2. extracting units of meaning
3. inductive interpretation of initial units
4. grouping and clustering themes
5. formulating a table for the clustered themes
6. interpretative phenomenological analysis and self-reflexivity.

Findings and discussions

The findings of the study are reported through the following major themes, namely types of abuse experienced because of being a person with albinism, causes of abuse and brutal killings of PWA.

Theme 1: Types of abuse experienced because of being a person with albinism

From the mentioned themes, the following sub-themes have emerged in the context of this study to determine the types of abuse experienced by PWA, as all the participants had stated that they had previously experienced some form of abuse.

Sub-theme 1: Name-calling and labelling

The first sub-theme that emerged established that PWA are discriminated against because of their physical characteristics (skin colour, hair and eyes) and assigned labels. These findings are consistent with those of Brocco (2015) and Brilliant (2015, n.p.): 'PWA experience and are subjected to taunting and discriminatory and derogatory labels because of their physical features and appearance, resulting in negative stereotypes being assigned to them'.

What was common in the theme was that all 26 PWA indicated some of the discomfort they felt with being called names such as '*albinos*' and '*persons living with albinism*'. The participants regarded both these terms or labels as derogatory, misleading, demeaning and an additional way of dehumanising them. Baker (2018) further asserts that language is a potent tool for shaping beliefs and realities about people, things or places and can be degrading, demeaning and dehumanising through taunting and name-calling. The term 'albino' is commonly used to describe PWA because of it originating from the Latin word 'albus', meaning 'white' (Nkrumah 2021). Some participants articulated their feelings on the use of *albino* and *persons living with albinism* as follows:

> 'Firstly, we are black, not white. We did not ask for this colour and all the bad things that go with this colour skin.' (Participant 1, female, IsiZulu)

> 'I am constantly insulted and called derogatory names like this "albino thing" and "monkey."' (Participant 7, female, English)

The terms used to refer to PWA have been cited in research by Brocco (2015), where locals use terms such as '*mzungu*', which refers to a European or white man, and '*napwere*', which refers to a 'pea-brownish colour', when

they speak about or call PWA. Similarly, in Mali, PWA are referred to as '*gomblè*', meaning 'red man', because of their sunburned complexion (Brocco 2015). Additionally, the names '*Zeru Zeru*' ('ghost-like creature'), '*mzungu*' ('white man') and '*shawa*' ('monkey') are also terms and labels used for PWA in eastern and southern Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, Tanzania, South Africa, Malawi and Mozambique.

Another participant articulated their perspective on labelling in the context of HIV-seropositive infections and albinism:

> 'This thing of calling us persons with albinism. We do not like it. We were born with albinism; we did not get it because we were doing wrong things. Look at HIV and AIDS; few are born with HIV, but most get infected for many of their own reasons. Unlike us, we had no choice in albinism; we were born like this.' (Participant 10, female, IsiZulu)

Although participants in this study objected to being called 'albinos', some studies still refer to people with albinism as *albino*s. One such study is that of Adediran (2015) entitled: *We thought we will be safe here: Narratives of Tanzanian Albinos in Kenya and South Africa*. Ironically, this study articulates Kenyan and South African PWA voices on abuse. Similarly, within media broadcasts, it is common to see labels such as: '*The tragic story of Tanzanian Albinos – hunted for body parts for witchcraft*' (Zmescience 2021*; Zimbabwe: Ostracized albinos describe life as hell on earth* (AP News, 2016) and *DR Congo albinos live in fear* (Africa News 2016).

Other participants went further to express that people with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) purposely got infected, chose not to take antiretroviral drugs and got grants to assist them in managing their lives. One participant highlighted that the similarity between HIV and albinism involved a sexual act, one being pregnancy and the other at the time of pregnancy as well, but mostly because of risky sexual practices. Studies have highlighted that risky and unprotected sex is the primary mode for HIV infections (Wilson & Saithiyasusuman 2015).

The labelling and comparison between albinism and HIV did not end there, as other participants compared albinism to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), highlighting the global attention that the latter receives from the mass media, government and humanitarian organisations. In addition, the emphasis and encouragement for all global citizens to get vaccinated with this global outcry not occurring to the exact proportion for albinism and PWA (Reiter, Pennell & Katz 2020):

> 'Now if our lives are not bad enough, there is COVID-19. So much fuss about a disease that started in China. We are people with albinism; we are getting killed left, right and centre. There not [*sic*] so much noise about us but a disease that started two years ago everyone is shouting. There's a vaccine for COVID-19. How

> come there's no vaccine for albinism? Even HIV, there so [*sic*] much money for it. Where the [*sic*] money for albinism?' (Participant 5, female, IsiZulu)
>
> 'I am sure people who had COVID-19 do not get called names; instead, people celebrate them or feel sorry for them. Every day on television, we hear how many infections, how many deaths. But what about us people with albinism are [*sic*] born, abused and die without all this hullabaloo? Treat us all equal, no matter what the sickness is.' (Participant 3, female, IsiZulu)

☐ Sub-theme 2: Experiences of emotional, physical and sexual abuse

In this sub-theme, the follow-up question to ascertain the types of abuse experienced by PWA in society has emerged, as all participants revealed that all participants had experienced some form of abuse. The participants voiced that they had also been subjected to sexual abuse. In terms of the sexual abuse experienced by participants, these findings validate Uromi's (2014) study regarding sexual aggression in terms of rape being a human rights violation, yet many women living with albinism (WWA) living in Africa are raped and violated because of albinism being viewed as a cure for HIV and AIDS. This was also evident in comments made by two participants during the semi-structured interviews. One participant stated that:

> 'I was repeatedly battered, psychologically tortured and raped.' (Participant 14, male, English)

Although three female participants reported they had experienced sexual abuse, none volunteered whether they knew if the sexual violations were HIV-related as reported in several studies that having sex with a WWA is considered a cure for the disease:

> 'I have been emotionally and physically abused, as well as subjected to discrimination.' (Participant 10, female, IsiZulu)

☐ Sub-theme 3: Fear

The sub-theme that also emerged indicated that most PWA are fearful because of maltreatment imposed on their lives. Ojedokun (2018) also specified that PWA are no longer able to live regular lives because of the continual dread of being assaulted, humiliated, trafficked or murdered. Because of the fact of communal mistreatment, they alleged to have had a series of ritualistic murders that compelled those with albinism to seek police protection and sanctuary in locations deemed safe. In substantiation, the following views were expressed:

> 'I am scared of walking in public with pride, scared of walking in the streets freely.' (Participant 2, female, IsiZulu)

Another participant also expressed that:

> 'The abuse that I have experienced and witnessed has badly affected my life. My rights of movement and freedom have been affected. I am always at risk. I can't enjoy my life to the fullest because I am now fearful.' (Participant 16, male, English)

Similarly, scholars such as Mswela (2017) have discovered that persons with albinism live in terror of being hunted and killed for their body parts, a worry that is shared by many other researchers. The UN (2018) also stated that 'attacks, threats, killings, abductions, possession of body parts, and exhumation of graves of people with albinism' have caused trauma to family members who have witnessed their relatives' dismembered bodies in some communities in Africa. The literature findings suggest that people with albinism and their family members live in terror for their lives. They fear for their life as a result of the notion that they lack rights that protect them from assault and murder (Mswela 2017).

Theme 2: Causes of abuse and brutal killings of people living with albinism

The second theme that has emerged revealed several themes and sub-themes that relate to the abuse of brutal killings of PWA in KZN. The participants in this study were required to mention the factors that contribute to the maltreatment and murder of people who have albinism as a result of their race or ethnicity. This topic sparked a great deal of debate among the participants, who reacted with a variety of different justifications for their positions. This section of the study has identified a number of sub-themes that are related to the contributory elements that lead to the abuse and cruel killing of people with disabilities. They are discussed in the following ways.

Sub-theme 1: Lack of awareness and inadequate knowledge of albinism and people living with albinism

The study found that the public lacks awareness and has inadequate knowledge about PWA, and as a result, they abuse and abduct them. The UN (2022) also affirmed that public education and awareness are lacking, and it remains central to changing their negative minds regarding the abuse and attack towards PWA. This became evident as some participants lamented that:

> 'People lack awareness about albinism.' (Participant 20, female, IsiZulu)

Another participant raised the complaint that:

> 'People don't understand the condition. As a result, they tend to create their own explanation as to what albinism is and how people who have the condition should be treated. Some others think that once we come closer to them, they will get infected by the disease.' (Participant 26, male, IsiZulu)

Sub-theme 2: Fear

The outcomes of the study revealed that when the general population sees a person with albinism, they tend to look down on them because they do not have a thorough understanding of albinism and PWA. Because they regarded PWAs as social outcasts who constituted a threat to society, they opted to torture, traffic or murder them in their quest to shed light on the mystery surrounding them. These findings concurred with ecological systems theory, where Kirst-Ashman (2010, p. 12) stated that it is of utmost imperative for an individual to have a sound understanding of the 'person-in-the environment'. Ero et al. (2021) have similar feelings, stating that PWAs are considered 'deficient, pitiable, wicked or malicious, dangerous or worthless' regardless of their cultural background. Ero et al. (2021) further mentioned that the public believes that people with albinism are outcasts in society. One member made the following statement to emphasise the preceding argument:

> 'They are afraid of us, thinking that they will be contaminated with our disease.' (Participant 3, female, IsiZulu)

Another participant expressed that:

> 'The public think that we are just outcast and not human beings as they are.' (Participant 21, female, IsiZulu)

Theme 3: Cultural beliefs and practices

The third theme that emerged revealed startling statements made by the general public, directed at PWA. These outcomes of the study are associated with cultural beliefs and practices. For instance, it has been revealed that the public believes that the use of a person with albinism's body parts forms a mixture (*muthi*) that has extraordinary qualities. Some of the participants argued as follows:

> 'I think is because of the myths and untrue beliefs that the body parts of PWA makes good concoctions (*muthi*).' (Participant 6, female, IsiZulu)

Another shocking remark was uttered by one participant:

> 'The public has strong cultural beliefs, myths and a lot of false stories about the special powers that our body parts hold, that it can even bring luck to them.' (Participant 25, male, IsiZulu)

In support of the study's findings, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2018) stated that around governmental elections, the number of PWA murders increases because some people believe that their bodies contain mystical, magical and supernatural powers that can positively sway elections or re-elections in favour of specific politicians. Furthermore, some people believe that albinism people's organs are sources of good fortune targeted at improving their lives and well-being (Mswela 2017).

☐ Sub-theme 2: Business opportunity, enrichment and luck

The study's findings also revealed disturbing public remarks, which emerged as a third theme, such as the claim that an albino person's body parts can make anyone wealthy. This suggests that albinism-related body parts can be used to lift people out of poverty and into prosperity. The study findings concurred with Franklin and Lund (2017), whose study found that in Africa, PWA – including women, children, men and the aged – are hunted for their body parts (hair, limbs and heads), as the sale of these body parts is a lucrative business, including the mining and fishing industries. This is because the mining and fishing sectors profit from the selling of body parts. Traditional witch doctors alleged to be using PWA body parts to produce charms and magical potions, killing them and harvesting their body parts, are part of a lucrative industry (Navy 2013; Pillay 2013). Based on Navy's (2013) and Pillay's (2013) findings, some participants argued that:

> 'It is the ideology that when you have killed a person living with albinism and sell his or her body organs, you become rich.' (Participant 11, female, IsiZulu)

Another participant lamented that:

> 'The corrupt public has a belief that our body parts have a magic of making a person who has been living in poverty to [*sic*] become wealthy because we attract riches.' (Participant 18, female, IsiZulu)

The use of albino people's body parts as charms is popular in places such as Tanzania and South Africa. According to Lund and Roberts (2018), there is a widespread notion that PWA body parts have magical qualities that can bring wealth. These charms, which include albino women's breasts and fingers and albino men's genitals and legs, as well as albino blood, are believed to bring fortune (NOAH 2021).

☐ Sub-theme 3: Medicinal and healing

According to the participants, women and young girls are raped by the public, particularly men, who believe that having sexual relations with someone who has albinism can cure illnesses.

According to a participant, one can hear people claim:

> 'You know what, if you rape an albino woman, you will be healed of HIV/AIDS.' (Participant 8, female, IsiZulu)

Another participant stated, 'The public believes that if HIV-positive males sleep with and have sexual relations with women who have albinism, HIV/AIDS will just vanish' (Participant 12, male, IsiZulu).

In research conducted in some African countries, sexual relations with WWA are believed to be useful in healing HIV and AIDS (Uromi 2014).

Theme 4: Negative impact of abuse

The negative impacts of abuse experienced by PWA, including various aspects such as being fearful and feeling unsafe, are discussed in this section.

Sub-theme 1: Fearful and feeling unsafe

The study findings showed that PWA's lives have been affected negatively by being fearful and feeling unsafe in the communities where they reside. According to Ojedokun (2018), PWA are not able to live a normal life like other people because they are attacked, chastened, trafficked or murdered. In supporting the argument by Ojedokun (2018), some participants articulated that:

> 'I am afraid of everyone and that's a challenge because my brothers and sisters are being killed on a daily basis.' (Participant 4, female, IsiZulu)

Another shocking remark by one participant who said:

> 'I am affected negatively; I am no longer like a normal human being. It is like I am an animal that people harvest to feed themselves.' (Participant 13, male, IsiZulu)

One participant argued that:

> 'I do not trust even my parents because people make a lot of money through us.' (Participant 4, female, IsiZulu)

Sub-theme 2: Diminishing self-esteem

The findings of the study revealed that PWA sometimes feel as though their self-esteem is eroding because of the abuse they receive from the general public. The following is what one participant said:

> 'It has had a detrimental impact on me since I am constantly afraid and have lost my self-confidence.' (Participant 10, female, IsiZulu)

According to a Human Rights Watch interview (2017), PWA are perpetually depressed and have low self-esteem as a result of the harassment they receive from the general public.

☐ Sub-theme 3: Relationships

The findings revealed that some women living with albinism prefer to be without a partner rather than be in a relationship. According to Under the Same Sun (UTSS) (2018), people with albinism have disconnected themselves from anything that societies do and they feel unsafe among members of the communities where they live. It became evident as two participants stated that:

> '[...] I am not involved in a relationship.' (Participant 15, male, IsiZulu)

> 'I will never get married and even be involved in any relationship.' (Participant 22, female, IsiZulu)

The study findings corroborated those of Benyah (2017), who observed that many WWA prefer to live alone owing to self – and public stigma, and many feel compelled to live alone or in seclusion.

☐ Sub-theme 4: Psychosocial

The findings of the study settle that PWA might occasionally suffer emotional and psychological consequences as a result of the abuse that the general public heaps upon them. This was demonstrated by one participant who stated:

> 'I am affected emotionally and psychologically because of the abuse that [*sic*] public impose on us.' (Participant 17, male, IsiZulu)

Nkrumah (2021) also revealed that external social forces have an emotional and psychological impact on those with albinism. The United Nations (2022) noted in another study that PWA are emotionally impacted throughout their lives as a result of the difficulties and disappointments they face.

☐ Sub-theme 5: Recluse and anti-social behaviour

The findings confirmed that PWA avoid social interactions and even go outside freely because of their perceived risk from the public. The UN (2018) expressed a similar sentiment, arguing that attacks, threats, killings, abductions, possession of body parts and exhumation of graves of PWA have caused trauma to family members who have witnessed their relatives'

dismembered bodies in some African communities. Among the grievances raised by participants are the following:

> 'I prefer to live a life of indoors and I no-longer go to town or even to a shop because maybe I am already sold.' (Participant 20, female, IsiZulu)

One participant made shocking remarks that:

> 'I am badly affected by the notion we are the sacrifice of other human beings. My rights of movement and freedom have been affected, I am always at risk, I can't enjoy my life to the fullest.' (Participant 25, male, IsiZulu)

A similar study by Mswela (2017) also discovered that persons with albinism are living a fearful life as a result of maltreatment imposed on their lives. According to Ojedokun (2018), PWA are no longer able to live regular lives because of the continual dread of being assaulted, humiliated, trafficked or murdered.

Conclusion

The study established that PWA are abused and brutally murdered by the public. One of the key exploitations is that people with albinism are discriminated against because of their skin colour and are labelled with different names like monkey or *umlungu*, just to mention a few. The types of abuse experienced range from emotional, physical and sexual to a fear of actually being killed or mutilated. Therefore, the study findings confirmed several factors contributing to the abuse and brutal killings of PWA. These factors are not limited to lack of awareness, cultural beliefs and practices, as well as inadequate knowledge of people with albinism. It was revealed that the body parts of people with albinism are believed to be useful solutions in healing and bringing fortune to one's life. Several recommendations were made, which are not limited to a need for government and civil society to be fully involved in raising awareness of the abuse of people with albinism. There is an urgent need for the social work profession to take a bold step and intervene appropriately in the plight of PWA, who are often traumatised by the abuse and brutal killings. In addition, the community members who are living in the midst of PWA should be conscientious that PWA are people just like everyone and should not be abused but protected. Consequently, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2015) is very clear on this issue and declares that when men have sexual contact with women who have albinism, the HIV and AIDS virus is not healed. Therefore, the use of PWA sexual relations and body parts for rituals and healing of HIV and AIDS should earnestly be condemned.

SECTION B

Social work education and vulnerability

Chapter 7

Reflecting on transforming social work education from its colonial past

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Abstract

For social work to be relevant and effective as a discipline and professional practice it is important to have an understanding of local socio-cultural dynamics. The field emerged as a response to social problems that arose during the Industrial Revolution in the Global North (Europe and North America) in the 1880s and has since expanded worldwide. In order to remove any remnants of colonialism from the discipline, Mogorosi and Thabede (2018) argue that it is necessary to indigenise and adopt culture-sensitive approaches. Successful decolonisation requires an understanding of the national identity of a collective group of people. To assist with understanding what people consider essential to their collective identity (i.e. their 'world views' and 'national DNA'), this chapter examines the preambles of selected national constitutions (South Africa, Seychelles, India, and Germany) as examples. In the South African context, addressing

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historical injustices and promoting national reconciliation are central to its preamble (thus, social work should prioritise these efforts). In support of these endeavours, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) and the national Department of Social Development (DSD) promote decolonisation and indigenisation through curriculum transformation and practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for social work to strive for contextualisation and cultural appropriateness.

Introduction

This chapter argues for further decolonisation and indigenisation of social work to be relevant to local conditions. As exemplified by reasons of its own birth, further decolonisation and indigenisation will help address personal and socio-economic challenges in a given environment.

Social work emerged in the Global North (i.e. Western Europe and North America) in the 1880s as a response to the challenges brought about by the Industrial Revolution, such as diminishing means of self and family support, unemployment, poverty and the growing need for child welfare (Midgley 1990; Osei-Hwedie 2019; Schenck 2019). These roots of the Global North have inevitably influenced how professional practice approaches are adopted and used in other world regions. Currently, the International Federation of Social Workers and International Federation of Schools of Social Work (IFSW) (2014) define social work practice as being underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges. The definition goes on to state that social work engages with people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being. The IFSW (2014) definition emphasises that principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

Decolonisation and indigenisation

In examining the impact of colonisation, Mhlauli, Salani and Mokotedi (2015, p. 204) illustrate through the case of South Africa how apartheid and racism stem from the expansion of European colonialism during the 19th century. This colonial dominance in Africa led to land dispossession, community displacement, racism and the derogation of local cultural practices. Addressing the psycho-socio-economic ramifications of colonialism necessitates a concerted effort towards deepening decolonisation and indigenisation across all spheres (Mabvurira & Makhubele 2018; Mogorosi & Thabede 2018; Noyoo 2019; Sekudu 2019).

To foster transformation within the realms of social work and social development, Makhubele, Mogorosi and Mabasa (2018, p. 6) advocate for a holistic approach that integrates African values and knowledge with Western knowledge. This holistic approach is crucial for advancing the intertwined processes of decolonisation and indigenisation, both vital aspects of social transformation and change. Firstly, decolonisation seeks to undo imperialism's subjugation and denigration of indigenous knowledges (IKs) and cultures, as well as calls for an examination of repressive hegemonic narratives that are rooted in colonial practices and incorporates the voice and narratives of those oppressed peoples in conversations that ultimately affect the restoration or creation of new direction (Rowe, Baldry & Earles 2015). Secondly, Yang (2005, p. 68) explains that indigenisation is about integrating 'one's reflections on the local culture and/or society and/or history into her/his approaches'. Bar-On (2015) adds that indigenisation calls for the incorporation of IK (i.e. beliefs and practices which are independently developed and mostly oral in nature). To demonstrate its benefit to society, IK contributes towards redressing historical injustices and helps with democratisation, enriches global knowledge and importantly contributes towards people's psychological health (Bar-On 2015).

For their combined objectives, Crampton (2015) asserts that the collective process of decolonisation and indigenisation includes three aspects, namely, identifying destructive beliefs and practices, reclaiming indigenous beliefs and practices, as well as learning from successful efforts elsewhere.

For social work to transform anywhere, it must acknowledge being heavily influenced by its colonial past. Social workers are likely to function in environments that could be linked with the interest of 'the state' and the ruling elite. Tamburro (2013) added that social work 'occupied' a privileged and influential social status, as it historically represented the interests of the state in terms of the dynamics of plans and approaches to address social problems. Schenck (2019) highlights the European or Victorian so-called 'upper-class origins', masquerading as philanthropic endeavours yet rooted in prejudiced judgements of the less fortunate by those in power. A situation unfolded in South Africa, where Dr HF Verwoerd, a strong proponent of apartheid and prime minister during the 1950s and 1960s, played a pivotal role in the establishment of social work, as well as its being embedded within state institutions (Miller 1993; Mogorosi & Thabede 2018). Institutions such as the ASASWEI, DSD and South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) have, however, led efforts to transform social work to help restore the profession at the centre of social development space in the country.

The DSD, SACSSP and ASASWEI social work transformation initiative

Spearheading a national initiative to renew the profession, DSD and SACSSP co-hosted a National Social Work Indaba in Durban (2015) focusing on the role of the profession for its responsiveness to local needs (theme: '*Revitalising Social Work Practice in South Africa*'). The conference urged the DSD and SACSSP to ensure the utilisation of all social work methods and to assist in the development of a body of knowledge on Afrocentric and culturally sensitive approaches. These resolutions emanated from deliberations on the necessity to ensure relevance to professional methods and approaches to obtaining social conditions. Most clientele come from a largely black African population, have rural home connections and are proudly and deeply rooted in their own cultural practices (including the use of traditional healing and medicines, being immersed in spirituality, *botho* or *ubuntu* and group solidarity). At the same time, these communities are emerging from the lingering effects of apartheid, including human rights abuses, psychosocial and economic hardships, and deeply ingrained social inequalities ('First Social Work Indaba 2015').

Much progress has been made to transform social work education. For example, the CHE's (2015) 'Qualification Standard for Bachelor of Social Work' requires that all accredited Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW) programmes in South Africa should include – as one of nine applied competencies and core areas – '*working with a range of diversities*'. These BSW Qualification Standards also require that such programmes should also have, as part of their '*core Social Work knowledge*', to include:

- history of social work and social service delivery in South Africa
- the influence of colonialism and apartheid on welfare service delivery
- national transition from apartheid to democracy
- social dynamics (including demographics, socio-economic development status and cultural diversities).

To further help transform social work, ASASWEI recently contributed through efforts such as conferences, research and publications. Three examples of these stand out, namely (Osei-Hwedie 2019):

- co-hosting a biannual national conference (with DSD and SACSSP), using *decoloniality* as one of the themes (2017)
- publication of a decoloniality-themed journal edition in partnership with *Southern Africa of Social Work and Social Development* (2018)
- publication of a book, *Theories for Decolonial Social Work Practice in South Africa* (Van Breda & Sekudu 2019).

World view and national DNA

For a contextual understanding of people, often a focus would be on their 'ways of life' (beliefs and practices), which may include spoken languages, occupied geographic spaces, choices of food, clothing, music, as well as religious practices. This chapter, however, argues that an examination of preambles of national constitutions can also contribute in the exercise to understand both the 'world view' and 'national DNA' of a people.

Literature indicates that 'world view' as a concept was initially used by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his work, 'Critique of Judgement' (1790) (Conradie 2014; Vidal 2008). Vidal (2008, p. 3) also adds that 'philosophy' and 'worldview' are closely intertwined and that it 'is often used to emphasise a personal and historical point of view'. Rowe et al. (2015, p. 298) added that 'worldviews in critical social work, such as the centrality of relationships to land, the place of obligations, and the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and spirit'. Thus, here, the adopted use of the concept is that worldview is about interpretations of life, beliefs and practices, as to how these unfold in various places.

For contextual understanding of generic 'African worldview', the continent constitutes 54 multi-culturally diverse countries. Notwithstanding such diversities, Africans generally share an essential cultural outlook on life. Relevant to social work education and practice, for example, Africans tend to be less individualistic in their outlook, believe that personal and family problems need to be resolved within families, as well as have spirituality and *botho* or *ubuntu* as central in their cultures (Asante 1980; Dykes et al. 2019; Graham 2013; Sekudu 2019; Thabede 2005). For example, Dykes et al. (2019) explain spirituality in the African cultural context as it is:

> [*A*]ssociated with communicating with spiritual beings, the Divine and with one's ancestors. The ancestors, who are deceased persons in one's linage, are regarded as a source of support and strength in times of despair and stress, providing comfort and solutions to life's problems, and even healing of illness and disease. (p. 224)

In the African context, *botho* or *ubuntu* is a philosophy and practice of human and group solidarity, anchored by compassion, respect and giving support. It embodies positive, good-spirited and intertwined oneness of being, as well as the belief that extended family or community fates are commonly tied together. Manda (2009) affirms that *botho* or *ubuntu* encourages social cohesion and positive human interaction. Sekudu (2019) adds that, prior to colonisation, Africans used the practices of *botho* or *ubuntu*, largely to reinforce sharing within communities, to assist those who were less fortunate.

Table 7.1 offers examples of the generic cultural outlook and practices of African people.

Focusing on 'national DNA', the argument here is that preambles of national constitutions can contribute towards the understanding of the 'world view' of a collective people. For such an exercise, factors including its natural environment, social history, peoples and their cultural practices can be reflected upon. In the bio-medical sciences, examination of DNA (i.e. deoxyribonucleic acid) is used to understand all manner of materials. Travers and Muskhelishvili (2015) and Dong et al. (2020) described DNA as a versatile and smallest molecular compound that forms elementary building blocks of functional materials that are hereditary and predominant genetics in the living world, including for humans and almost all other organisms. To assess the essence of societies on their self-identities, stances and choices within the international community, use is made here of preambles of national constitutions – representing their 'national DNA'. Consequently, the exercise can help answer a question of 'national being': 'How do a given people see things?'

A simplified content analysis method was utilised to identify elements of interest in the preambles from the four national constitutions here. Content analysis is a quantitative research technique that assists with gathering and examining patterns of symbolic meaning that are found within text, audio, visual and other various mediums. The process typically involves the objective and systematic identification and counting of text elements to provide a quantitative description of the texts of interest (Neuman 2013, 2017). Elements of interest here were references in preambles of national constitutions, focusing on collective negative national historical experiences and future national aspirations to do 'good'.

Preambles of most national constitutions tend to give clues to the past, highlight commitment to a set of values and principles, and capture national aspirations. For illustration, four preambles of constitutions (see Table 7.2) were presented during the online conference discussions (i.e. ASASWEI

TABLE 7.1: African-centred worldview.

Elements, principles and values: Generic African-centred worldview	
Oneness in life and nature	The interconnectedness of all things in life and nature (people, animals and inanimate objects)
Unity of mind, body and spirit	Oneness of mind, body and spirit asserts that there is no division seen between mind, body and spirit
Spirituality	The essence of human beings is that they are spiritual in nature
Solidarity and collective identity	The value of interpersonal relationships and the collective nature of human beings entailing collective identity and responsibility superseding individual differences
Botho* or *ubuntu	The individual cannot be understood separate from others (*'I am because we are, and because we are, therefore, I am'*)

Source: Asante (1980); Thabede (2005); Graham (2013); Dykes et al. (2019) and Sekudu (2019).

TABLE 7.2: National DNA and the preambles of constitutions of South Africa, Seychelles, Germany and India.

Country	Preamble	Preamble points
South Africa (Africa)	Preamble of National Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)	• We, the people of South Africa • *Recognize the injustices of our past* • *Honor those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land* • Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country • Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity • We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to: ❍ *Heal the divisions of the past* ❍ *Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society* ❍ *Improve the quality of life of all citizens* ❍ Build a united and democratic South Africa
Seychelles (Africa)	Preamble of Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles 1993 (as amended to 2018)	• We, the People of Seychelles, Grateful to Almighty God that we inhabit one of the most beautiful countries in the world • *ever mindful of the uniqueness and fragility of Seychelles* • *conscious of our colonial history before becoming an independent republic*
Germany (Europe)	Preamble of National Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany (1990)	• Conscious of their responsibility before God and men • *animated by the purpose to serve world peace as an equal part in a unified Europe* • the German People have adopted, by virtue of their constituent power, this Constitution
India (Asia)	Preamble of National Constitution of India (1949)	*We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic* and to secure to all its citizens: • Justice, social, economic and political • Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship • Equality of status and of opportunity • And to promote among them all • Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation

Source: RSA (1996), Federal Republic of Germany (1949), Republic of Seychelles (1993) and *National Constitution of India* (1949).

and partners conference 2021). The home country of the author here (i.e. South Africa) has had both destructive colonial and apartheid historical backgrounds, both of which have had far-reaching effects on the current socio-cultural and economic well-being of society in general. The selection of the other three nations was also based on their histories. These included

Germany (the largest European economy) with its Nazi and 1990 re-unification background, while both India (Asian, and in terms of population size, the world's largest democracy) and Seychelles (an eastern African island state) having been colonised by Europeans and later engaged in democratising efforts. In all preambles here, issues of interest are highlighted through bolding (namely, specified histories, values and principles).

Table 7.2 shows that the preambles of national constitutions of South Africa, India and Seychelles refer to aspirations to address the unjust colonial past. Alternatively, with experiences of having been a colonial master, going through national division, as well as its Nazism practices, current Germany's constitutional preamble obviously refers to desires to contribute towards peace and unity. All these highlighted factors would factor in various ways for each state as they go about engaging in all national endeavours to become better (Homan 2004; Marshall & Marshall 2007). In the South African context, since the 1990s democratisation, discourse has been about righting colonial and apartheid past, restoring the dignity of a people and national reconciliation. These national aspirations should influence how most nations go about their collective societal endeavours.

Similarities of social work education for practice?

Social work is a practice-oriented profession, which is grounded in its basic values of self-determination and empowerment and the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all. It is also central in its practices and approach to the improvement of social functioning and interaction with the environment for individuals, groups and communities. Because it is practice-oriented, it is logical that it should, therefore, have in its preparatory education be informed by and anchored in the cultural environment, situation and practices of targeted communities (Crampton 2015; Cree 2013; Graham 2013; Rowe et al. 2015; Thabede 2005).

An African expression says that '*tsela e botswa ho ba ka pele*' (Sesotho and Setswana) or '*indlela ibuzwa kwa ba phambili*' (IsiZulu) ['learning from those with experience']. For its success, social work in Africa needs to incorporate lessons from elsewhere. Various authors have cautioned against wholesale adoption of external approaches – and in this case – Global North practices (Askeland & Payne 2006; Biko 1978; Mabvurira & Makhubele 2018; Prah 2017; Tamburro 2013; Thabede 2005). Firstly, Biko (1978) says that such practices tend to make Africans perpetual students whose progress should only rely on guidance from external experts. Secondly, Askeland and Payne (2006) argue against ideas from Global

North cloaked as 'universal knowledge', as such conflict with the need to accommodate different understandings of the world, concluding that any education system should try to integrate cultural diversity ('cultural diversity is needed just as much as biodiversity', Askeland and Payne (2006, p. 735)). Thirdly, urging for the need to ensure relevance to indigenous communities within the North American environment, Tamburro (2013) believes that social work students are required to be:

> [*P*]rovided the knowledge, skills and values that will support and enhance their ability to work in partnership with indigenous peoples. Viewing curriculum from a post-colonial lens can aid in this endeavour. (p. 1)

Finally, Mabvurira and Makhubele (2018) cautioned African researchers that adopting Eurocentric methodologies and practices contributed to a condescending belief that external cultures are superior to local methodologies.

Conclusion

The 2015 DSD Social Work Indaba reminded everyone about whom they largely served, mostly the black African population. One Indaba resolution implored DSD and SACSSP to champion efforts to generate a body of knowledge on Afrocentric and culturally sensitive approaches to social work education. That resolution resonated with an earlier call of Thabede (2005) for practitioners to 'use the model or conceptualization of human beings of that society. For that reason, it is important for social workers to understand institutionalized cultural values' (Thabede 2005, p. 50).

Regarding 'national DNA', since the democratic dispensation (1994), national discourse in South Africa has focussed on redressing colonial and apartheid past, justice work related to restoring the dignity of a people and national reconciliation. Additionally, the 'Qualification Standard for Bachelor of Social Work' (2015) has been encouraging with the transformation of BSW education and training. It, therefore, is incumbent upon local social work education and practitioners' community to assist with the development of further theory and training suited to South Africa's own socio-cultural environment.

To further address these issues here, research endeavours by national stakeholders, such as ASASWEI, DSD, CHE, SACSSP and Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), are therefore suggested to help with renewal for policy, programming and professional service relevance. For example, such efforts should focus on:

- *Quantitative profile studies* of social work clientele being served (on matters that they get social workers to assist them with, as well as prior help-seeking processes before professional consultation).

- *Two-track qualitative studies* on social work professional services. The first to focus on service recipients (assessment of the quality of service, also concentrate on what clients point out as service gaps in relation to addressing unique 'cultural-related needs' (e.g. spirituality)). The second qualitative study should concentrate on the assessment of both possible skill deficits and training needs related to service provision on cultural-related aspects.

To restate, it is crucial for decolonisation and indigenisation to reclaim indigenous beliefs and practices and learn from successful efforts elsewhere (Crampton 2015). Therefore, it is important to continue what works well and ensure that age-old local practices of living are encouraged and incorporated to enhance the effectiveness of the practice.

Chapter 8

What Paulo Freire would say about online education: A hypothetical view of online learning in social work practice

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Abstract

The global outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic resulted in most higher education institutions adopting online learning. Key in this regard is the exclusion of face-to-face learning. This chapter starts by providing a brief profile of Paulo Freire and further poses a hypothetical question on what Paulo Freire would say about online learning in social work practice. Both Arnett's conception of emerging adulthood and Mezirow's theory of transformative learning collectively provided a conceptual framework for analysing and discussing Freire's critical pedagogy in relation to the adoption of online learning in social work practice. A scoping review was used in sourcing and reviewing literature

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that related to Paulo Freire and the ideas and concepts related to critical pedagogy. The findings are presented using four thematic areas related to the core elements of critical pedagogy, namely the role of existential experience, student-centred dialogue, the role of critical reflection and the learning and teaching context. This chapter provides three main recommendations. Firstly, there is a need for higher education institutions to minimise the prevailing digital divide to consider the adoption of a more holistic and inclusive approach to support effective learning and teaching environments. Secondly, the chapter recommends the kind of education that embraces the process of teaching students that promotes critical consciousness and situational learning among students. Lastly, there is a need to promote a practice-led learning and teaching environment instead of a technology-led one. This chapter concludes with a view that there is no indication that Freire would reject online learning entirely, whether practised as an emergency remote online learning and teaching or as part of digital transformation. There is relatively sufficient literature to arrive at the conclusion that Paulo Freire would have raised some concerns about the adoption of online learning that lacks the centralising of students' sense of urgency and disregard of the students' lived experiences and context. There are also more chances that he would advance a learning and teaching strategy that followed a multifaceted and inclusive approach.

Introduction

In response to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, most higher education institutions started to offer online learning and teaching and excluded face-to-face learning. As a point of the premise, a disclaimer is made that, although this is a conceptual study based on a critical review, it does not fall short of the rigour underlying a qualitative inquiry. Motala and Menon (2020, p. 82) report that 'the pandemic has brought into sharp focus several questions that are not new but acquire a different dimension given the current circumstances', an indication that it is not unusual to raise issues of this nature in response to major social challenges. This chapter departs from a critical pedagogical position that challenges the prevailing narrative that presupposes the use of online learning as a desirable replacement for traditional learning. While the radical proponents of online learning advocate for the complete adoption of online learning in line with digital transformation as a 'new normal', some studies provide a moderate view, arguing that education in the future will land somewhere between Emergency Remote Teaching and fully developed online learning (Kingsley 2020; Munna & Shaikh 2020). A hypothetical question ('What Paulo Freire would say about online learning in social work practice?') was posed as a challenge to the gradually dominating hypothetical view of online learning

as the 'new normal'. Kaur and Bhatt (2020, p. 41) use the term 'faceless teacher' to refer to this kind of learning. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a distinction between pure online learning and 'emergency remote online learning and teaching' (EROLT), which most higher learning institutions purport to have adopted. It is worth indicating that significant in both forms of learning is the eminent exclusion of face-to-face, whether through temporary suspension or deliberate omission. Social work education, like education in general, is not a neutral phenomenon, and it does not exist in a vacuum. Illeris (2009) describes knowledgeability as a phenomenon that is subjected to a constant state of change based on the social, cultural and historical contexts and interaction among diverse people in multiple and heterogeneous ways. Van Schalkwyk (2020) concurs, remarking on the economic, technological, demographic, political and social challenges that have taken place in South Africa's public university system as a consequence of the sudden and global spread of COVID-19.

Conceptual framework

This chapter is underpinned by Arnett's emerging adulthood, and Mezirow's theory of transformative learning served as the conceptual framework. A conceptual framework is described as a map of theories and issues that gives meaning to the relationship between variables (Leshem & Trafford 2007). Using the two related perspectives was instrumental, considering that this chapter mainly focused on the learning environment where most children's transition to adulthood is manifested. The triangulation of these perspectives was, therefore, found relevant in relation to the developmental stages of learners and the conscientisation of transformative learning, respectively (Arnett 2000; Calleja 2014; Schnepfleitner & Ferreira 2021). The relevance of this triangulation is significant in the sense that the transition of young people from childhood to adulthood is unique, considering that it is shaped by a combination of factors, namely the individual's personal experiences, the context in which the person is transitioning and the social transformation. These two perspectives could be viewed as standing ideologically in relation to Freire's critical pedagogy in the classroom. Arnett (2013) describes emerging adulthood as a developmental stage extending from 18–25 years old, which is conceptualised as the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling-in-between and the age of possibilities. On the other hand, Mezirow (2018) describes this as the age of young adults who have acquired the frames of reference that define their life-world, which is a coherent body of experience including associations, concepts, values, feelings and conditioned responses.

Literature review

Freire's profile of humble beginnings and its relevance in the South African context

It is essential to indicate that this section does not purport to provide a biography of Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, popularly known as Paulo Freire. Before alluding to his work circumstances and scholarly contribution, it is essential to provide some insight into who Paulo Freire was as a person and how his life history relates or contrasts to the profile of students under consideration. Paulo Freire's profile depicts him as a person with humble beginnings (Peters & Besley 2015). In this regard, he could easily identify with the social, economic and political circumstances of the student population of focus in this chapter. Even though Paulo Freire passed away more than two decades ago, his ideas are still found relevant in this era, with his philosophical ideas serving as an idiolect of significance in critical pedagogical ecolect (Giroux 2010).

Paulo Freire was born in Recife on 19 September 1921 (Gerhardt 1993; Lucio-Villegas 2009) and died of heart failure on 02 May 1997. Although Recife is described as the fourth largest impoverished habitat in a coastal north-eastern capital city of Brazil, Freire was born into a middle-class family comprised of two parents and four children (Gerhardt 1993). His father, Joaquim Temístocles, served in the military, whereas his mother, Edeltrudes Neves, served as a practising catholic (Kirylo 2011). His home is described as having served as a context for engagement with nature (Freire 2020):

> I see myself then in the average Recife house where I was born, encircled by trees. Some of the trees were like persons to me, such was the intimacy between us [...] Animals were equally part of that context [...]. (p. 4)

The dialogue and the notion of praxis (the dialectical interweaving of theory and practice) cultivated his concept of conscientisation (Freire 2020). Freire's work life can be summarised into three different stages (Lucio-Villega 2009). The first period includes work undertaken in both public and private organisations in Brazil, where he contributed to advancing connections between culture and adult literacy. This provided him with exposure to literacy and adult education in a range of different contexts. Secondly, it is a period that covered his exile in various countries, namely Bolivia, Chile, United States of America (USA) and Geneva. This period became critical in the application of his philosophy and practice and the establishment of his international reputation. The last period involved his return to Brazil, where he worked as an educator at several universities and, apparently, served as Secretary of Education in his country of birth.

More than a decade ago, Giroux (2010) argued that educators needed to embrace Freire's conceptual understanding of empowerment and the democratic potential of education and that young people needed to develop and assert a sense of urgency in participation instead of being governed by prevailing ideological and material forces. Literature depicts knowledge as a dynamic entity and an empowerment tool for sustainable livelihood and socio-economic development (Adetiba 2019; Phatshwane & Faimau 2020). Based on his life and historical development, it is worth noting that Paulo Freire is significant in South Africa's education system, at least when it comes to dispossession. In general, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) continues to appeal as an argument for a system of education that emphasises learning as an act of culture and freedom (Peters & Besley 2015). Despite having developed himself and becoming a lawyer and an educator, Paulo Freire happened to be imprisoned twice in his country and was exiled at some stage (Gerhardt 1993). It is not surprising that in the educational landscape, in particular, Paulo Freire's global legacy is afforded similar stature as that of former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, motivated, elevated and shaped by similar political ideas of freedom, equality, emancipation and radicalism that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s (Peters & Besley 2015). The militarisation of the academic space and commodification of education have become inseparable aspects of South Africa's learning context. The manifestation of the militant nature of academia intensified as a result of the emergence of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protest actions that took place in South Africa's higher education in 2015. Mbembe (2016) describes students as having become what he refers to as the 'consumer of vendible educational commodities'. Furthermore, Nathane and Harms Smith (2017) describe academia as descended into a battleground and a space of collective trauma and pain instead of hope and liberation through learning.

Historic, structural and social inequalities in the educational context

Literature describes the context as essential in influencing the perspective and judgement of the relativistic thinker and asserts that Freire was critical of how teaching is conducted (Boyd 2016; Cournoyer 2011). Despite some changes that have taken place through the advent of democracy, South Africans are reported to have endured decades of minority rule and oppression at the hands of both the colonial and apartheid states (Thomas 2009). It is worth noting that the South African context is still characterised by deep-seated historical and structural inequalities, including unequal spending, unequal access, unequal opportunity and outcomes, distorted notions of quality and so forth (Badat & Sayed 2014).

Six years later, Badat (2020) cautions against the use of the COVID-19 pandemic to initiate and institutionalise reorganisation, restructuring and changes that are desired by proponents of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) without open debate about their desirability. This is supported by growing literature that depicts how COVID-19 has impacted the demographic and historical socio-economic disparities of student social workers (Nkomo 2020; Tanga, Ndhlovu & Tanga 2020). 'Freirean theoretical tools provide a compelling framework for understanding the lack of progress towards a more free and egalitarian South African society in the post-apartheid era' (Thomas 2009, p. 258).

As depicted in the introductory section, the unprecedented technological change is mainly engendered by digital transformation. Hoosain, Paul and Ramakrishna (2020) propound the use of technologies as long as they contribute to the achievement of societal goals. Rafferty and Steyaert (2008) argue that technology is not always functional as it often poses challenges and dangers to the social work education practice context. Motala and Menon (2020) assert that social inequality and the digital divide are likely to impact the learning and teaching context because of challenges related to social capital, poor living conditions, high data costs, limited bandwidth and psychosocial factors that adversely affect students from lower socio-economic groups. In this regard, the educational achievements made thus far are likely to regress. Despite the identified challenges, there is no clear basis or justification for the rejection of online learning.

Banking education

The term 'banking education' is used to describe and critique traditional methods of education, with knowledge depicted as transmitted from the teacher to a passive student using a pre-determined curriculum (Boyd 2016; Saleh 2013). Freire (2005) used the phrase banking system to describe the kind of education that describes knowledge as a kind of gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable compared to those whom they consider to possess less knowledge. This system regards the teacher as the depositor over students as passive depositories. While online learning is reported to have been occurring for some time, it was in 2019 as a response to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the related lockdown protocols that this mode of learning was reinforced by most higher education institutions. A study by Bozkurt and Sharma (2022) found the COVID-19 pandemic to have been a catalyst for digital transformation. Limited interaction could be viewed as impacting the relationship-based practice and as being integral to social work education and practice.

Online learning and social work practice

It suffices to note that the majority of student social workers fall within the age group of 18–25 years old. Arnett (2000) regards emerging adulthood as a relatively new life stage for those in the age bracket of 18–25 years old, who are in a stage distinguished by relative independence from social roles and normative expectations. Ziehe (2009) regards this generation as preference-related and therefore not growing in a norm-regulated manner compared to other generations. Lombard (2015) argues that the quality of social work education is influenced by the minimum standards applicable in classrooms and field placements. Almost 25 years ago, Mahon (1996, p. 11) made an assertion that in rendering their service, social workers are required to understand the persons in their environment and the interaction between them. Student social workers' experiences in field practice as a learning context could be viewed as exposed to the approximation of the day-to-day realities of the persons.

As indicated in the introductory section, the question this article sought to address is what Paulo Freire would say about online learning in social work practice. It was based on the presumption that the adoption of online learning that disregards the social factors influencing the educational landscape and that does not centralise the learner may have posed a concern for Paulo Freire. This critical pedagogical contribution reflects on the relevance and application of Paulo Freire's philosophical ideas in analysing online learning in social work practice. Key in critical pedagogy is its emphasis on the role of educators and students as active collaborative learners in the learning environment (Freire 2005). In this regard, Freire's idiolect provides a unique contribution to the ecolect of critical pedagogy (Freire 1993). In relation to this view, Bozkurt and Sharma (2022) identify various aspects that may lead to the risk of writing failure stories rather than success stories, namely ignoring the social aspects, not positioning humans at the centre of digital transformation and failing to understand the philosophy, vision and mission that lies behind it.

Methodology

This chapter followed a conceptual approach based on the use of a scoping review in mapping existing literature. Jaakkola (2020) recognises that the common goal shared by empirical and conceptual studies is that both are expected to create new knowledge by building on carefully selected sources of information combined according to a set of norms. The main distinction is that the research designs in conceptual studies are not derived from data acquired in the traditional sense but involve the assimilation and combination of evidence in the form of previously developed concepts

and theories (Jaakkola 2020). Armstrong et al. (2011) describe scoping reviews as a literature mapping process. While they may be similar to systematic reviews, the two slightly differ in several ways. In this study, existing literature was sourced from online databases such as Scopus, CiteSeerX, ScienceDirect and Wiley Online Library, with the main focus on electronic books and articles that covered texts and research reports that alluded to and advanced Freirian ideas and concepts related to critical pedagogy, namely conscientisation, dialogue, praxis, banking system and situated learning. In this regard, accessible literature by Freire and other proponent authors who reflected on his learning and teaching scholarly contribution was sourced. It suffices to indicate that the process followed in this search was not without its limitations, considering that this chapter was based on a hypothetical question. However, relative endeavour was made to avoid bias in this process. The rationale for focusing on the work of Paulo Freire was his critical pedagogical idiolect, which continues to influence the ecolect of critical pedagogy even in contemporary society (Freire 1993).

The three identified aspects that provide justification for this reflection, in one way or another, relate to the value of critical pedagogy. Firstly, it is the notion of the dimensionality of time, depicting the human beings' reflection capacity, that enables them to reach back to yesterday, recognise today and come upon tomorrow (Freire 2005). Secondly, it is the acknowledgement of social inequality that 'justifies the pedagogy proposed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*' (Kohan 2018, p. 3). Thirdly, it is about critical thinking, which is also central to Freire's contribution, described as 'the propensity and skill to use reflective scepticism when engaged in some specific activity' (McPeck 1990 cited in Cournoyer 2011, p. 52).

Findings

The findings in this chapter are therefore constructed and summarised around the four core elements of transformative learning (Mezirow 2018), namely the role of existential experience, the student-centred dialogue, the role of critical reflection and the learning and teaching context.

The role of existential experience

Literature confirmed that social work students and practitioners, just like other disciplines, if not more so, are grappling with the use of and encountering technology in unprecedented ways (Reamer 2019). Tynjälä (2008) asserts that, in order to be a true expert in working life one is expected to develop situation-specific forms of competence, as applicable mainly in authentic situations. The education system in this country is

regarded as not neutral, considering that it is influenced by the socio-economic circumstances. The hierarchical nature of voices during COVID-19 cannot be overemphasised. While in their study, Wilson et al. (2020) found students to be generally active collaborators in learning, the situation that prevailed during the COVID-19 pandemic was such that limited consultations were undertaken with students regarding their understanding and improvement of their lived experiences.

The role of existential experience may be evident in Freire's view that the educator needs to seek an understanding of reality from students' perspectives before they can be encouraged to resist and transform their reality. As Boyd (2016) asserts, the interpersonal nature of Freire's pedagogical ideas could be attributed to the significant time that he spent in a community acclimatising himself to the culture, linguistic patterns and people's living circumstances. Dykes and Green (2015) perceive transformative learning as achievable when we critically reflect on suppositions or conjectures that underlie our frames of reference. Outlining transformative learning, Rahman and Hoque (2017) emphasise that the learners become active participants in discourse and that they change in some way as the result of the learning, a presupposition acknowledging that knowledge is neither apolitical, ahistorical nor free from ideological basis.

Student-centred dialogue

Reconciling the poles of contradiction in the teacher-student role is an area worth noting. According to Ghavifekr (2020), 'collaborative learning results in participants working together by identifying advantages shared by all group members, through working together, learning from each other's knowledge and experience', and developing awareness that the group work outcomes come from each participants' contribution and performance. Shor (1993) described Freire's student-centred dialogue as participatory, situated, critical, democratic, dialogic, dissocialising, multicultural, research-oriented, activist and affective. Both the educator and the learner need to simultaneously serve the role of being a learner and the educator. Freire (cited in Shudak 2014) uses the term generative literacy to refer to students' understanding that they are an integral part of their lives, the problems they face and the questions they have. Students become critically conscious of the connection between their own lives and the larger society, and this empowers them to change their own environment. Paulo Freire would likely challenge any form of learning, including online learning, that falls short of strengthening this human element.

While dialogue may also take place in online learning through live learning and teaching, more often, it is regarded as centred on the teacher

as the main party who sets the learning agenda or the mode through which learning and teaching take place. The study by Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021), even though it was undertaken in the United Arab Emirates, managed to provide essential insight into how the learning space in online learning is left under the control of the instructors and institutions using a conventional learning management system (LMS) as opposed to learners. Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021) further assert that, despite the related advantages of online learning, the online learning environment tends to be characterised by a scarcity of a sense of community, with student-teacher interaction taking precedence over student-student engagement. Bozkurt and Sharma (2022) advanced a similar view and recommended that digital transformation practices need to be carried out in a human and learner-centred manner.

The role of critical reflection

The development of critical awareness remains key in education and teaching and learning, in particular. Any process that seeks to alienate the student in this pursuit tends to defeat the very fundamental endeavour. Pushing students to online learning while disregarding the related contextual aspects may be concerning. Freire would probably suggest the kind of pedagogy that seeks to meet the diversity of learners' needs and which does not create barriers for particular students or student groups. Brown and Rutter (2009) identify the context as playing a significant role in determining what will count as sensible or reasonable application of any standards and principles of critical thinking. Professional education is viewed as putting emphasis on the notion that knowledge is embedded in application and practice (Brown, Moore & Turney 2012; Eraut 2007).

The learning and teaching context

It may not be disputed that in a digital society, there seems to be an escalation of the use of technology as a mode of offering (Rafferty & Steyaert 2008). However, there is a need to consider the socio-economic circumstances as the context in which learning and teaching are taking place, at least in South Africa's higher learning institutions. It has already been identified that the adoption of online learning cannot be viewed as a neutral process and that it is not undertaken without its challenges. Sufficient evidence suggests that the transition to online learning appears to have been rolled out without due consideration of the related unintended consequences (Hlatshwayo 2021). For instance, Kaur and Bhatt (2020, p. 44) regard the inequity and inequality in accessing online education as likely to 'profoundly widen the digital divide among students'.

Speaking to the non-conductive nature of the learning context, Olaniran and Uleanya (2021) argue that going online is not easy in the continent where only 24% of the population has access to the Internet, and the rest is experiencing poor connectivity. Madhushree, Bhuvana and Aithal (2020) assert that the advent of COVID-19 and its related impact on student movement necessitates the need for educational institutions to find solutions for the effective implementation of quality educational services. In her study, Hlatshwayo (2021) asserts that some of the summary of the recommendations involved the need for the development of guidelines for digital social work training methods and tools; the provision of resources needed for blended learning and teaching; the provision of holistic support to student social workers which considers the impact of socio-economic realities on students' learning experiences and ensuring academic integrity in the online component of blended learning and teaching assessments. In relation to the latter, while online assessments and examinations have been found to decrease anxiety among student social workers, the risks of online assessments for academic integrity and quality assurance purposes have become a concern.

Discussion

From the outset, a disclaimer was made that this contribution involved a conceptual study conceptualised through a scoping literature review process. The predominant literature attributes the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdown protocols as contributing to an enhanced shift towards online learning (Roy & Uekusa 2020). In this regard, the transition to online learning and teaching in social work education and practice is viewed as devoid of proper debate and design. While there is ongoing empirical evidence depicting the plight of student social workers as they were pushed to online learning, this chapter mainly relied on Freire's ideas of critical pedagogy as the overriding basis. In practice, social work was identified to be among the most vulnerable professions associated with the implementation of total online learning, based on the view that professional activity is associated with direct communication and physical contact with other people (Gad 2022).

Considering the critical analysis followed and the subsequent method applied, it is apparent that this chapter did not fall short of the rigour underlying the qualitative inquiry. In Freire's view, the liberating education system enables students to develop ideas and realise the ability to be active subjects in their changing world (Saleh 2013). Compounding this view may be related to the existential crises that are manifested in the socio-economic circumstances prevailing in the country. Both social inequality and the digital divide are aspects worth noting. In the current context, online learning appears to be characterised not only by

philosophical limitations but by methodological shortcomings. In online learning, technology could be described as the corridor towards access to education, with limited access to technology likely to perpetuate the prevailing digital divide, posing a challenge to education in general. According to Boyd (2016), technological environments have the power to redefine the way human users understand themselves and their relationship to the world and operate at the level of meaning and ethics. In line with this view, online learning was viewed as likely to impact beyond the physical and material access to learning. It also impacts power imbalance and (in) justice in learning and teaching. This, in turn, is likely to result in dire consequences on the learning and teaching environment in general and the disempowerment of the dispossessed in particular. In tandem with this view, it is imperative for student social workers to be afforded a chance to assume an active role in the construction of their social work knowledge.

Recommendations

Before outlining the recommendations, it is worth noting the assertion by Brown and Rutter (2008, p. 17), which indicates that the process of applying new knowledge into practice from a critical-thinking perspective requires 'a framework to ensure certain activities are covered which provide the process with a necessary robustness and validity'. It is also worth noting that there is an enormous gap in current learning and teaching practices in relation to Freire's critical pedagogy, with its emphasis on strengthening emancipation.

In light of the findings in this chapter, three recommendations are presented.

Firstly, there is a need for higher education institutions to minimise the prevailing digital divide to consider the adoption of a more holistic and inclusive approach to support effective learning and teaching environments. An approach of this nature needs to be crafted through consultation with a variety of institutional stakeholders, including the student bodies, with the view of strengthening digital accessibility and closing the inequality among the users. Even the proponents of online learning attest to the existence of barriers to the implementation of e-learning (Munn et al. 2018).

Secondly, considering that education is viewed as a practice of freedom, the chapter recommends the kind of education that embraces the process of teaching students and promotes critical consciousness and situational learning among students. More than ten years ago, Anderson-Merger (2011) concluded that social work students needed to be prepared to practice in a technologically global context and think critically about what that kind of context involved.

Lastly, considering that social work is a practice-based profession, there is a need to promote a learning and teaching environment that is practice-led instead of a technology-led process. In contrast to technology-led approaches, Hill and Shaw (2011) describe practice-led approaches as those which start with social work practice, not with information communication technologies (ICTs) per se. Lester (1995 cited in Brown & Butter 2009, p. 19) argues that it is no longer 'adequate to base professional development on transmitting existing knowledge or developing a predefined range of competences'. Considering the relatively fine dividing line between social work education and practice, there needs to be a clear strategy for the introduction of ICT as a mode of support to social work education practice (practice-led approach).

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, it is worth mentioning that this chapter does not dispute the value of online learning but that it outlines two main aspects relating to the learning and teaching environment. Firstly, the chapter concludes with a view that there is no indication that Paulo Freire would entirely reject online learning in social work practice. However, there is relatively sufficient literature to arrive at the conclusion that some concerns would have been raised about the adoption of online learning that lacks the centralising of students' sense of urgency and disregard of their lived experiences and context. Secondly, there are more chances that he would propagate a social work learning and teaching strategy that follows a multifaceted and inclusive approach.

Chapter 9

Enablers and barriers for effective work-integrated learning implementation for social work students: 'The power of tripartite alliance'

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Abstract

This chapter describes the enablers and barriers to the effective execution of work-integrated learning (WIL), as well as the influence of a collaborative tripartite alliance. The alliance comprises the university, fieldwork agency and student social workers. For students to be fully immersed in the social work profession, they need to integrate theory with practice (academic and practical training), which is WIL. Therefore, collaborative efforts, observed through tripartite alliances, are duly accountable for WIL. Effective WIL advances student learning, preparing students for professional

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conduct and readiness for real work. Under-preparedness, unskilled and inexperienced students harm the professional practice. In addition, this could place the social work profession in disrepute because of the inappropriate management of social work services. This chapter is informed by a desk research approach, using secondary data relating to fieldwork practice from six published articles. The secondary data analysis was conducted following three processes: identification of research questions, identification of the data set and the evaluation of the data set. The findings are students' supervision, unpreparedness, screening, support, limited resources and well-designed learning guidelines. A solid collaboration of the tripartite alliance in executing the WIL programme is paramount.

Introduction

The chapter describes the enablers and barriers to the enactment of WIL and also explores how the tripartite alliance can influence its effective implementation. Schmidt and Rautenbach (2016) assert that for social workers to be globally recognised, the need for knowledge, skills and values is paramount, and that can be achieved through the integration of theory into practice. Globally, societies are faced with indescribable challenges and problems that need intensive social work interventions from well-experienced, skilled and knowledgeable social workers. South Africa, as well, is clouded with numerous challenges from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, gender-based violence, poverty, and unemployment, among others, which require skilful and knowledgeable social workers to transform society. However, based on several factors, the implementation of WIL is still inadequate. Undergraduate training provides theory; however, the integration of theory into practice is vital, as indicated by Uche et al. (2014).

Therefore, Du Plessis (2015, p. 1) affirms that 'WIL is considered to be an integral part of the students' curriculum'. However, some enablers and barriers influence the implementation of WIL. To address these enablers and barriers, collaborative efforts (tripartite alliance) are the cornerstone. Consequently, in this chapter, WIL is conceptualised, as well as the importance of the tripartite alliance, while the enablers and barriers to effective WIL implementation are discussed. The findings are shared, along with recommendations and a conclusion.

Conceptualising work-integrated learning

Various authors define WIL differently, depending on where it is applied. According to Uche et al. (2014), WIL is also referred to as field education. 'Field education is referred to as the laboratory or testing ground for

undergraduate and graduate social work education' (Uche et al. 2014, p. 1329). In this chapter, all terms are used interchangeably, as they are all focused on integrating learning and work. Rowe (2017, p. 3) indicates that 'There are a variety of these educational programmes, namely, internships, sandwich programmes, fieldwork and cooperative education, which are referred to, generically, as WIL'. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE 2015, p. 12) asserts that 'Field education is the signature pedagogy of social work education'. It further states that 'The intent of field education is to integrate the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting'. Lucas (2017) adds that field education encourages students into critical learning of self, careers and expertise through purposely designed reflective tasks. This implies that WIL complements teaching in a classroom with practice in the field; therefore, learning outcomes should be aligned with the practice activities. Fieldwork practice, when effectively implemented, reflects students' readiness to practice social work with the necessary skills and competencies. Brewer, Lewis and Ferns (2022, p. 17) concur and state that 'WIL is essential to prepare students for work readiness in a disrupted employment market that requires new and diverse graduate capabilities'. However, WIL differs from one discipline to the other, in terms of its nature, scope, context, purpose, objectives and outcomes (Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework [HEQSF] 2013, p. 11). Consequently, Uche et al. (2014, p. 1329) highlight that 'Medicine has an internship, education requires teaching practice, and social work has the practicum or fieldwork as the primary place where much of the role definition occurs'. However, they have a common goal.

Additionally, WIL implementation depends on the National Qualification Framework level it wants to achieve, the institutional capability and competencies, as well as the systems and structures in place to support the student's learning (Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework [HEQSF] 2013). Fullan and Scott (2014) contend that the advantage of educating students is not merely in the advanced skills but also in learning through collaboration and reflection, for them to be skilled when addressing dilemmas of the work life. Fullan and Scott (2014) further indicate that for people to be able to handle the problems of the 21st century, they need to develop cognitively and have better interpersonal relations. Social workers require skills to navigate the challenges of society, and WIL could assist them in acquiring those skills. Therefore, WIL is regarded as a signpost for the completion of an educational professional journey.

Tripartite alliance

The success of the WIL programme depends on strong and reliable partnerships between the institution and external resources, namely

agencies or organisations (Fleming, Mclachlan & Pretti 2018). In support, Hay (2020), as well as Aničić and Divjak (2022), indicate that, for WIL to be effective, it needs a strong relationship between the tertiary sector (university), organisations (agencies) and students. As highlighted by Fleming et al. (2018), this partnership ensures suitable conditions, which include proper infrastructure and resources to support learning. However, the partnership needs commitments in terms of well-articulated roles and responsibilities (Barends & Nel 2017); therefore, it demands a well-developed memorandum of agreement (MOA), which spells out the commitments of the three parties.

This three-legged pot requires support from each partner, as well as a mutual understanding of the roles and expectations, to ease the implementation of WIL. Ultimately, the parties in the tripartite alliance complement each other towards the fulfilment of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme. Hence, Stirling et al. (2016) affirm that there should be working together between the student, field supervisor, and university supervisor for the benefit of the student. International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2020, p. 14) indicate that one of the standards for fieldwork practicum is the 'Partnership between the educational institution, the agency (where applicable) and service users in decision-making regarding field education and the evaluation of students' fieldwork performance'.

Chivers, Hay and Tudor (2021) concur and articulate that:

> Both social work education and WIL share a long history of helping students connect with authentic work-related learning opportunities in the context of engagement and partnership with organisations outside of the educational institution, using onsite mentoring. (p. 433)

Chivers et al. (2021, p. 434) 'argue that social work field education is highly contextualized, pedagogically driven, and collaborative'. The university provides educational opportunities for the students, while the fieldwork agency provides the practice to improve the quality of the students' professional practice and learning.

Enabling factors for work-integrated learning execution

An enabler, in this context, refers to a means to achieve an objective. Several factors are highlighted as enablers of WIL implementation. Planning and preparations for the placement of students is the key, and all role-players should be mentally, physically and materially ready. The university should prepare the students academically, the students should absorb knowledge

and skills, and the agency should prepare the reception of the students. Preparations include the identification of suitable placement agencies that meet students' learning goals and objectives, with the necessary tools of trade, office space, furniture and a qualified supervisor (Engelbrecht 2019). Thorough planning and preparations should be conducted before the students' placement to ensure the effective implementation of WIL, avoiding disappointment and failure. Functioning in a conducive environment facilitates effective learning; therefore, the fieldwork placement should be the most memorable moment for students' learning.

Supervision is another enabler in WIL implementation. 'Fieldwork practice is dependent on efficient and effective agency supervision to bridge the classroom with the service setting and supervisors take a leading role in shaping future professionals' (Mokgadi & Maripe 2020, p. 29). Every work performance requires a supervisor with expertise, extensive knowledge and skills. For students to learn and develop successfully in the field of practice, they require an appropriate and effective supervisor (Du Plessis 2015). Supervision assists the students in actualising their understanding of social work practice, as well as identifying their learning needs. For students to learn effectively, the supervision process should track their growth and development through the administrative, educational and support functions (Engelbrecht 2019). Therefore, the tripartite alliance should be involved to ensure that this important enabler is not compromised.

Assessment of the student's performance is also an enabler, and consideration should be given to the assessment guidelines. Aligned assessment formats should be discussed with the students and fieldwork supervisors for mutual understanding. Cantalini-Williams et al. (2014) emphasise that the WIL programme expectations and assessments required should be articulated well by the student, the university, and the agency. The assessment should have timelines and show the progress, as well as the challenges experienced so that a student at risk could be identified and appropriate measures applied. Du Plessis (2015) asserts that students' performance needs to be monitored with positive feedback from the supervisors and that support should be provided if there is a need. Consequently, Engelbrecht (2019) affirms that assessment should be a continuous process (at the beginning, middle and end). This process will scaffold students' critical thinking in their work performance, as per developmental theory that advocates progression in student learning (Engelbrecht 2019). Most importantly, the assessment should be performance-based. Additionally, honesty and loyalty in assessments are key and assist in the growth and development of the student. Darling-Hammonda et al. (2020) assert that if students are assessed continuously and provided with constructive feedback, that will enhance their

competency and improvement in their work. Subsequently, Stirling et al. (2016, p. 44) submit that 'Student learning may be assessed through direct observation'. Additionally, the university should monitor, follow up and support the students by assessing their performance while in the field.

A supportive environment is yet another enabler. Bogo (2015) states that, for effective WIL implementation, the attitude of host organisations, as well as their collaborative relationships, are key. Bogo (2015) adds that the students should be provided with feedback, reflecting the work performance on their actual practice. Positive and constructive feedback is an anchor for WIL implementation, as it encourages students instead of demoralising them. The positive environment provides a positive and effective learning platform. Markos, Guoyuan and Abdulghani (2019, p. 86) indicate that in the study conducted 'The participants believed that the organization culture is central and has a paramount importance for accomplishing their daily routines'. Cantalini-Williams et al. (2014) reiterate that students should be continuously supported to accommodate their diverse needs. Mokgadi and Maripe (2020, p. 34) aver that 'A healthy relationship stimulates positive attitudes and confidence, trust, as well as openness, from both sides'. A supportive environment could be augmented by the courtesy visit of the university supervisor during placement to encourage and motivate the students. Du Plessis (2015) argues that agency visits are imperative, as they serve to monitor and support students on their explorative professional journey. A conducive learning environment, with relevant learning materials and resources, creates support for the students. Additionally, a conducive learning environment includes the attitude, approachability, availability and accessibility of the supervisor.

A comprehensive learning tool is also an enabler of WIL implementation. IFSW (2014) asserts that clear fieldwork manuals are necessary and should stipulate the expectations, such as the number of reports and the standards that should be met, for supervisors to be able to direct students learning. This will ease the assessment of the student's competencies and learning in the field of practice. Boston University (2021) asserts that the comprehensive fieldwork manual and learning contract should be drafted jointly by the fieldwork and university supervisors to dispel any misunderstandings about what is to be accomplished. This would encourage self-directedness and self-management. Therefore, Darling-Hammonda et al. (2020, p. 99) urge that there should be 'productive instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning'. Darling-Hammonda et al. (2020) further affirm that these strategies that promote scaffolding learning support students' understanding and propel them to engage in learning tasks. The success of WIL implementation stems from these key enablers; therefore, the collaborative tripartite

alliance is key to facilitating the processes. The supporting structure, such as the relevant policies, procedures, physical resources and well-trained fieldwork supervisors, could serve as enablers for WIL implementation (Henderson & Trede 2017).

The barriers to effective work-integrated learning implementation

As much as there are enablers for effective WIL implementation, there are barriers, as well. The barriers refer to the mechanisms that hinder individuals from achieving the objective. Work-integrated learning implementation barriers did not commence during the COVID-19 pandemic but were experienced long beforehand. Several barriers were identified, such as untrained supervisors, massification (huge number of student intakes), lack of resources, inability to integrate theory into practice and under-prepared students. The first barrier is inadequately trained supervisors. Ketner, Van Cleave and Cooper-Bolinskey (2018) assert that students view quality supervision as a contributing factor to effective WIL, as it transmutes their learning experience. Consequently, when students receive quality and effective supervision, they can learn under guidance. Quality supervision could be provided by supervisors who are trained, experienced and knowledgeable. Untrained supervisors compromise the quality of fieldwork practice. The identified deficiency is that no student supervision training exists in the undergraduate training, and similarly for the fieldwork agency supervisor. This causes a disjuncture when students are placed under their supervision in the field of practice. Du Plessis (2015, p. 81) emphasises that 'fieldwork supervisors need to be adequately trained with supervisory skills, intertwining academic work with practice'. In their problem statement, Mokgadi and Maripe (2020) state that:

> Supervisors who are responsible for the practical training of social work students are not sufficiently resourced to undertake their role adequately and yet they are expected to provide opportunities for students to develop their professional knowledge and skills. (p. 29)

Firstly, the untrained supervisors become frustrated when they must perform this function with the students.

Secondly, massification is also identified as a barrier to WIL implementation. The huge number of students admitted to social work classes creates an impact when the students are to be placed in the field of practice. Schmidt and Rautenbach (2016, p. 589) assert that 'One of the greatest challenges currently facing field instruction models in the Eastern Cape is the increase of student numbers in the BSW programme'. This challenge is not only experienced in one institution but in most universities

because of the policies and demands of the Department of Higher Education and Training, which 'puts pressure on social work departments at universities to accept more students while staff numbers may remain constant' (Schmidt & Rautenbach 2016, p. 589). This creates a challenge in terms of resources (physical, material, financial and human), and consequently, some agencies become overcrowded. Overcrowding impacts quality, the inability to cope with many students and resources to cover all the students. A huge number of students is a challenge for universities in terms of placement, particularly in the local social work agencies.

In addition, besides overcrowding, some agencies lack resources. Uche et al. (2014) observed that most agencies are ill-equipped to deliver services to clients. Home visits are essential to expose students to the real world and allow them to unpack their social work skills; however, because of transport limitations, they are incapacitated (Uche et al. 2014). The lack of resources, such as stationery, also acts as a barrier to WIL implementation and impacts negatively the students' report-writing skills. The inability to integrate theory into practice is another barrier to WIL implementation. Ajibo, Mbah and Anazonwu (2017, p. 104) assert that 'theory and practice should be complementary'. This could be conducted through the application of different methods and principles of social work in the field of practice. As put by Uche et al. (2014), the combination of theory learned in class and fieldwork practice makes it possible for student social workers to develop fully as professionals. However, when the two components are not linked, the WIL aims will not be fulfilled. It is through the application of theory into practice that students acquire social work skills as they interact with real cases.

Finally, under-prepared students also serve as a barrier to WIL implementation. Many factors, such as academic, social and economic background, contribute to under-preparedness. The findings of a study by Carelse and Dykes (2014) revealed that students' under-preparedness contributes to their inability to understand and integrate theory with practice, which serves as a barrier to their learning, and makes WIL more difficult to apply. In support, Hay et al. (2019) state that student readiness for WIL is dependent on the pre-assessment, ability to integrate theory into practice, and meet all the social work criteria as a person. However, Hay (2020) argues that:

> If a student is not ready to engage, have the required attributes to be able to access the available learning opportunities, or cannot become integrated into the practicum environment, the success of WIL is unlikely. (p. 59)

Therefore, Hay (2020) recommends that higher education institutions assess the readiness of the students and their capability if challenges with WIL are to be avoided. If these barriers could be overcome, the students

would be anchored fully in social work practice through the implementation of WIL; therefore, the role of the tripartite alliance is to enforce the enablers of and remove the barriers to students' learning.

Research methodology

The research approach

A qualitative desktop research approach was followed in this chapter. The author reviewed the findings of previous research articles to gain a broad understanding of the fieldwork practice and assess their contribution to the subject at hand. The information consulted was regarding fieldwork practice for student social workers.

The sampling: Various articles relating to the fieldwork practice of both international and national authors were searched, identified, and selected. The international and national literature was used to share the knowledge, experiences and practices regarding the components that constitute enablers or barriers to WIL implementation. Initially, ten peer-reviewed articles were targeted and purposively selected; however, the information gathered was sufficient to cover the questions under study, while some of the articles consulted had similar findings. Consequently, six peer-reviewed articles were selected, consulted and read, which guided the findings in this chapter.

Data collection: The qualitative secondary data were sourced from the published articles in journals, particularly on fieldwork practice. The author used a PC with an Internet connection as a data collection tool to access journals and published sources and collect secondary data. The collected data were recorded to evaluate their accuracy. The author used an ad hoc survey, conducted by independent researchers in the social work field of practice for the students. The following articles were consulted and used:

- Sun, Liu and Jiang (2015), 'Enhancing social work field education through international collaboration'.
- Shokane, Nemutandani and Budeli (2016), 'Challenges faced by 4th-year social work students during fieldwork practice at a rural-based university'.
- Carelse and Poggenpoel (2016), 'Practitioners' experiences of student supervision in the BSW degree'.
- Schmidt and Rautenbach (2016), 'Field Instruction: Is the heart of social work education still beating in the Eastern Cape?'
- Carelse and Dykes (2014), 'Integration of theory and practice in social work: Challenges and triumphs'.

- Mokgadi and Maripe (2020), 'Experiences of Agency Social Work Supervisors in Gaborone'.
- Data analysis: The data analysis followed the three processes mentioned by Johnston (2014, p. 620–622), namely:
  - **Development of the research question:** The main research question is 'What contributory factors to effective WIL implementation?' The research questions that guided this work are:
    - What are the factors that enable the WIL implementation?
    - What are the factors that act as barriers to the WIL implementation?
    - How does the tripartite alliance impact effective WIL implementation?
  - **Identification of the dataset:** The existing data were used to address the research questions. The previous and current work of experts in the fieldwork practice were identified, read and analysed. The literature review of previous studies assisted in identifying the topic for discussion. The findings of well-renowned authors and publishers on fieldwork practice were identified and reviewed. The data were analysed based on the findings of the articles used.
  - **Evaluation of the dataset:** The data were analysed to 'ensure the appropriateness for the research topic'. The evaluation considered factors such as the data's original purpose, its population, sampling, data collection and the data findings. However, this chapter was analysed based on the articles' findings.

Discussion of the findings

The four themes that were identified in the analysis are discussed in this section.

Theme 1: Students' supervision

The inadequate supervision of students can be attributed to a lack of qualified or trained supervisors. Some findings revealed that students were not consistently supervised. In some cases, they were supervised by interns, while in other cases, they were supervised by different supervisors. This demonstrates a lack of adequate supervision, which exposed students to study by trial and error. In some surveys, students were not supervised but subjected to washing dishes, preparing tea and accompanying supervisors on shopping trips. Some supervisors lacked the motivation to supervise students. Additionally, the findings revealed that students were not adequately supervised because the interns, who were still enrolled in the learning programme themselves, lacked the capacity to provide supervision. The lack of motivation by other supervisors impeded the students' ability

to gain knowledge and exposure in the social work field. Washing dishes denied the students exposure to learning, and such activities did not enhance or contribute to their learning. Unsupervised students, consequently, are likely to commit ethical errors; however, Uche et al. (2014) argue that WIL could enhance professional development and may assist in solving the problem of ethical misconduct. Therefore, it could be concluded that the lack of supervision, or poor quality supervision, could be regarded as a barrier to WIL implementation, as the students conclude their placement with insufficient knowledge of the field practice.

Theme 2: Limited resources

Limited resources, such as agencies, the material used for field instruction, and the lack of sufficient practice opportunities were identified. Most students experienced problems with limited resources, such as office space, stationery and transport for home visits, which compromised the implementation of WIL. The overcrowding of students compromises the social work principles of confidentiality, especially when handling cases. A high intake of students places pressure on placement agencies, which has been observed to be a barrier to the implementation of WIL. Overcrowding is the outcome, which hinders the process of WIL, as overcrowding compromises the confidentiality, privacy, learning and quality of work. These findings have implications for social work education and practice.

Theme 3: Under-preparedness, screening and support

The findings indicated that the student's academic background contributes to learning, which also affects the implementation of WIL. In the survey conducted with the University of the Western Cape, the students, who originated 'from previously disadvantaged communities, were observed to be academically under-prepared, and not familiar with academic discourse' (Dykes 2009, cited in Carelse & Dykes 2014, p. 166). Students need to be properly supported throughout their academic journey. Another finding that was identified is related to the screening process involving agency supervisors and students (Carelse & Dykes 2014). According to the researchers, it is crucial to prioritise the screening of both the agency and agency supervisors before placing students to ensure that they receive adequate training, guidance and support. It is important to note that not every social worker can be a supervisor as this role requires specific skills and qualities. Additionally, the researchers recommend screening students upon admission to ensure that appropriate cohorts are enrolled in social work studies.

Theme 4: Well-designed and inclusive learning guidelines

> It is suggested that clear articulation of student learning outcomes, assessment and plans has the greatest impact on the educational quality of the structured work experience and is also used to assure the educational quality of the other learning modes addressed. (Stirling et al. 2016, p. 38)

The development of learning plans was observed to be critical in guiding and directing students' roles, assessment methods and activities to be undertaken (Carelse & Poggenpoel 2016). The integration of theory into practice, which was lacking, should be included in the learning plans. In the study conducted by Mokgadi and Maripe (2020, p. 30), it was observed that 'one of the challenges in WIL was the lack of fieldwork manuals for their reference'. The findings of a similar study conducted by Tanga (2013) revealed that fieldwork supervisors indicated that a lack of training on fieldwork manuals affects the quality of supervision provided to students and subsequently misdirects their roles and responsibilities. It was reported that the training institutions did not provide the agency supervisors with supervision guidelines, and consequently, they had to improvise (ibid). Based on this research, it is evident that the learning plans facilitate a smooth fieldwork process, as expectations are clearly defined. The findings revealed various factors that impacted the implementation of WIL, which needs to be managed collaboratively.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the enablers and barriers to the effective implementation of the WIL programme are addressed. The enablers identified related to regular students' supervision, the opportunity to integrate theory into practice and a supportive environment with reasonable resources. If the learning environment is not conducive, the quality of learning is compromised, and the profession is exposed to risk. The barriers are the absence of the enablers, namely, under-preparedness (students, agencies and university), limited resources, untrained supervisors and an unsupportive learning environment.

The importance of a tripartite alliance was evidenced, as a single entity could not possibly facilitate the achievement of the WIL activities. Fieldwork practice, or WIL, is a collaborative effort that needs to be strengthened in terms of working agreements, with clear roles and responsibilities by the parties involved. The two parties (university and agency) need each other to develop the third party, the social work student. Their participation and collaborative work could enhance the professional growth and development of the students. In turn, this would lead to effective service provision upon

their completion. According to the literature, WIL provides students with the opportunity to become fully immersed in the social work profession, both ethically and practically. In conclusion, it can be inferred that enablers can become barriers if not properly managed, and the tripartite alliance plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective implementation of WIL.

Based on the findings, the following are further recommended for the effective implementation of WIL:

- Universities, student social workers and fieldwork agencies should collaborate in placement preparations and planning so that quality time is provided for learning purposes.
- Continuous training, meetings, and workshops for fieldwork supervisors and university supervisors or fieldwork coordinators should be conducted for updates and further innovation and creativity of the WIL programme.
- Standardised policies that guide WIL programmes should be developed.
- All entities should strengthen, maintain and adhere to the MOA agreements and activities.
- Synergy should exist between the university and fieldwork agency reporting systems for the easy integration of theory into practice by the students.
- Effective supervision should be implemented in fieldwork or WIL to facilitate reflective practice.
- Implementable and comprehensive standardised fieldwork manuals and guidelines should be developed with clear learning contracts, assessment methods and curriculum, as well as learning outcomes.
- The institution of higher learning should manage students' intake numbers in consideration of the accessibility and availability of the agencies for fieldwork practice.
- Support environment should be provided to students to facilitate learning needs and processes, such as positive relationships, reception, learning environment and resources.

Chapter 10

Students' perceived academic stress in a blended learning environment and its effect on their family social functioning

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Abstract

Stress is a part of human day-to-day living. It is felt when there are significant changes. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused rigorous change across the globe, and one particular area of change is the academic system. Higher education institutions in the Philippines adopted various learning modalities to pursue education despite the pandemic. The study aimed to know the perceived academic stress of university students who are exposed to blended learning and its effect on their family social functioning and their experiences. This sequential explanatory mixed-method study utilised a modified ten-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale, Family Role Performance Scale and

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semi-structured in-depth interviews and was treated using Pearson *r*, regression analysis and inductive content analysis. Based on the result, there is moderate perceived academic stress among blended learning students, and they fulfil some expectations in their family social functioning. Further, the two variables have a high significance and a weak negative relationship. The perceived academic stress significantly affects family social functioning. The causes of the perceived academic stress among the students who are exposed to blended learning are difficulty in academic workloads, inability to concentrate at home while engaging in schoolwork and Internet connectivity problems. Its effects on their family's social functioning are the inability to do their tasks or chores at home, lessened and poor-quality communication among family members, and displacement of academic stress at home. A social work intervention based on a task-centred model was proposed to alleviate the presented problems of the blended learning students.

Introduction

Stress is seen as a permanent part of an individual's day-to-day life, and it is a natural reaction to pressure. It is to be felt in every environment: at home, outside of the house, at work and at school (Ekpenyong, Daniel & Aribo 2013). However, depending on the severity of stress that a person experiences, it can affect their performance in various roles or their overall functioning (American Psychological Association [APA] 2019). The perception of stress or the person's assessment of their own stress is called the perceived stress (Lee, Kim & Wachholtz 2016). Academic stress is the stress originating from schooling and education (Alsulami et al. 2018).

Stress impairs the social functioning of a person. It negatively affects their performance of roles in the group that they are in (Moskowitz et al. 2012). These negative effects may cause poor performance, or no performance at all, of their roles in the family. Social Functioning refers to an individual's capability of adjusting to their respective environment, which is the result of performing their various roles in society (Lee-Mendoza 2008, pp. 1–9). When the performance of roles is specified in the family, it will refer to the social functioning in the family. Family functioning encompasses the relationship and interaction of the members and how it affects the family holistically (Lewandowski et al. 2010).

In addition, an article by Cleveland Clinic (2015) defined stress as the response of the mind and body to changes, either positive or negative change.

In the study of Zheng et al. (2020), COVID-19 is an infectious disease that causes respiratory and cardiovascular malfunction that started in

December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. The spread of the virus was drastic, and it was declared a pandemic in early March 2020. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), the first case of the disease in the Philippines was on 30 January 2020. On 07 March 2020, the first local transmission of the disease in the country was confirmed. The rapid spread of COVID-19 caused a rigorous change in the Philippines. One of these significant changes was seen in the education system in the country, which made a drastic shift in the system of learning as an approach to tackling the concern of continuing the academic year.

The flexible learning modality is used in Philippine education in order to pursue the studies of the students despite the health crisis. According to the Philippine government, they formulated this new learning method to provide quality education while avoiding and limiting the risk of acquiring the virus. Flexible learning, as defined in the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order Number 04 Series of 2020, is an approach where the learning process varies and is adjustable, thus considering the individual needs of the student's 'place, pace, process, and product of learning'. This type of learning involves three categories: the use of online or blended learning, the combination of online and offline learning, and modular learning.

This study on perceived academic stress levels was prompted by perceptions of the sudden change in the learning modality resulting from the pandemic. Moreover, it is important to know how this affects the students' social function inside their homes because it will aid in the enhancement of school life and the family life of the students.

This chapter aimed to know the severity of academic stress the college students of blended learning modality experienced by measuring their perceived academic stress and how it affects the family's social functioning by measuring their family role performance and their views regarding it. Through the results of the research, the proponents recommended an intervention process in line with the social work method that will benefit the students, their families, the college, the university and the society.

Methodology

This chapter follows a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. It begins with a quantitative approach and then transitions to a qualitative approach (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick 2006). The quantitative approach provides a general explanation of the research problem, while the qualitative approach provides a deeper and more elaborate view to further clarify and support the statistical data (Rossman & Wilson 1985, cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998; Rossman & Wilson 1985, cited in Creswell et al. 2003, pp. 209–240).

In knowing the students' perceived academic stress, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein (1983) was used. This scale measures an individual appraisal of how stressed they are in the past month. The ten-item version of the questionnaire was used in this particular study. While studying the effect of perceived academic stress on students, the researchers also examined the impact on their family's social functioning. In order for this to be measured, the Family Role Performance Scale (FRPS) developed by Chen et al. (2013) was used. This eight-item scale measures an individual's task and relationship performance inside their family. Lastly, to provide a narrative on experiences of perceived academic stress and family social functioning of the students in their academic life while using the blended learning modality, an open-ended questionnaire was utilised as an interview guide.

The participants in the study are university students (Table 10.1). These students came from the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (CSSP) of Don Honorio Ventura State University (DHVSU). It is the oldest vocational school in Far East Asia (Cervantes 2019) and the most accessible to researchers.

The sample respondents were selected through stratified random sampling, which involves dividing the population into strata or groups of individual students with the same characteristics (Siegle 2015). On the other hand, the sample participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method where not everyone can be a participant. Purposive sampling relies on the researchers' decision or judgement (Dudovskiy 2016). Before being considered as part of the sample, the student must meet the criteria: be a single full-time student with no children. Based on various research, there is a difference between students with children and those without children and between part-time students and full-time students when it comes to their stress and roles in the family. The stress level of undergraduate parent-students is higher because of their new obligations that are not in the scope of their academic life (Springer, Parker & Leviten-Reid 2008). The responsibilities and identities of these undergraduate students who have children are different from those who do not because they will need to meet new demands (Scharp & Hall 2017).

TABLE 10.1: Sample drawn from College of Social Sciences and Philosophy students with different degrees.

College of Social Sciences and Philosophy	First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year	Total	%
Bachelor of Science in Social Work	138	191	195	53	**577**	36.1
Bachelor of Science in Social Work (3rd Tri.)	31	-	-	-	**31**	2.0
Bachelor of Science in Psychology	217	269	231	60	**777**	48.6
Bachelor of Science in Sociology	45	91	37	-	**173**	10.8
Bachelor of Human Services	40	-	-	-	**40**	2.5

Source: Author's own work.
Key: Tri., trimester.

The quantitative data were gathered through an online survey. While the qualitative data were collected through online interviews using Google Meet, survey results were only accessible to the researchers. The floating of questionnaires and interviews were conducted by the researchers only. A recording of the interview, either audio or video, was present for transcription purposes.

The survey results underwent descriptive analysis. Then, to determine if the perceived academic stress of students significantly relates to their social functioning in the family based on blended learning modality, Pearson's correlation coefficient (*r*) was used. It is a statistical tool that tests the association or relationship of the variables. It tests if the two variables have or do not have a relationship, and if they have, if it is a positive or negative correlation (Schober, Boer & Schawrte 2018). A simple linear regression analysis was used to determine whether the perceived academic stress level of the students significantly affects their family social functioning. This statistical tool is used to see if the independent variables have an impact or effect on the dependent variables (Gallo 2015). For determining the viewpoint of the university students regarding their perceived academic stress and their family social functioning, inductive content analysis was used. This approach looks for similarities, patterns and connections to reach a conclusion (Elo & Kyngäs 2008).

Results and findings

The sample respondents were 232 students, with a 5% margin of error, 90% level of confidence and 50% response distribution. The survey was administered in March among the 232 full-time students who were single and have no children.

Based on the survey, Table 10.2 depicts the perceived academic stress level of blended learning students, where 6 (2.59%) students have low perceived stress, 42 (18.10%) have high perceived stress and 184 (79.31%) have moderate perceived stress. With a mean score of 22.47 and a 4.55 standard deviation, the results revealed that the student's perceived stress level was moderate. The respondents see their school life as moderately stressful. Moderate perceived stress is the degree to which the respondents

TABLE 10.2: Descriptive analysis of perceived academic stress level of respondents exposed to blended learning.

Levels	Freq	%	Mean	s.d.	Verbal description
Low perceived stress	6	2.59	22.47	4.55	Moderate perceived stress level
Moderate perceived stress	184	79.31			
High perceived stress	42	18.10			
Total	**232**	**100.00**	-	-	-

Source: Author's own work.
Key: Freq, frequency; s.d., standard deviation.

find their academic lives moderately unpredictable, moderately uncontrollable and moderately overloading (Cohen et al. 1983, pp. 385–386).

The family social functioning of blended learning students was assessed using the FRPS of Chen et al. (2013). As seen in Table 10.3, the descriptive analysis of the assessment of blended learning students' family social functioning, respondents fulfilled some expectations on doing the chores, maintaining the home, providing emotional support and general support, and giving advice to family members. While they fulfilled many expectations, such as completing household responsibilities, doing tasks around the house, and keeping family members connected, in general, the blended learning students fulfilled some expectations in performing their roles in the family, with a grand mean of 3.25 and a standard deviation of 0.86. The students are fulfilling only some of the expectations in their performance of the tasks and relationships in the family setting.

Table 10.4 features the correlation analysis between the blended learning students' perceived academic stress and family social functioning. Data reveal that perceived academic stress has a weak negative correlation to the family social functioning of the respondents exposed to blended learning modality. This implies that the lower their perceived academic stress, the higher their family social functioning, while the higher their perceived academic stress, the lower their family social functioning. This means that blended learning students who view their academic stress as low have higher performance to fulfil their tasks and relationship expectations in the family, and vice versa. Further, the weak negative relationship between the said variables is highly significant, having a

TABLE 10.3: Descriptive analysis of the family social functioning assessment of respondents exposed to blended learning.

Indicators	Mean	s.d.	Verbal description
Do household chores	3.33	1.08	Fulfil some expectations
Complete household responsibilities	3.41	1.04	Fulfil many expectations
Do tasks around the house	3.45	1.08	Fulfil many expectations
Provide emotional support to your family members	3.01	1.14	Fulfil some expectations
Provide general support to your family members	3.17	1.14	Fulfil some expectations
Give advice to family members	2.90	1.20	Fulfil some expectations
Keep family members connected with each other	3.44	1.24	Fulfil many expectations
Grand mean	**3.25**	**0.86**	**Fulfil some expectations**

Source: Author's own work.
Key: s.d., standard deviation

TABLE 10.4: Correlation analysis between perceived academic stress and family social functioning of respondents exposed to blended learning.

Variable	Family social functioning	
Perceived academic stress	*r*	Significance
	−0.269	0.000

Source: Author's own work.
Key: *r*, correlation coefficient.

p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.01 level of significance. This indicates that the perceived academic stress of the students exposed to blended learning can be associated with their family's social functioning.

Table 10.5 presents the regression analysis of the blended learning students' perceived academic stress on their family social functioning. It can be observed that perceived academic stress has a highly significant effect on family social functioning with a *p*-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.01 level of significance. Family social functioning depends on the perceived academic stress of students exposed to blended learning. This only shows that the perceived academic stress of blended learning students has something to do with their performance of roles in the family based on tasks and relationships.

To further provide an in-depth understanding of the perceived academic stress and its significant effect on the family social functioning of students exposed to a blended learning environment, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The interview was based on the result and analysis of the quantitative data. The data gathering was participated by eight single, with no children, and full-time students of CSSP. The participants were coded as BLS1, BLS2, BLS3 … BLS8, which refers to Blended Learning Student 1, Blended Learning Student 2, Blended Learning Student 3 … Blended Learning Student 8.

All of the participants narrated their experiences that resulted in one theme: views of experiences on blended learning. This theme consists of three categories: (1) the significance of blended learning, (2) the cause of perceived academic stress and (3) the effect on family social functioning.

Category 1 refers to the responses of the participants regarding the benefits of blended learning. Out of the seven participants, four reported that they found it beneficial, while three indicated that they did not. Category 2 encompasses the participants' narratives on why they perceive stress. It reveals that the causes of their perceived academic stress include heavy workload requirements in school, non-conducive home environments for learning and Internet connectivity problems. Category 3 examined the impact of perceived academic stress on students' family social functioning. The findings revealed that participants experienced difficulties in

TABLE 10.5: Regression analysis of the significant effect of perceived academic stress of respondents exposed to blended learning on their family's social functioning.

Dependent variable	Beta coefficient	Standard error	*t*	*p*	Decision
Family social functioning	−0.269	0.012	−4.230	0.000	Reject H_o
Independent: Perceived academic stress					

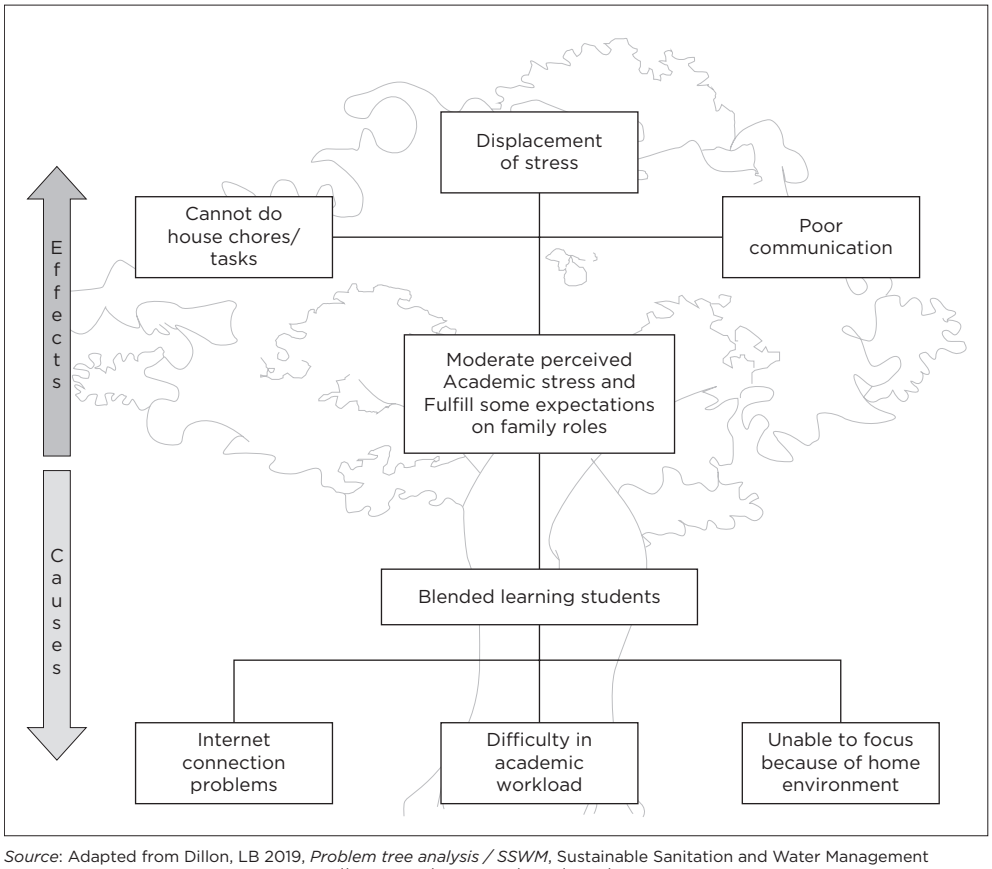
Source: Author's own work.
Key: *t*, test statistic; *p*, probability value; H0, null hypothesis.

completing their household chores, faced challenges in communicating effectively with other family members, and often transferred their stress from school to their homes and family members.

Proposed social work intervention

The problem tree analysis depicts the cause-and-effect relationship that was established in the study. This kind of analysis uses a diagram to show the problem, its causes and its effects (Ammani, Auta & Aliyu 2010). The problem was established through the conducted survey, while the causes and their effects were provided when the participants were interviewed.

As shown in Figure 10.1, this study reveals two main problems identified on the trunks of the tree. These problems are moderate perceived academic stress and the fulfilment of some expectations in family role performance



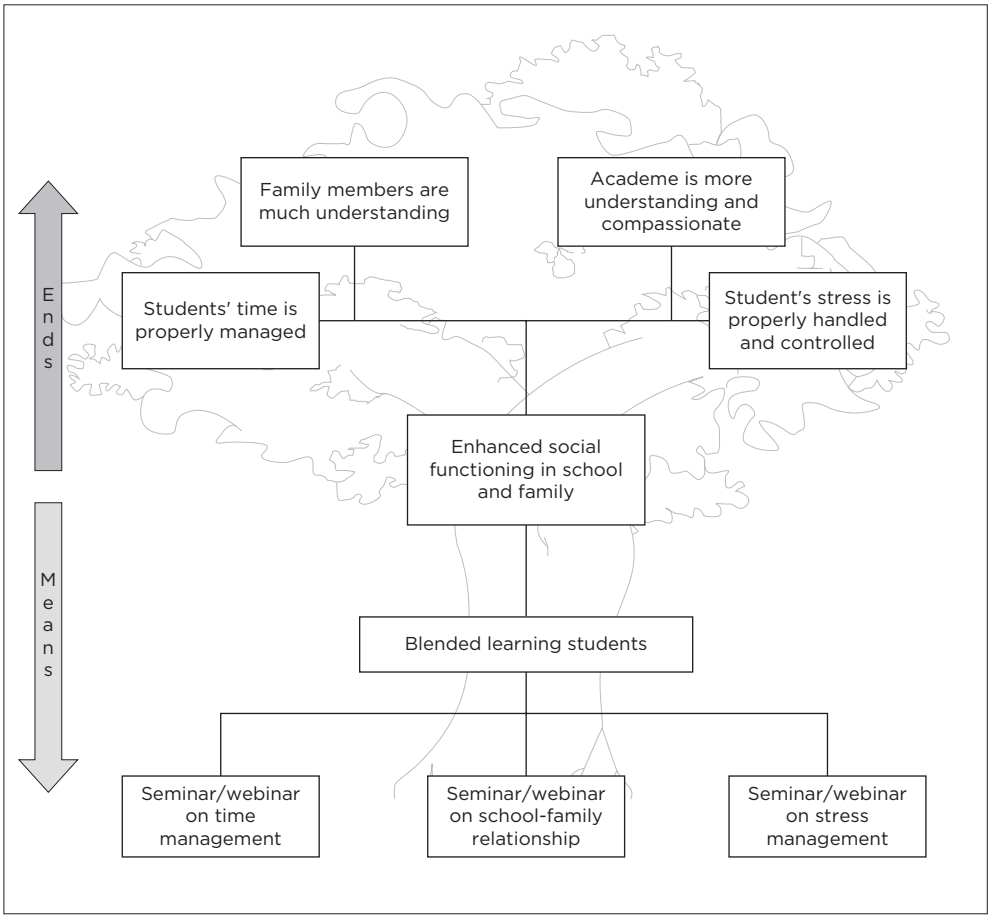
Source: Adapted from Dillon, LB 2019, *Problem tree analysis / SSWM*, Sustainable Sanitation and Water Management Toolbox, viewed 16 February 2021. <https://sswm.info/taxonomy/term/2647/prblem-tree-analysis>.

FIGURE 10.1: Problem tree.

among students who are exposed to a blended learning environment. The causes and effects of these problems are the reflection of the survey responses and the narration of the participating students.

In order to provide a solution to these challenges, the problem tree was transformed into an objectives tree after a focus group discussion among the proponents and three registered social workers.

The problem tree analysis presented the gap that needed to be reduced. Figure 10.2 features the 'what is', and Figure 10.3 features the 'what is supposed to be'. To reduce the gap and reach the ideal situation for blended learning students, the task-centred model will serve as the basis of the intervention process.



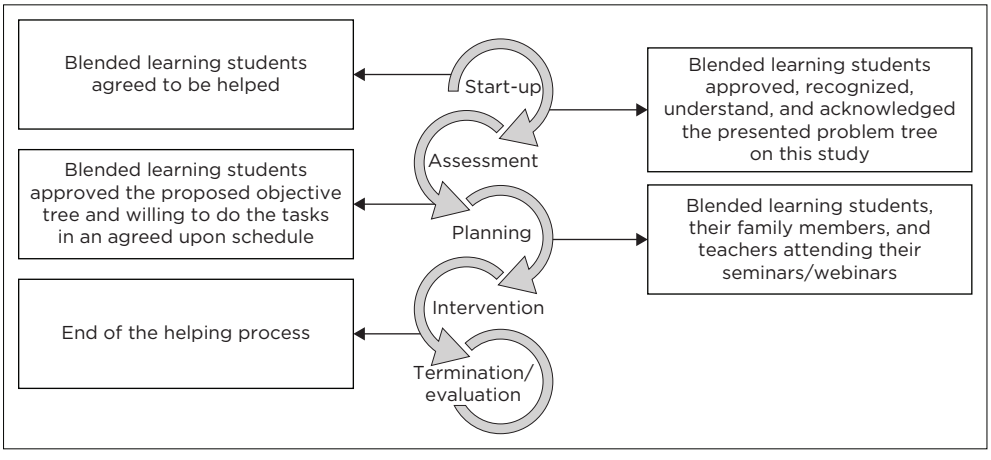
Source: Adapted from Dillon, LB 2019, *Problem tree analysis / SSWM*, Sustainable Sanitation and Water Management Toolbox, viewed 16 February 2021. <https://sswm.info/taxonomy/term/2647/prblem-tree-analysis>

FIGURE 10.2: Objectives tree.

Figure 10.3 presents the solutions, the goals and the objectives to alleviate the blended learning students from their presenting problem. Found in the roots of the tree are the resources to empower students, their families, and their teachers. This will be accomplished through a series of seminars and webinars. These activities are aimed at achieving the main objective, which is to improve students' social functioning in both their academic and family lives.

The task-centred model is used by doing the tasks systematically in order to solve the presenting problem that has been agreed upon, recognised, comprehended, acknowledged and is desired to be solved by the clients within a brief and time-limited process (Reid 1978, cited in Watson & West 2006).

The intervention process, based on a task-centred model for group work, will start from the formation of the group. The members are single, with no children and full-time students exposed to a blended learning environment. The members of the group will be interviewed and must be willing to be helped. Then, in Step 1, assessment, the surfaced result and findings of this study will be discussed with them. The worker and the group must come to an agreement that they approve, recognise, understand and acknowledge the problem. Upon the completion of Step 1, where they agreed on the problem tree, the next process is Step 2, planning, where the group will need to approve the objective tree. The group must share a common goal and objectives. Further, they must also be willing to do the tasks in the agreed-upon schedule. In Step 3, intervention, the group members must complete the tasks, undergo a seminar or webinar on stress



Source: Adapted from Lee-Mendoza, T 2008, *Social welfare and social work*, Central Book Supply, Quezon City.
FIGURE 10.3: Task-centred model.

management, and then the seminar or webinar on time management. Their family members and their teachers must attend the seminar or webinar on the school-family relationship in separate sessions. Through these tasks, Step 4 can be safely performed, thus concluding the helping process. After the end of the school year, an assessment must be carried out for the now-empowered blended learning students.

These proposals of problem tree analysis and intervention plans based on a task-centred model aim at alleviating the students of their problems presented in this study. However, it is delimited to single, childless, full-time students enrolled in blended learning. Those who do not meet the mentioned criteria require a different intervention process as they have different responsibilities. Nonetheless, the proposed social work intervention is based on the results and findings of the study and the process can be altered depending on the professional judgement of the implementer.

Conclusion

In summation, blended learning students who are single, with no children and attending school full-time perceive their academic stress as moderate and fulfil some expectations on family role performance, which is caused by academic workload, home environment and Internet connectivity problems. Moreover, the family social functioning of the aforementioned students is significantly affected in that they cannot do their chores or tasks in the house, have communication problems with family members and displace their stress at home.

As a result, a proposed social work intervention presented the surfaced problem, where the cause-and-effect relationship is depicted on the problem tree, and the means of solving the problem, objectives and the main goal are depicted on the objectives tree. The intervention plan based on a task-centred model for group work aims at helping blended learning students who are single, with no children and attending school full-time to alleviate their problems.

It is, therefore, recommended to administer the proposed social work intervention and modify it as needed in order to properly cater for the presented causation of the moderate perceived academic stress and the fulfilment of some expectations on family roles. Also, there is a need to formulate a university-wide programme to address the academic workload, the lack of motivation in class participation and Internet connectivity problems. Moreover, it is necessary to formulate social work interventions that address the family group to treat the familial issues caused by academic stress.

In addition, it is recommended to further expand the study by incorporating the students' demographic profile (age, gender, marital status, number of children and household income) in order to fully understand if these factors affect the helping process. Also, to further expand the study to students using modular learning and online learning to cater to other student groups.

Chapter 11

Logistical, teaching and learning challenges of undergraduate students with visual impairments at a selected university

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Abstract[4]

Individuals with disabilities are increasingly pursuing higher education opportunities beyond their schooling years. Over the years, discussions and research have centred on the obstacles and journeys of disabled students, highlighting the negative effects it has on those facing inequality, thereby amplifying humanitarian concerns, particularly within the framework of extreme poverty and joblessness, issues that are of particular concern to social work. However, few studies have focused specifically on the logistical, teaching and learning challenges of students with visual impairments at higher education institutions. This empirical study aimed to gain insight into the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments, using a selected university as a case study. To achieve the aim of the study, a qualitative research methodology was used. The study has included a descriptive research design. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with fifteen undergraduate students using purposive sampling. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. According to Willems (2021), the findings showed that undergraduate students with visual impairments experience logistical, teaching and learning challenges at multiple levels. At the micro level, signage visibility and PowerPoint fonts are a challenge. At the meso level, some support services are challenging. At the macro level, accessible transportation challenges were highlighted. The study concludes that students with visual impairment continue to face institutional challenges at all levels. It is recommended that the use of different social media platforms is maximised to raise awareness aimed at the various levels.

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank (2011), it is estimated that more than a billion people, accounting for about 15% of the world's population, live with some form of disability. The latest statistics in South Africa estimated that 6% of South Africans lived with a disability (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] 2022). According to StatsSA (2016) census data, only 5.3% of persons with disabilities have attained higher education compared to 22.3% of non-disabled individuals (StatsSA 2016).

4. Sections in this chapter represent a substantial reworking of two works, namely Willems, M 2021, 'Logistical, teaching and learning challenges of undergraduate students with visual impairments at a selected university', Thesis presented for the degree of Master of Social Work in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University, with Dr Z.F. Zimba as supervisor (https://scholar.sun.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/92ebc9a6-14a6-431d-bbc3-50c63c69e415/content); and Zimba, ZF 2021, 'Practice experiences of South African social workers living with disabilities', *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 244–256. https://doi.org/10.15270/52-2-932

Therefore, when persons with disabilities enter higher education, they are taking up an opportunity to increase their knowledge, develop their social skills, obtain good qualifications and expose themselves to debate and discussion. The statistics alluded to above show that people with disabilities remain vulnerable to exclusion from higher education spaces, thus limiting their chances for social advancement. It is also alarming that in the South African census of 2022, no indication of people with disabilities' educational level was given,

The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WPRPD 2015) defines disability as being:

> [/]mposed by society when a person with a physical, psychosocial, intellectual, neurological and/or sensory impairment is denied access to full participation in all aspects of life, and when society fails to uphold the rights and specific needs of individuals with impairment. (p. 4)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) recognises that disability is a dynamic concept, and it arises from the interaction between individuals with impairments and societal barriers, including both attitudinal and environmental factors. The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015) stated that:

> It recognises persons with disabilities as those who have long-term physical, psychosocial, cognitive and/or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (p. 4)

'Sensory impairments include blindness, low vision, deafness, hard-of-hearing as well as deaf blindness'. For the study, the researcher focused on sensory disability as a visual impairment.

The Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System (2018) states that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015) adopted the human rights approach to disability. It acknowledges the protection and promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities and indicates that the state must ensure and promote the full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities without discrimination based on that disability and the protection of all persons against the violation of their human rights.

However, persons with disabilities in South Africa continue to face numerous challenges when accessing higher education institutions because of their disability (Howell 2006; Lourens 2015; Mutanga 2017). While institutions in the post-school education and training system throughout South Africa have made progress in addressing the rights for reasonable accommodation of and services for persons with disabilities, much still

needs to be accomplished (Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System, 2018).

According to the Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System (2018), Section 9(3) of Chapter 2 (The Bill of Rights) of the South African Constitution (1996) deals with equality, meaning that the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone in terms of race, gender, sex, disability, religion and other characteristics. Lyner-Cleophas (2020) states that the South African Constitution and the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 note the importance of addressing inequalities and diversity in education and call for flexibility and redress in transforming our society. Discrimination against people based on class, race, gender and disability is illegal. Therefore, in 2018, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) released a strategic framework for disability in the tertiary sector specifically to address disability inclusion as part of diversity (Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System, 2018).

According to (International Association of the Schools of Social Work [IASSW], International Council on Social Welfare [ICSW] & International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] 2014; Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht 2018), the most recent global definition of social work identifies human rights as one of the guiding values for social work, next to social justice, respect for diversities and collective responsibilities.

This is endorsed in the revised global definition of social work as a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people, with principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities as fundamental to social work (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW 2014). Based on this definition, social workers are expected to promote social change, social development, social cohesion, empowerment and the liberation of vulnerable groups. Moreover, social workers have an obligation to enhance social change and, ultimately, to bring about social justice within communities. In addition, the global social work statement of ethical principles indicates that social workers promote social justice in relation to communities and on behalf of people to whom they render services (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW 2008). The global definition thus requires social workers to actively lobby for an inclusive society where people with disabilities are able to fully participate in public spaces.

A few international research studies about students with disabilities seem to focus more on problems regarding access to universities, challenges experienced in learning and assessment and, lastly, negative attitudes of lecturers towards students with disabilities (Riddell, Tinklin & Wilson 2005, p. 157). Riddell et.al. (2005) states the future of British higher education

inclusion policies for students with disabilities will inevitably be shaped by changes in the higher education system. Similarly, in South Africa, researchers such as Howell (2006), Lourens (2015), Mutanga (2017) and Lourens and Swartz (2020) focus on the challenges which students with disabilities face when accessing a higher education institution, as well as in accessing the support needed to be a well-adjusted student who performs well academically.

According to Mkhize (2014), higher education institutions are becoming the main institutions for social development. These institutions prepare students to participate in a world bound together by communication and economic and social relations. Education has become essential for individuals to cope with the demands of modern living and for national economic survival, with the understanding that everyone develops well and that the university supports that development. Therefore, higher education institutions have student affairs divisions that consist of student support units contributing to areas such as support to students with disabilities, career development and self-empowerment. The latter resonates with the mission of social work as a discipline where the objective is to develop the full potential of individuals, enrich their lives and prevent dysfunction. Social work as a profession promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships, empowerment and the liberation of people to enhance their wellbeing (Du Toit 2009).

Problem statement and aim of the study

Many researches (Beauchamp-Pryor 2013; Howell & Lazarus 2003; Lourens & Swartz 2016) on students with disabilities emphasise that barriers within higher education relate to attitudes towards disability, academic curricula, physical environments, teaching and learning support, and the allocation and distribution of resources. Lourens and Swartz (2020) report that South African students with disabilities face numerous challenges when accessing higher education institutions. However, there is much research focused on the challenges faced by students with disabilities, and studies which focus specifically on the experiences of students with visual impairments at higher education institutions are limited.

Statistical analysis of students with disabilities in higher education and training in a South African context

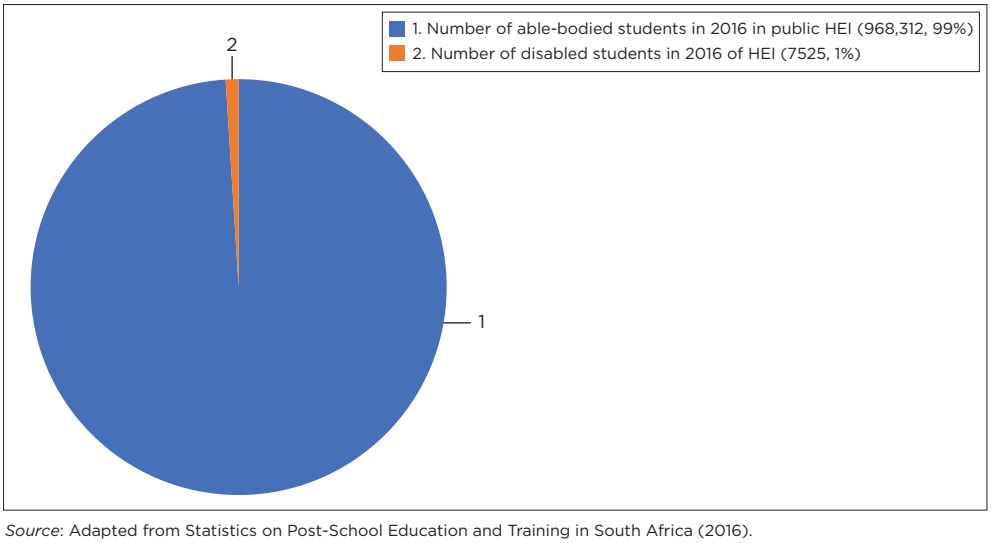
Lourens and Swartz (2020) state that the initiative globally to welcome students with disabilities on university campuses is new. Since the late 1990s, more and more students with disabilities have been making their way into higher education institutions across the globe. This research gives an overview

of a statistical analysis of students with disabilities who have disclosed their disability to higher education and training institutions in South Africa.

According to the Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa 2016, released in March 2018 by the DHET (2018a), Figure 11.1 shows the number of disabled students in higher education. In the graph, in 2016, only 1% of the number of undergraduate students with disabilities were enrolled in higher education institutions.

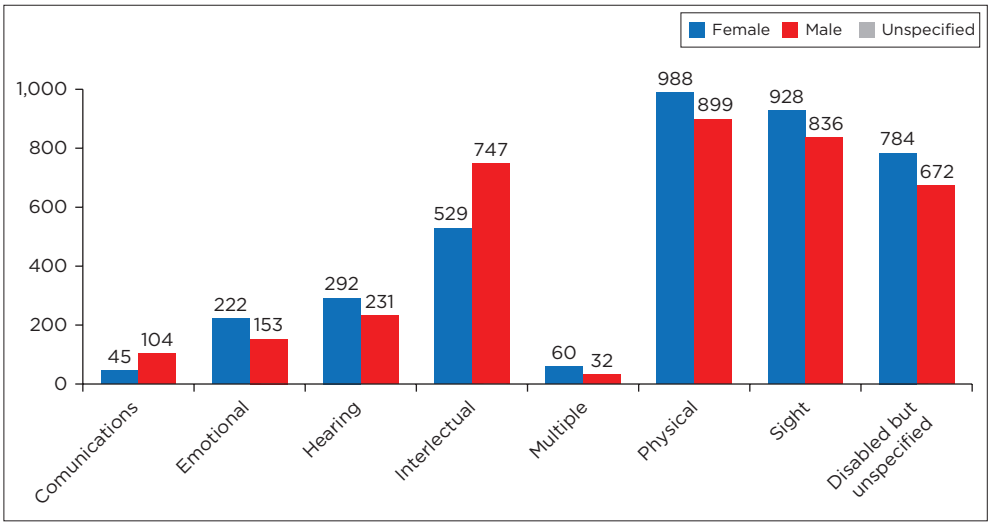
In 2016, just under 1% (7,525) of students enrolled in public higher education institutions in South Africa reported having some disability, of whom 51.1% (3,848) were women while 48.8% (3,674) were male students. Slight variations exist in tertiary enrolment between women. Almost half of the students reported physical and sight disabilities (1,887 or 25.1% and 1,764 or 23.4%, respectively). Fewer students reported multiple disabilities (92 or 1.2%). According to the Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System (2018), the South African Census (2011) reported that 11.1% of South African people had at least some difficulty performing functions, as described in the Washington Group questions, and estimated an impairment prevalence of 7.5% or approximately 2.9 million out of 38 million people.

According to the South African Census (2011), the profile of persons with disabilities in South Africa reported that the majority of persons aged 20–24 years old with severe difficulties across all functional domains were not attending any tertiary institution and did not have post-school qualifications.



Source: Adapted from Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa (2016).
Key: HEI, higher education institution.

FIGURE 11.1: Comparison of undergraduate able-bodied students versus disabled students enrolled in public higher education institutions in 2016.



Source: Adapted from Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa, 2016.

FIGURE 11.2: Number of students who have disclosed their disability in public higher education institutions by gender in 2016.

Only about 20% of persons with severe difficulties were attending tertiary educational institutions. Available data on the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) shows a gradual increase in the number of enrolled students with disabilities at universities over the period 2010–2016, from a total of 5,357 in 2010 to 7,525 in 2016 (the total of students who disclosed their disability is shown in Figure 11.2). The category of disability that ranks highest is that of students with a physical disability (1,887), followed by visual impairment (1,764) and those with unspecified disabilities (1,456). While the categories seem to be limited, there appears to be no differentiation between visually impaired and totally blind individuals despite the great difference in the approach or support technology required by these two categories.

Research question

The study aimed to answer the following research question:

- What are the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with a visual impairment?

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to gain more insight into the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments in higher education using a selected university.

Theoretical framework

To gain more insight into the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments in higher education, we will use the ecological systems perspective as the theoretical point of departure. Kondrat (2013) points out that the ecological systems perspective can be used to investigate the relationship between the person and their environment. The ecological systems perspective focuses on the micro, meso and macro levels and will be the core theoretical undergirding ethos of this study. For this study, the ecological systems perspective as a school of thought was utilised, as it will create the chance to see the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments at a selected university in South Africa. The actualities of students' experiences of their day-to-day encounters of logistical, teaching and learning challenges at various levels in universities are the focus of the study.

The main concepts of the ecological systems perspective include the micro system, the meso system, the exosystem, the macro system as well as the chronosystem. For the sake of the study, Bronfenbrenner's model has been chosen as the bio-ecological perspective provides a multi-faceted model of human development. It could serve as a tool to aid in understanding the complexity of the influences, interactions and relationships between the individual person and all the other systems that are interconnected to the individual (Bronfenbrenner 2005).

Methodology

This qualitative study sought to describe the logistical challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments in higher education in South Africa. De Vos et al. (2021) proclaim that a qualitative approach is characterised as unstructured because it enables flexibility in all aspects of the research process. Therefore, this approach was used to allow the researcher to explore phenomena in their natural setting while trying to understand things in terms of the meaning that people ascribe to them. (Creswell & Creswell 2018) Thus, a qualitative research approach was essential, as the study was concerned with narratives of the voices of visually impaired students (De Vos et al. 2021).

A descriptive research design is used to provide detail and paint a picture of a situation, thus focussing on 'how' and 'why' questions (De Vos et al. 2021). The study employed mainly purposive sampling to collect data in one-on-one interviews with fifteen (participants) undergraduate students with visual impairments at a higher institution in South Africa.

The criteria for inclusion in the sample of the study

Participants must be registered undergraduate students who have disclosed their disability, such as being a Braille user, utilising JAWS software (speech recognition software) or requiring enlarged font.

The recruitment process of the study

Firstly, the researcher obtained institutional permission to conduct the study. Secondly, ethical clearance approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee for the Humanities to initiate the study. The ethical clearance reference number is SU Project number 2359. Thirdly, the researcher requested permission to establish communication with students with disabilities who use the Centre, which renders support services to students with disabilities. Potential participants were informed about the study via email. The researcher began the process of data collection by contacting the potential participants who gave consent to the Centre. During the contact, the researcher introduced herself to the potential participants and explained the purpose and procedures of the research study. The researcher then established their readiness to participate in the research study. Permission was obtained from willing participants to audio record the interview (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The participants were informed about the confidential nature of the audio recordings and the transcripts of the interview. Finally, the researcher explained that if they decide to participate voluntarily in the study, they would be requested to sign a consent form. After informed consent was established, the researcher proceeded with the interview.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were carried out using an interview schedule with open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted in either English or Afrikaans and audiotaped with the consent of the participants. These interviews allowed participants to have the freedom to deviate and introduce their own issues during the interviews. De Vos et al. (2021) state that semi-structured one-on-one interviews are used primarily to get a clear picture of participants' convictions about a specific topic. Thematic analysis was used for the data analysis, as suggested by Bryman (2016). This involved scanning the raw data, which were transcribed, arranged and organised for analysis. This also allowed for scanning of incomplete, inconsistent and/or irrelevant data to organise data into relevant categories. Data were organised into a manageable format or into groups in terms of descriptions, common words, phrases and themes of patterns of information, which were categorised according to smaller relevant pockets of information (Crowe, Inder & Porter 2015).

Discussion of the findings

The findings and discussion of the study are divided into two sections. The first section is the biographical information of participants; the second section focuses on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the narratives of participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants (Table 11.1).

TABLE 11.1: Biographical profile of participants.

Participant	Year of study	Faculty of studies	Gender	Type of visual impairment	Causes of visual impairment	Living in residence or privately
Participant A	5	Economic and Management Sciences	Male	Myopia (near-sightedness)	Biological	Private accommodation
Participant B	4	Economic and Management Sciences	Female	Stargardt	Biological	Private accommodation
Participant C	2	Theology	Male	Glaucoma	Biological	University residence
Participant D	4	Arts and Social Sciences	Female	Drager syndrome and glaucoma	Biological	University residence
Participant E	3	Arts and Social Sciences	Female	Keratoconus	Biological	University residence
Participant F	1	Agri Sciences	Female	Heavy eye syndrome	Biological	Private accommodation
Participant G	2	Engineering	Male	Hyperopia (far-sightedness)	Biological	University residence
Participant H	4	Arts and Social Sciences	Female	Keratoconus	Biological	Private accommodation
Participant I	2	Economic and Management Sciences	Male	Keratoconus	Biological	University residence
Participant J	2	Economic and Management Sciences	Male	Asen syndrome	Biological	University residence
Participant K	1	Arts and Social Sciences	Male	Myopia (near-sightedness) and Hyperopia (far-sightedness)	Biological	Private residence
Participant L	3	Sciences	Female	Autoimmune disease and Myopia (near-sightedness)	Biological	University residence
Participant M	3	Engineering	Female	Extreme light-sensitive and Hyperopia (far-sightedness)	Biological	University residence
Participant N	4	Sciences	Male	Astigmatism	Biological	University residence
Participant O	2	Law	Female	Co-morbid autoimmune and Myopia (near-sightedness)	Biological	University residence

Source: Authors' own work.

A brief summary of the participants who participated in the study is provided in Table 11.1. This indicates the participant's year of study, faculty of studies, gender, type of visual impairment, causes of visual impairment and living in residence or privately.

Year of study

The study only focused on the experiences of undergraduate students with visual impairment. All participants purposively selected were undergraduate students with a visual impairment disability. The majority of the participants were students in their second year of study, while a few were at their senior level (third year). The year of study was only included to show that the participants are registered undergraduate students. According to Lillywhite and Wolbring (2019, p. 2), students with disabilities face various challenges within the higher education setting. Therefore, data should be available that provide insight into the situation of undergraduate students with disabilities as knowledge producers. Undergraduate students with disabilities could be involved in generating the evidence and knowledge missing in the social situation of persons with disabilities, given that they are experts in terms of their lived experience.

Faculty of study

In this study, out of the fifteen participants, four were from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; four were from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences; two were from the Faculty of Engineering; two were from the Faculty of Science; one was from the Faculty of Law; one was from the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and the last one was from the Faculty of Theology. During the study, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, there was equal participation among the participants. Therefore, students with visual impairments do not mainly study Arts programmes (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences), as previously stated by Lourens (2015, p. 137). As specified in this study, participants are studying in various other faculties. It is approximately a reflection of all ten faculties represented at Stellenbosch University. Only students from the Medicine and Heath Sciences, the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Military Science chose not to participate in the study.

Gender

In the study, eight of the participants were female and seven were male. The majority of the participants were women, while the others were men. Lourens (2015) argued that lower participation rates of males are not a

novel occurrence. This assertion was prevalent in the study. Furthermore, Oliffe and Thorne (2007) cite that it is more difficult to recruit male participants compared to females. The South African Census (2011) indicates that disability prevalence by sex shows noticeable sex variations. The South African Census (2011) index shows that disability is more prevalent among women (8.3%) compared to men (6.5%). For that reason, more women participated in the study than men.

Type of visual impairment

In the study, the majority of participants (thirteen) provided their formal diagnoses and two participants did not have a formal diagnosis, as they were never formally diagnosed at their hospitals. Landsberg (2016, p. 410) states that the most common eye conditions are refraction errors. The three main refraction errors are near-sightedness or myopia, far-sightedness or hyperopia, and astigmatism. The participants in the study had similar eye conditions, which were previously stated. Near-sightedness or myopia occurs when light rays do not focus on the macula but in front of it. This may be caused by an abnormally long eyeball or by an increase in the refractive power of the refractive media when the cornea is too round (Landsberg 2016). This means that students can see objects close to them perfectly well but cannot perceive those at a distance clearly. For example, the PowerPoint slides might be unclear to see, or the student cannot see notes on the board in a very large lecture venue.

According to Landsberg (2016, p. 411), far-sightedness of hyperopia occurs when light rays fall on a point behind the macula instead of on it. The cause is an abbreviated eyeball or a weakness in the refractive power of the refraction media. It could be that the cornea on the eyeball may be too flat. Students suffering from hyperopia can see well at a distance, but their closer vision is poor. For example, reading learning material and books in class can be problematic. Landsberg (2016) states that astigmatism is an eye condition which is often associated with myopia or hyperopia and is caused by an uneven cornea. Light rays do not fall on the macula but behind and in front of it. Students with this eye condition find it difficult to distinguish between round letters such as B and D, or G and D or R and S, which could be related to why they experience learning barriers.

Another type of visual impairment prominent in this study is the eye condition glaucoma. According to Landsberg (2016), congenital glaucoma can be present at birth or can develop at any time up to the age of three years old. It happens when too much aqueous humour is produced in the front chamber of the eye, and the outflow is restricted or blocked in some way or other. Painless pressure builds up in the cornea and damages the optic nerve, causing loss of vision. Another type of visual impairment

prominent in this study is Stargardt disease (Zerberto et al. 2015). Stargardt disease is one of the causes of low vision. It is a hereditary progressive retinal dystrophy, autosomal recessive, usually bilateral, that starts in the first two decades of life. Another type of visual impairment which is prominent in this study is keratoconus (Acera et al. 2015). Keratoconus is a disorder of the eye that results in the progressive thinning of the cornea. This may result in blurry vision, near-sightedness, irregular astigmatism and light sensitivity, which could lead to poor quality of life.

Causes of visual impairment

In the study, nine participants indicated that they were born with the visual impairment condition, meaning that it is congenital. Four participants indicated that owing to a disease, they are visually impaired. Two participants indicated environmental factors caused a disease. The participants indicated and shared the causes of their disability; therefore, the causes of visual impairment can be seen as biological. Causes of visual impairment can be categorised as factors from the environment, diseases or congenital. Landsberg (2016) states that there are three risk factors which could be causes of visual impairment. These risk factors are congenital, environmental and diseases. The congenital factors are risk factors before birth (prenatal) such as rubella, lack of oxygen for a baby before or during birth, and lastly, genetic eye conditions such as albinism. Environmental factors such as head injuries during child abuse, poor nutrition, accidents such as shooting and motor vehicle accidents, and eye injuries caused by fireworks and ball games could be causes of visual impairment in the environment. The last risk factor is diseases, such as when an individual may contract measles, diabetes or meningitis, which could cause visual impairment.

Living in residence or privately

Participants were asked to indicate their accommodation on campus. The majority of participants – ten – indicated that they are staying in a university residence. Few indicated that they stay in private accommodation closer to the university campus with a short travelling distance. According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016), students with disabilities found residence placement on campus, which is near the faculty, to be convenient. Participants motivated their choice to stay in a university residence on campus, as there is limited transport for persons with disabilities in town. In agreement, Watermeyer (2013) and Watermeyer and Swartz (2008) aver that public transport in South Africa is mostly inaccessible for persons with disabilities.

The second section of the findings and discussion presents data categorised according to themes that emerged from the interviews.

Emerging themes, sub-themes and categories

From the fifteen qualitative interviews that were conducted, the three themes that emerged from the empirical study, as well as the sub-themes and categories that were identified, are presented in Table 11.2.

Theme 1: Logistical, teaching and learning challenges

In this subdivision, the experiences of visually impaired undergraduate student participants are presented.

TABLE 11.2: Themes, sub-themes and categories.

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
1. Logistical, teaching and learning challenges	1.1. Micro: Logistical challenges	a. Unable to read signage on notice boards b. Unable to see lecturer's notes displayed on a PowerPoint projector and chalkboard c. Limited accessible entrances
	1.2. Meso: Technological challenges	a. Use of computer with assistive technology b. Obtaining study and reading material in a soft copy (accessible format) c. Online assessment challenges
	1.3. Macro: Transportation challenges	a. Accessible shuttle service b. Safety issues c. Policy implementation
2. Experiences of students with visual impairments	2.1. Micro: Social participation	a. Linkage with other students b. Participating in residence activities c. Factors which hinder social participation d. Personal challenges
	2.2. Meso: Classroom experiences	a. Assessment accommodations b. Lecturers' attitude
	2.3. Macro: Policy awareness	a. Involvement in policy consultation b. Inclusive education, universal access, and design c. Participation in official student societies
3. Support available at the selected university	3.1. Micro: Individual knowledge of support structures	a. Lack of knowledge of available support b. Willingness to access support
	3.2. Meso: Awareness of services	a. University office which renders services to students with disabilities. b. University office which renders specialised services to students with visual impairments c. Faculty support
	3.3. Macro: Physical environment support	a. Mobility orientation on campus b. Facilities management support c. Funding access d. Other support

Source: Authors' own work.

Sub-theme 1: Micro level: Logistical challenges

This section presents the logistical challenges faced by participants at the micro level on campus, categorised accordingly. This is offered in the context of Categories (a) and (b).

Category (a): Unable to read signage on notice boards

In the study, most of the participants indicated that they could not read the signage on notice boards on campus. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'When I walk to class, I make use of a guide dog, as I could not see the signage on notice boards.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments experience challenges related to the physical layout of passages and the presentation of signage. It is thus evident that the findings confirm what Hurst (2009) stated: visually impaired students might find the environment inaccessible. The South African study by FOTIM (2011) also indicated that partially sighted students are unable to read the signs on the campus.

Category (b): Unable to see lecturer's notes displayed on a PowerPoint projector and chalkboard

In the study, most participants indicated that they were unable to see the lecturer's notes displayed on a PowerPoint projector and on the chalkboard. A few of the participants indicated that some days they can see lecturers' notes on the PowerPoint and the chalkboard. This was outlined by Participant M, who stated:

> 'I struggle to see the PowerPoints in class, and I sometimes struggle to see clearly on the board even if I sit in front of the class.' (Participant M, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments still experience difficulties seeing lecturers' notes in class on PowerPoint or chalkboards. It is thus evident that the findings confirm Howell's (2006, p. 168) statement that students with disabilities experience difficulties in class. Furthermore, Swart and Greyling (2011) argue that teaching technologies used in the classroom can cause problems as students with visual impairments could have difficulties in seeing the contents of transparencies or PowerPoint slides. Crous (2004) suggests that students with visual impairments should receive copies of transparencies before class discussions. Lourens (2015) emphasises

inclusive practices as a universal design for instruction (McGuire, Scott & Shaw 2006), and a universal design for learning (Hall & Stahl 2006) should be followed. By consistently implementing universal design for learning practices, lecturers should always read aloud the content written on the whiteboard or PowerPoint slides. This will enable students with visual impairments to actively engage in class discussions without having to disclose their disability to the lecturers.

Category (c): Limited accessible entrances

In the study, participants indicated that they struggle to access buildings and walk on inaccessible routes to class. This was outlined by Participant C, who stated:

> 'When I walk to class with my white cane, I make use of tactile paving. The challenge is when there is no tactile paving on the sidewalks or it is not wide enough, then I sometimes get lost. By getting lost, I sometimes end up being late for class, and miss out on valuable work done in class. There is also no tactile paving or strips on stairs to indicate the beginning of stairs.' (Participant C, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that the students with visual impairment still experience difficulties in accessing buildings when using inaccessible stairs or sidewalks without tactile paving, which makes the sidewalks inaccessible routes to use to class. Lourens (2015) indicates that there are also other physical challenges in the environment for visually impaired students; for example, the physical layout of the universities is non-inclusive. Buzzers at traffic crossings would help, not only students with visual impairments but also people who could not see well at night, those with colour blindness and students with attention deficit disorder. Hence, Shaw (2007) reflected a concept of universal design. However, some universities remained out of reach for students with disabilities, because of inaccessible physical layouts (Lourens 2015; Riddell et al. 2005). As the UNCRPD (2007) stipulation assumed, these physical barriers sometimes spilled over into other areas of life, affecting students' ability for 'full participation'. A potentially 'affected' area could be the academic performance of students with disabilities (Lourens 2015), as students with visual impairments can get lost and not be on time for classes, as confirmed by Participant C.

Sub-theme 2: Meso level: Technological challenges

Participants were asked to share their technological challenges on a meso level. Below are the identified Categories (a), (b) and (c) and the narratives presented.

Category (a): Use of computer with assistive technology

Most of the participants indicated that they find it challenging when they must access their class notes or submit assignments on the online learning management system with their assistive technology on the computer. Participants further added that they experience challenges in navigating various websites for educational purposes. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'Due to my visual impairment, I struggle to navigate the online learning management system as I have to enlarge everything, with Zoom Text software; therefore, I can't see the whole document and I miss the submit button when I have to submit an assignment. Also on the university website, the images don't have captions. When I have to enlarge the images to see it, it gets distorted. It is challenging as I miss a lot of information.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments still experience technological challenges when accessing the online learning management system to obtain reading material, submit assignments or see their marks. It is thus evident that the findings confirm what Mutanga (2018) states that assistive technology enhances access to learning for students with disabilities, but it could also exclude other students. He states that the role of assistive technologies is essential in the building of inclusive environments to eradicate injustices. In the study of Mokiwa and Phasha (2012), they indicate that JAWS (speech recognition software) for visually impaired students could not read mathematical and scientific signs or graphic material. Hence, this clearly indicates that visually impaired students do experience technological challenges when using the computer with assistive technology. This confirms the findings of Mutanga (2018).

Category (b): Obtaining study and reading material in a soft copy

In the study, most of the participants indicated that they obtained study and reading material in a soft copy which is in an accessible format to read. This was outlined by Participant C, who stated:

> 'It takes longer for me to get information (books and notes) as sighted students. Sighted students can go to the library, get resources and immediately work on assignments. My books and lecturers' notes first needs to be send to the Braille office and be converted in an accessible format for me to read. Then it comes back to me. It takes longer for me to start with assignments as I sometimes have to wait for 10 days or 14 days for my books and reading material to come back from the university's office who render specialised services to students with visual impairments.' (Participant C, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is thus evident that these findings confirm what Lourens (2015) alludes to the fact that disability units were often responsible for the conversion of academic texts, material or books into an electronic format (Sukhraj-Ely 2008). Lourens (2015) states that visually impaired students occasionally receive their course material late, owing to the time-consuming nature of conversions, which are carried out by a few staff at under-resourced disability units (Ngubane-Mokiwa 2013; Seyama 2009). This clearly indicates that visually impaired students do experience challenges when obtaining study and reading material in an alternative format. This confirms the findings of FOTIM (2011) and Lourens (2015).

Category (c): Online assessment challenges

In the study, most participants indicated that they experience challenges with undertaking online assessments. This was outlined by Participant C, who added:

> 'As a legally blind student, when writing tests and exams I need my question paper in an accessible format (soft copy) to be able to read it with assistive technology (JAWS software) on my computer. From experience, assistive technology such as JAWS software cannot read foreign languages such as Greece and Hebrew; therefore, I would need the question paper in Braille format to be able to read it. As it takes me longer to read Braille, I use concessions such as extra writing time and use of computer with assistive technology during online tests and examinations to provide my answers on computer with assistive technology (JAWS software). Without these concessions I would not be able to do academically well.' (Participant C, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is thus evident to say that these findings confirm the findings of Mullins and Preyde (2013) and Lourens (2015). The academic experiences of visually impaired students systematically entail the provision of reasonable accommodations (UNCRPD 2007; WHO & World Bank 2011). According to Mullins and Preyde (2013), these accommodations for visually impaired students were imperative for achievement in the academic terrain. Accommodations include modifications to printed information and course material, PowerPoint, teaching methods and assessment techniques. Hence, these narratives clearly indicate that visually impaired students do experience challenges during online assessments when writing tests and examinations because a variation of concessions and technical support is needed to perform well academically. As students with visual impairment experience online assessment challenges when doing assessments, they do need assistive technology on their computers to support them while undertaking assessments.

☐ Sub-theme 3: Macro level: Transportation challenges

This section presents the categories of participants' challenges on a macro level. This is offered in the context of Categories (a), (b) and (c).

☐ *Category (a): Accessible shuttle service*

Most of the participants indicated that they make use of the current shuttle service and do experience challenges when they use it, as it is not accessible for students with disabilities. This was outlined by Participant D, who stated:

> 'The new shuttles [*buses*] do have more seats in and have less space than the older buses. The older buses had less seats, but it had more space for my guide dog. If it rains and I use the shuttle, it is very difficult for my guide dog to get out as the space is very limited.' (Participant D, location unspecified, date unspecified)

As Mutanga (2017, p. 6) states, universities need to identify the needs of students with disabilities and provide according to their needs, such as a university bus to take students with disabilities to class and back to residence, as well as shopping for essential food and other needs as local taxis are reluctant to transport them (if they have a guide dog) or charge double if they travel with a wheelchair. Mutanga (2017, p. 6) also states that the transportation needs to be a universally accessible transport system for all students. The selected university in the study does have a shuttle service; however, the challenge that visually impaired students with guide dogs face is that it is not accessible for guide dogs or wheelchairs. There is not enough space in the shuttle service, and it does not travel all routes to class and back to residence on campus, especially in winter months with heavy rain. It is evident that this confirms the findings of Mutanga (2017).

☐ *Category (b): Safety issues*

In the study, most participants indicated that they experience safety issues and therefore do not participate in activities late at night. The university's current shuttle service does not drive all routes, and this makes it difficult to participate in activities or go to the library after hours as it is a safety risk. This was outlined by Participant H, who stated:

> 'I do not engage that much on campus, and I do not belong to any societies. [...] I really want to be part and engage in social activities, but I stay in flat on campus and it is very unsafe to walk in the dark at night alone. The shuttle service also does not drive all the routes, so I do not participate.' (Participant H, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is evident that the findings confirm what Hodges and Keller (1999) state that it is very challenging for visually impaired students to participate in social activities. According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016), the illegal parking of cars on pavements and in disability parking bays remains an ongoing problem for students with disabilities on campus. The renovation of buildings that result in obstructions for students in wheelchairs or for those who are blind continues to pose a barrier and a safety risk to students, as the students with visual impairments cannot see the cars which are parked on pavements or when buildings are renovated. Hence, this clearly indicates that visually impaired students experience safety challenges on campus and an accessible shuttle service that drives all the routes would make it easier for students to participate in activities after hours.

Category (c): Policy implementation

Most of the participants indicated that they consider policy implementation to be a challenge. In the study, only one participant indicated involvement in the policy implementation of students with disabilities at the selected university. At present, the Disability Access Policy (2018) is relatively new, and it is still seen as the policy of the university office that renders services to students with disabilities. The university environment needs more sensitisation and training on the new policy. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'As I was an active member of the student Society for Students with Disabilities, I am also involved with the implementation of the Disability Access Policy, as I am assisting the university office that render services to students with disabilities, as a student representative with co-facilitating at workshops for staff and students.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016, p. 234), evidence shows that universities are moving in the right direction regarding policy changes and incorporating students with disabilities as part of their diversification and inclusivity profile. Hence, this clearly indicates that visually impaired students are involved in the implementation of policies, but more can be accomplished. Lyner-Cleophas (2016) argues that the role of top management cannot be underestimated in ensuring that policies, their management and their implementation are integrated and embedded into the operations of the university. Implementation implies a process of training that would need to happen from top management and filter down to all departments and staff in a systemic way.

Theme 2: Experiences of students with visual impairments

In this subdivision, the experiences of visually impaired undergraduate students will be presented. Sub-themes and categories identified from the data are presented in accordance with the participants' responses. The sub-themes identified will also be associated with the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of the ecological systems perspective. Categories are designed according to participants' responses and will be discussed in this section.

Sub-theme 2.1 Micro level: Social participation

This section presents the categories of participants in terms of their social participation experiences at the micro level on campus. This is offered in Categories (a), (b) and (c) underneath.

Category (a): Linkage with other students

According to Lourens (2015), the social participation of persons living with disabilities is often experienced in various ways. In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they prefer to socialise more with students with disabilities, as they support each other and experience the same challenges, than with non-disabled students. This was outlined by Participant D, who stated:

> 'I socialising with my friends who are disabled on a different level. Because some of them also have a visual impairment as me. We enjoy jokes which only is funny to us visually impaired students. I feel my friend with disabilities understands me as we share the same challenges on campus. They are also very helpful with advise on how to handle situations as they experienced it as well.' (Participant D, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that the students with visual impairment would socialise more with their visually impaired friends. As peers, they share some of the same experiences as other visually impaired students and would support each other and give advice as needed. In agreement with Lourens (2015), Swart and Greyling (2011) state that students with disabilities regard practical and emotional support from peers to be very important, and the lack thereof was experienced as a barrier. Therefore, the knowledge, guidance and experience of support from older students with disabilities are considered to be valuable resources of information about services, advocacy and support.

☐ *Category (b): Participating in residence activities*

The majority of participants who reside in university residences indicated that they experience challenges in participating in residence activities owing to their visual impairment. However, few of the participants indicated that living in a residence does not present any experiences owing to their visual impairment. This was outlined by Participant I, who stated:

> 'In residence I do not participate in social events, due to my visual impairment. I do feel isolated and feel there is not a lot of stuff which I can do. I really wanted to play table tennis for my residence, I tried but it was very hard. I could not see the ball and I stopped trying.' (Participant I, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is thus evident that these findings confirm Lourens' (2015, p. 193) statement that it was often difficult for students with visual impairments to participate in all social activities in residences. Visually impaired students find it difficult to play sports, for example, soccer, in the residence, as they cannot see the ball. It was, therefore, often difficult for visually impaired students to find someone who shared their interests and abilities as these are mostly centred around inaccessible socialising activities like watching rugby matches. Hence, this clearly indicates that students with visual impairments experience difficulties in participating in activities in residences.

☐ *Category (c): Factors which hinder social participation*

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they do not participate socially in functions on campus after hours because, owing to the visual impairment, they cannot drive or do not have the extra funding to pay for a taxi or Uber as the university shuttle service does not operate after hours. This was outlined by Participant H, who stated:

> 'I do not engage that much on campus, and I do not belong to any societies. I really wants to be part and engage in social activities, but I stay in flat on campus and it is very unsafe to walk in the dark at night alone. The shuttle service also does not drive all the routes, so I do not participate As a NSFAS bursary student I also do not have extra money to get alternative transportation as a taxi go to events after hours.' (Participant H, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative indicates that students with visual impairment do feel unsafe when walking alone at night on campus, as the shuttle service does not drive all routes, which excludes them from participating in activities after hours, as confirmed by Hodges and Keller (1999), as well as by Lourens (2015). Hodges and Keller (1999) emphasised that it was very difficult for visually impaired students to participate in social activities. These events often take place after 17:00, at which time the students are already at home. In addition, it is difficult for students with visual impairment to participate in social activities because, owing to their visual impairment, they are unable to

drive and do not always have extra funds to get a taxi or alternative transportation to return to campus to attend these socialisation opportunities.

▫ *Category (d): Personal challenges*

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they experience personal challenges owing to their visual impairment. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'I have negative experiences on campus, but it has nothing to do with the university services, as it had more to do with people's attitude on campus. They would always ask me why you have a guide dog, but you don't look blind, and I am faking it. This is the one frustrating part of people on campus, as I must educate them every single moment. No, they cannot just stop me when I am walking with my guide dog, as I have places to be. I also have a life and needs to be places and they can't just stop me.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is thus evident that these findings confirm Lourens' (2015, p. 49) statement that direct psycho-emotional disablement arises from the relationships that a disabled person has with other people. The students with visual impairments often are questioned about their disability, as they do not seem to be disabled even though they are with a guide dog, and they are accused of faking it to gain concessions during tests and exams. These negative attitudes of people on campus may leave a person with a disability feeling shameful, hurt, awkward and too despondent to obtain support when needed because they are often questioned regarding their disability.

▫ Sub-theme 2.2 Meso level: Classroom experiences

In this section, the participants mostly viewed their academic experiences in the learning and physical environment on campus. They spoke largely about their experiences in the classroom, about assessment accommodations and about assistive technology they have used as support to read. The categories that were recognised during the interviews in relation to participants at meso level are presented under Categories (a), (b) and (c).

▫ *Category (a): Assessment accommodations*

The majority of the participants indicated that they make use of assessment accommodations to support them to be academically successful. Participants also reported being able to use a computer with assistive technology during tests and examinations or making use of a scribe as an alternative form of assessment. This was outlined by Participant C, who stated:

> 'I use JAWS software on computer to access my reading material, to study and write exams. I also prefer a Braille format question paper for subjects,

> for example languages as JAWS can only reads English during tests and exams.' (Participant C, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is thus evident that these findings confirm the statements of Lourens (2015, p. 109) and Swart and Greyling (2011, p. 102) that universities need to respond to the diverse needs of students with disabilities and thus provide a spectrum of accommodation and support services. As described in Chapter 3, the support and alternative arrangements referred to include the scanning of textbooks and notes in electronic format to make it easier for visually impaired students to access written material. The software, JAWS for Windows, makes it possible for blind students to work on computers, read electronic books and browse the Internet. Similarly, students with partial sight use Zoom Text to magnify any electronic information on a computer. Swart and Greyling (2011, p. 102) also emphasise that concessions would include lecturers emailing notes and PowerPoint presentations after lectures, designated seating arrangements in classrooms and providing extra writing time for assessments. During tests and examinations, enlarged question papers and papers in Braille format could be available for students who are Braille users. Hence, this clearly indicates that students with visual impairment do need a spectrum of accommodations and support services and that they feel grateful that the services are available for them to be academically successful. This confirms the findings of Crous (2004), FOTIM (2011) and Lourens (2015).

☐ *Category (b): Lecturers' attitudes*

In the study, the majority of participants felt comfortable commenting on their lecturers' attitudes towards students with visual impairments. This was outlined by Participant L, who stated:

> 'My academic life is positive but doing lab work in the Science Faculty can be very problematic with a visual impairment as I cannot see the fine millimetres. I also receive assessment accommodations, for example, extra writing time during tests and examinations and enlarge font of question papers, but when I email my lecturers to inform them, I do not always receive a very positive response in the "calmest way." It let me feel that I am a burden to request my accommodations.' (Participant L, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments do experience negative attitudes from lecturers. According to Ndeya-Ndereya and van Jaarsveldt (2015), beyond legislation and institutional policies relating to students with disabilities at South African universities, lecturers should accept responsibility for and understand accessibility and the establishment of an inclusive learning environment. Therefore, a collaborative effort among the stakeholders, such as the lecturers, support services, and students, is required to enhance inclusivity at an institution. Furthermore, it confirms what Matshedisho (2010),

Swart and Greyling (2011), Lourens (2015) and Lyner-Cleophas (2016) have to say. Where lecturers seemed unhelpful, students often relate it to the lecturer's lack of awareness regarding disability rather than to a pure unwillingness to help them.

Sub-theme 2.3 Macro level: Policy awareness

This section presents the categories of participants' policy awareness at a macro level on campus. This is offered in Categories (a), (b) and (c).

Category (a): Involvement in policy consultation

The majority of participants indicated that they were not involved in the policy consultation process and were therefore not certain what the policy entailed. Only one participant indicated involvement in the policy implementation of students with disabilities.

In March 2018, the University Council approved the current Disability Access Policy (2018). The Disability Access Policy (2018) states that:

> [*T*]he aim of the policy is to outline the principles and provisions that would guide the university on the path to becoming a universally accessible university for staff, visitors and students with disabilities. This implies striving towards disability inclusion regarding physical spaces and information in accessible forms. (n.p.)

During the revision and implementation of the policy, students, as well as staff with disabilities, were consulted to sensitise them regarding the importance of the new policy and why it is needed. This is still being undertaken by the university office, which renders services to students with disabilities on an ongoing basis. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'As I was an active member of the student Society for Students with Disabilities, I was involved in policy consultations when the policy was renewed to the Disability Access Policy. I am aware of the services of the university office who renders services to students with disabilities, and gave my input when asked, as I make use of their service on regular basis a student with a visual impairment.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments do have a voice and that their input is valued when policy revisions are carried out. However, more input is needed from students with disabilities. According to Howell (2006), the lack of participation by persons with disabilities in the decision-making process and structures within an institution has further marginalised these issues from debate and discussion in institutional planning and resource allocation (Howell & Lazarus 2003). Disability issues need to be on the transformation agenda

and should not just be an add-on after institutional planning and implementation. According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016), inclusion is fostered on campus when students want to be more involved in decision-making processes regarding support, giving life to the slogan used in the disability world of 'Nothing about us without us'. However, the institution needs to welcome input from representatives of students with disabilities, for students to become more involved.

☐ *Category (b): Inclusive education, universal access and design*

In the study, the majority of participants reflected that they were not sure what inclusive education and universal access and design were. According to Lourens, Watermeyer and Swartz (2019), Mutanga (2018), Lyner-Cleophas (2016) and Matshedisho (2007), the South African government put numerous policies in place for the inclusion of students with disabilities. However, there were still many students with disabilities who could not access universities. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'I feel there is a need for more awareness-raising on campus and educating people, for example, staff members on disability issues on campus. If I could, I would have an accessibility or universal access and design module in each faculty. Everyone should have a basic understanding of disabilities as not all visual impairment is the same.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that there needs to be more awareness-raising regarding the needs of students with visual impairments on campus. Lyner-Cleophas (2016) states that ongoing talks regarding student support are held with individual staff in faculties on an ad hoc basis but that these need to be developed into formalised and tailor-made courses with faculties taking into account their specific needs.

☐ *Category (c): Participation in official student societies*

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they were part of an official student society on campus. This was outlined by Participant D, who stated:

> 'As a person who is blind, I am very active socially by playing Goal Ball and being part of the university's para sport for persons with disabilities. I am also a member of the student Society for Students with Disabilities and was a committee member as well. For me, this is socialising on a different level, making new friends as we support each other, as we share common experiences on campus.' (Participant D, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments do have a voice and that their input is valued when policy revisions are carried out. According to Swart and Greyling (2011) and Lyner-Cleophas (2016), when there is strong advocacy on campus around

students with disabilities, this leads to a sense of belonging. The Society for Students with Disabilities exists on campus as an organisation that fosters the social sense of belonging of students with disabilities at the university. The Society for Students with Disabilities on campus also plays an advocacy and lobbying role regarding disability issues on campus; as Swart and Greyling (2011) assert, it is important for students with disabilities to express their experiences and needs instead of becoming the recipients of services planned by others merely assuming what they need.

Theme 3: Support available at the selected university

In this section, the experiences of visually impaired undergraduate students will be presented. Sub-themes and categories identified from the data are presented in accordance with the participants' responses. The sub-themes identified will also be associated with the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of the ecological systems perspective. Categories are designed according to participants' responses and will be discussed here.

Sub-theme 3.1 Micro level: Individual knowledge on support structures

This section presents the categories of participants in terms of their social participation experiences at the micro level on campus. This is offered in the context of Categories (a) and (b).

Category (a): Lack of knowledge about available support

In the study, the majority of the participants indicated that they were not aware of the support available for students with visual impairments on campus. According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016, p. 216), despite information forthcoming in the welcoming week programme of the university and the information on the university's website, students were still unsure of the kind of support available on campus and where they could go for support. This was outlined by Participant A, who stated:

> 'I do not know about the services which the university's office who render services to students with disabilities has to offer, as my parents communicated with them to gain information on how to apply for concessions such as enlarge font and extra writing time and done the application for me.' (Participant A, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that visually impaired students do have a need to gain more knowledge about the support services on campus, as confirmed by the findings of Lyner-Cleophas (2016).

It also clearly states in the narrative that, although the visually impaired students are informed about the services, their parents are the ones to make contact and gain information regarding the services and support for their children.

Category (b): Willingness to access support

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they were not willing to access support, as their parents did it on their behalf because they were not uncomfortable disclosing their visual impairment to lecturers in order to access support. Lyner-Cleophas (2016, p. 217) states that it seems that some students do not want to draw attention to themselves, which prevents them from seeking the necessary support. Psychological issues around disability identity or the developmental stage of the students could have presented micro factors within the student that prevented them from seeking help. This was outlined by Participant I, who stated:

> 'I made use of the university's unit for therapeutic services and my psychologist referred me to the university's office who render services to students with disabilities. Before that in my first year I did not make use their services, as I did not feel comfortable that others know about my visual impairment.' (Participant I, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that some of the visually impaired students are not willing to access support, but with the encouragement of support staff and more knowledge of the services, they do eventually access support to do well academically. This confirms the findings of Lyner-Cleophas (2016).

Sub-theme 3.2 Meso level: Awareness of services

This section presents the categories of participants in terms of their awareness of services at the meso level on campus. This is offered in the context of Categories (a), (b) and (c).

Category (a): University's office which renders services to students with disabilities

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they make use of the university's office, which renders services to students with disabilities, as their parents made contact; however, they were not aware of all the services rendered by the office. A minority of participants indicated that they do not make use of the services, as they are also not aware of the services rendered by the office. Mutanga (2018, p. 145) argues that the importance of disability units in the lives of students with disabilities cannot

be denied. However, caution is needed to avoid stereotyping students with disabilities and alienating them from the rest of the student population. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'As I could not see on the board in class or the PowerPoint presentations, the university office who rendered services to students with disabilities assisted me with a transformer to see on the class board. I was also assisted with a technology bursary to obtain a laptop with Zoom Text software. This made my life easier as I can work at my flat as well and do not have to walk late at night from the assistive technology room where all the computers with assistive technology are.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The following narrative from Participant J emphasises the importance of the services of the university's office, which renders services to students with disabilities:

> 'When I was a prospective student, the university's office who render services to students with disabilities, assisted me in obtaining closer residence placement to my faculty. Due to my visual impairment, I cannot drive or get my driver's licence. I also cannot walk far distances as I cannot see the cars on the roads. During my first year they also assisted me with academic support as well as extra writing time and enlarge font for tests and exams assessments for the duration of my studies.' (Participant J, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments do need the services of the university's office, which renders services to students with disabilities, to facilitate access and encourage faculties to be understanding and helpful so that they feel accepted and part of the university culture. As emphasised by Lourens (2015), university disability offices do advocate for support to students with disabilities and assist them with day-to-day challenges on campus.

Category (b): University's office which renders specialised services to students with visual impairments

The majority of participants indicated that they make use of the university's office, which renders specialised services to visually impaired students, as they and their parents were introduced to the service in their first year during the welcoming session of students with disabilities, while a minority of participants indicated that they do not make use of the services. This was outlined by Participant D, who stated:

> 'As I am legally blind, I use JAWS software (JAWS for Windows) for all my tests and examinations and all my study material are converted in an electronic format so that I can read it on computer with assistive technology. Without this assistive technology support, for example, JAWS software I will not be able to be academically successful. The university's office who renders specialised services to students with visual impairments provide me with the services.' (Participant D, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that students with visual impairments need assessment accommodations for achievement on the academic terrain, as stated by Mullins and Preyde (2013). These accommodations included adjustments to printed information/course material, PowerPoints, teaching methods and assessment techniques. Moreover, the university's office which renders specialised services to students with visual impairments, would provide all visually impaired students with electronic course material and books in the accessible format in which they would need it. A student who is blind would also receive course material in Braille format if needed. All visually impaired students would make use of concessions such as extra writing time during tests and examinations and will also receive the question paper in an accessible format. Hence, this clearly indicates that students with visual impairments need the university's office which renders specialised services to students with visual impairments, services to access learning material in order to perform well academically. This confirms the findings of Lourens (2015).

Category (c): Faculty support

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they received support from their faculty. The participants mostly indicated that they receive academic support, for example, tutor support or subject-related support in subjects like mathematics and more disability-related academic support in the faculty. This was outlined by Participant O, who stated:

> 'The university office who rendered services to students with disabilities assisted me with residence placement and liaised with my faculty upon application in relation to my needs. I have felt very accepted by the university space and community.' (Participant O, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that some of the visually impaired students need faculty support to perform well academically. These findings confirm those of Lourens (2015) and Lyner-Cleophas (2016). According to Lourens (2015), apart from technical assistance, staff of the office which renders services to students with disabilities play a mediating role as they have to communicate the needs of disabled students to faculties. Lyner-Cleophas (2016, p. 221) states that to have a staff member as a faculty coordinator presupposes insight into the teaching and learning dynamic within faculties and, thus, an understanding of the kinds of support required by peers.

Sub-theme 3.3 Macro level: Physical environment support

This section presents the categories of participants' challenges on a macro level. This is offered in the context of Categories (a), (b) and (c).

☐ *Category (a): Mobility orientation/training on campus*

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they did not make use of mobility orientation training as they did not know that the services existed. Only one participant reflected on making use of mobility orientation training on campus in its first year upon arrival and that it was very useful and necessary as the campus was a new and unfamiliar environment. This was outlined by Participant C, who stated:

> 'I had mobility orientation training on campus as I was new and did not know the campus. I also make use of a cane and prefer not to have a guide dog. I found it extremely helpful and would advise it to all future visually impaired students who are totally blind.' (Participant C, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that visually impaired students do need mobility orientation training on campus and that it needs to be introduced to more students who are blind. This confirms the findings of McBroom (1997), Vancil (1997) and Hopkins (2011), who all argued that access to mobility orientation for visually impaired students is of the utmost importance, as they need mobility orientation on campus to learn the accessible routes to class and back to their residences. They also need to learn the routes to all the support services on campus, for example, the student health services, the disability unit, the bursaries and loans division, and where all the shops and banks are.

☐ *Category (b): Facilities management support: Lifts, tactile paving and strips for stairs and signage*

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they need the sidewalks to be accessible with strips to stairs, clear signage and tactile paving on sidewalks to guide the way to walk for persons who are blind. The lifts also need to have Braille and to be voice-activated. This was outlined by Participant J, who stated:

> 'When walking to class I do not have any issues as I stay near the faculty and only cross on pedestrian crossing, but earlier in the year while going to the mall a car bumped me as I did not see it while crossing the road.' (Participant J, location unspecified, date unspecified)

The aforementioned narrative clearly indicates that some of the students with visual impairments do experience physical challenges on the sidewalks when walking to class or on campus. These statements confirm the findings of Lourens (2015) and Lyner-Cleophas (2016). Lourens (2015) indicates that there are also other physical challenges in the environment for visually impaired students, for example, the physical layout of the universities is non-inclusive. Buzzers at traffic crossings would help not only students with visual impairments but also people who could not see well at night, those with colour blindness and students with attention deficit disorder.

According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016, p. 222), there is insufficient campus-wide collaboration in addressing the inaccessible environment and buildings on campus. Faculties felt that the university's office, which renders services to students with disabilities, needed to do more to address the inaccessible environment. Yet, the university's office, which renders services to students with disabilities, felt that they do refer urgent matters to the Facilities Management division, which is mandated by the university to address all physical access challenges experienced by students and staff.

Category (c): Funding access

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they make use of financial assistance (a bursary) to cover their studies financially, as well as the very expensive assistive technology they used to be able to study. This was outlined by Participant L, who stated:

> 'The university office who renders services to students with disabilities, assisted me with a bursary to cover my study fees, accommodation, food allowance and assistive technology (laptop and Zoom software) as it assisted my parents a lot as my medical expenses per year is very high.' (Participant L, location unspecified, date unspecified)

According to Lyner-Cleophas (2016, p. 213), financial support for students with disabilities needs to be more publicised. Students are not always aware of financial support available specific to the support of students with disabilities. The participants mainly received financial support from the First Rand Foundation and from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), but they did not know that there was an NSFAS bursary specifically for students with disabilities. Hence, this narrative clearly indicates that visually impaired students need more information and assistance with the process of applying for the NSFAS bursary for students with disabilities as it covers assistive devices, for example laptops with assistive technology, which are very expensive. They also cover assistance with the care of the guide dog, for example, veterinary costs and dog food, because a guide dog is seen as an assistive device to support a visually impaired student on campus. This confirms the findings of Lyner-Cleophas (2016).

Category (d): Other support

In the study, the majority of participants indicated that they need other support, for example, tutor support, assistive technology, support in laboratories doing measurements, accommodations, for example, extra writing time and enlarged font of question papers, and mainly, an accessible shuttle service to class during the winter months when it rains. This was outlined by Participant B, who stated:

> 'I feel that for winter months students with disabilities needs an accessible shuttle service to go to class. A bigger shuttle to make space for all the guide dogs on campus, as they cannot walk in the rain, as it is hard to concentrate in the rain. You also cannot walk with a guide dog and an umbrella when the rain is pouring. An accessible shuttle for all students with disabilities would be helpful especially during winter months.' (Participant B, location unspecified, date unspecified)

It is thus evident that this statement confirms the findings of Mutanga (2017). According to Howell (2006), Lourens (2015), Lyner-Cleophas (2016) and Mutanga (2017, p. 6), institutional actions at the university level involve having to choose from two equally problematic solutions to provide equitably for students with disabilities. As Mutanga (2017, p. 6) states, universities need to identify the needs of students with disabilities and provide according to their needs, for example, a university bus to take students with disabilities shopping because local taxis will not transport them (if they have a guide dog) or will charge double if they travel with a wheelchair. Mutanga (2017, p. 6) also recommends a universally accessible transport system for all students.

Conclusion

The authors aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the logistical, teaching and learning challenges experienced by undergraduate students with visual impairments in higher education. This was explored in a selected university in higher education.

Based on the literature review and the findings of the study, it can be concluded that students with visual impairments do experience logistical, teaching and learning challenges at the university level. Considering this evidence, logistical challenges occur when visually impaired students are unable to read signage on notice boards when they are on their way to class. In addition, students with visual impairments do experience difficulties in class when they are unable to see lecturers' notes displayed on a PowerPoint projection or chalkboard.

The findings of the study on transportation challenges indicate that there is a need for an accessible shuttle transportation service that caters to the needs of all students with disabilities. Another challenge that arises is the need for visually impaired students to navigate to classes in a new environment.

Based on the research findings of this study Willems (2021), several recommendations are made. The study suggests that the university management should prioritise the allocation of a permanent ring fence budget specifically for students with disabilities. This budget can be used to provide accessible transportation services and mobility orientation

training on campus for students with visual impairments. Additionally, the study recommends that the disability support services on campus should organise more awareness-raising sessions to inform students about the available services to support those with visual impairments. Lastly, the study suggests that there should be more sensitisation training sessions on the Disability Access Policy (2018) for both staff and students in order to promote disability inclusion in the higher education setting.

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Introduction

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Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 4

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This scholarly book is the third volume in the 'Knowledge Pathing: Multi-, Inter- and Trans-Disciplining in Social Sciences' book series. Chapters were invited from contributing authors who are involved in social work practice and education, and who are dealing with the issues of poverty, inequality and vulnerability in these fields.

The focus of the book emanates from the main conference theme and sub-themes of the ASASWEI (Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions) conference held in 2021. The theme of the conference, 'Pandemics, poverty, inequality and disability: Social work in the 21st century', provided an opportunity for deep deliberation, knowledge exchange and skills development on how vulnerable communities, already on the economic margins of society due to poverty and inequality, are further marginalised during significant societal disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is these deliberations which culminated in this book. Drawing on the papers presented, the chapters promote knowledge and skills around vulnerabilities in our social context and how the social work profession is challenged to interrogate its role in addressing the persistent challenges of poverty and inequality that keep people on the peripheries of human development.

This scholarly book emphasises the dynamic challenges the world is besieged by, particularly in the 21st century. The manuscript emphasises the intersectoral collaboration of social workers and civil societies to transform the world in the delivery of services through interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary modes of operation. To equip societies, practitioners and professionals with effective strategies to deal with administrative, financial and community developmental issues, as well as developing effective assessment instruments that can benefit social work research in academic institutions. Social work is a crucial field, even though some disciplines tend to undermine its role. As the late ex-president of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, would say: 'The very right to be human is denied every day to hundreds of millions of people as a result of poverty, the unavailability of basic necessities such as food, jobs, water and shelter, health care and a healthy environment'.

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