Investigating the Impact and Attitudes of Social Workers in Assisting People with Disabilities in Alice in the Eastern Cape of South Africa

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ABSTRACT The aim of this study was to investigate the efficacy of social workers in assisting people with disabilities. The study used a qualitative research design to collect data from twenty-nine (29) participants. The findings discovered a number of serious constraints in providing services for people living with disabilities, which include: inadequate knowledge and skills of how to take good care of people living with disabilities as well as inadequate funds to support them. Family support services are important safeguarding elements for people living with disabilities as policy documents shows that they required different services from community. However, a clear link between the aims of family preservation and the needs of families caring for a relative with a disability has been established. Rural contexts in these countries may present greater barriers than urban contexts, but little is known about access issues in such contexts. There is a paucity of studies in South Africa looking at "triple vulnerability" – poverty, disability and rurality. The current study provides a local case study of these issues with the aim of informing future interventions to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of a development policy for social welfare in the form of the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA 1997) was a response to injustice service delivery in the system and embraces a social welfare system that is more just, equitable, participatory and appropriate in meeting the needs of all South Africans (Hutchinson and Korazim- Kõrösy 2017). The research was grounded on the hypotheses that, effectiveness of social workers in helping people with disabilities are failing to provide consistent standardized services for people living with disabilities. This hypothesis clearly defines that there is a noticeable continuation of negligence of people with disabilities who still faces extreme social, economic and political levels of inequality and discrimination, which is contributing to their underdevelopment, marginalization, unequal access to resources and lack of service provision (Lombard 2008).

Therefore, such continuation of negligence is a clear indicator of the failure of approaches used by social workers in helping people with disabilities. The purpose of this study strives to explore the approaches of social workers in helping people with disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province, Alice town as a case study. Regardless of the relative wealth of South Africa matched with other countries in the region. Poverty is still widespread for a large majority of the population, and universal and equitable access to healthcare is still out of reach. The rural areas are the poorest, most under-served and historically most neglected (Grut et al. 2012). In 2001, seven (7) of the ten (10) poorest municipalities in South Africa were located in the Eastern Cape (Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) 2004-2014).

According to Mutanga and Walker (2017), there is a serious lack of reliable data on the nature and prevalence of disability in South Africa. This is because, in the past, disability issues were observed primarily within a health and welfare framework. This led naturally to a failure to incorporate disability into mainstream government statistical processes. Statistics are er-

ratic in that there are various definitions of disability. Different survey technologies are used to collect information; there are negative traditional attitudes towards people with disabilities; there is also a poor service infrastructure for people with disabilities in the underdeveloped areas. Lastly, violence levels in particular areas at particular times have impeded the collection of data, affecting the overall picture.

Research Problem

The problem that prompted the study is a shortage of social workers in the rural sector which led to poor service delivery, which therefore increases people with disabilities to vulnerability and has remained excluded in social, economic and political activities (Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper 1997). According to the Social Development and Special Programmes for Alice Town, the ratio of social worker to client is estimated to one (1) social worker as to twenty-two (22) people with disabilities and the same social worker has to assist other clients such as elderly, child and family care and may also be involved in community engagements. Therefore, this led to ineffective and inefficient service delivery to people with disabilities in Alice town. Lack of tangible facilities, infrastructure and the generalization approach, undermines the developmental approach. The national policy is also seen as another obstacle. In fact, lack of facilities and infrastructure creates a vacuum between policy and people with disabilities, as demonstrated by the insufficient structures put in place to enforce and implement the national policy. This contributes to a poor environment for social workers in assisting people with disabilities. Bourke and Waite (2013) denote that remoteness and rurality magnify and contribute the disadvantages experienced by people with disabilities.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to explore the approaches of social workers in helping people living with disabilities.

Objectives of the Study

The study objectives are:
* To explore social workers' approaches in helping people with disabilities.

* To investigate the effectiveness of social workers in helping people with disabilities in Alice Town.

Research Questions

* What are the social worker's approaches in helping people with disabilities?
* Are social workers effective in helping people with disabilities?

Literature Review

South African Legal and Policy Framework

The first reference to issues related to people with disability is addressed in the White Paper for Developmental Social Welfare (1997). Makwiramiti (2011) remarked *"it is apparent that developmental social will restore the dignity of marginalised South Africans by providing them with the necessary resources and magnifying their determination so that all South Africans may be seen to add value to and benefit from the economy of the country."* Furthermore, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No 108 of 1996) protects the rights and dignity of People with disabilities. The constitution also promotes and supports the equalization of opportunities of People with Disabilities; and their integration in society; within a social model and human rights policy framework. The White Paper on disability, namely the Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS1997) extrapolates on the rights of People with Disabilities as contained in the Constitution.

White Paper on the Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997)

The White Paper for Developmental Social Welfare (1997) carries aspirations for the people with disability. Hutchinson and Korazim-Kõrösy (2017) argue that the framework is not enough but there is further need for a framework that not only shows 'what', the 'why' but also the 'how' of the approach to enhance effective implementation which will then be monitored, evaluated and managed optimally.

National Disability Policy (2010)

The policy states that the duties of the Department of Social Development (DSD) specific three programme areas when dealing with peo-

ple with disabilities; namely are Social Security programme, Social Welfare programme and Community Development programme.

Social Security Programme

The programme focuses on the management and oversight of social security or assistance in the form of financial grants to the poor, the vulnerable and those with special needs, such as People with Disabilities, who qualify for such grants.

Social Welfare Programme

The focus area of this programme is on the provision of developmental social welfare services that supports the poor, the vulnerable and those with special needs, such as People with Disabilities, in a manner that reduces poverty and vulnerability. Activities in terms of this programme area are implementing partnership with other role-players such as state funded institutions; NGO's, DPO's to mention but a few. The activities are directed at improving the ability of targeted groups and beneficiaries to address both the causes and consequences of poverty and vulnerability.

Community Development Programme

This programme area focuses on community development in order to enhance and increase the capacity of communities to respond to their own needs and improve their capacity for development. Activities in terms of this programme area are primarily in the realm of community mobilization, strength based approaches and empowerment programmes. For the purpose of the study, the document is an important policy that sets out the interventions and structure set for people with disability. Also the document can be used as a yardstick to measure whether social workers are living up to national expectations.

Social Work Education

The Social Work Indaba in Durban (2015) brought into limelight some serious challenges with respect to the training of social workers. The Media statement from Indaba reiterates that there are number of new challenges that social workers are not trained to handle. Thabede (2014) therefore challenges that *"the current curricula are Eurocentric and there is a need to develop curricula that reflects the culture of African people."* The Department of Social Development (2015) does not deny that it has partnered with the Howard University of Social Work to help in social work capacity and curriculum development.

Social work training in South Africa require student(s) to enrol or register with an accredited institution (University or College). The requirements of a bachelor's degree in social work are set out in the school calendar and they differ from one institution to another. The minimum duration of social work training in a South African institutions is four years (including practical work) and each student is expected to accumulate all the knowledge and skills within this period (Social Work Training 2010).

Disability a Human Right Development Issue

Although it has been noted that social workers have, indeed, articulated the importance of inclusion and accommodation for individuals with disabilities; however, they have largely stayed away from active involvement in the disability rights movement that has been initiated by people with disabilities and their advocates (Critelli et al. 2017). The overall critical discussion laid against the seemingly positive developments in social work is that, the profession has done little to promote disability rights; social work literature, research, and practice on disabilities have lagged behind other topical areas dealing with oppressed groups (Bamu and Van Hove 2017). A human rights and development approach to disability focuses on the removal of barriers to equal participation and the elimination of discrimination based on disability. It has been asserted that people with disabilities experiences negative attitudes resulting in violence; sexual abuse; stigmatisation; and discriminatory tendencies all these have social impacts of low self-esteem and social isolation (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS 2014). In addition to their rights, people with disabilities should have equal obligations within society and be given the necessary support to enable them to exercise their responsibilities. This equally means that society must raise its expectations of people with disabilities (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS 2014).

On the other hand however, The South African context on exclusion and oppression of people living with disabilities has been noted that the only dedicated, national population-based disability prevalence survey in South Africa was commissioned by the Department of Health and conducted by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (Black and Matos-Ala 2016). Such a survey conducted long time ago is clear evidence to the fact that people with disabilities are socially, economically and politically excluded in society. Such continuation of negligence is clear indicator of the failure of approaches used by social workers in helping people with disabilities.

Social Work Approaches to People with Disabilities

Social work draws on theories of human development and behaviour and social systems to analyze complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizational, social cultural changes (Nicholas et al. 2010). The holistic focus of social work is universal, but it is worth to note that the priorities of social work practice vary from country to country.

Remedial/ Curative Approach

According to Midgley (2013), most of what social workers do is remedial or mainstream social work. This is usually dubbed *"Casework"* or *"Clinical"* social work. This brings in the notion of pathology and treatment that have been dominant in social casework and have long been given priority. The prevention function is of less priority when using this approach. The study recognizes that remedial approaches are primary approaches that social workers rely on especially in poor resource settings in particular rural Alice town. It is essentially for this study to assess the remedial approach as a means of helping people with disability in rural areas.

Theoretical Perspective

The study used the following theories to understand various approaches used by social workers.

Social Model to Disability

The social model of disability was adopted by the South African government. It involves nothing more or less fundamental than a switch away from focusing on the physical limitations of particular individuals to the way the physical and social environment impose limitations upon certain categories of people. Barnes (2017) argues that social model perspective is not a denial of the importance or value of appropriate individually based interventions, whether they are medically, rehabilitative, educational or employment based.

The social model theory will assist this study because it helps understand disability issues in macro terms. This will have an advantage of understanding the environment that they are in and this would assist this study to understand the social problems that is faced by the people with disability thereby helping to assess the interventions used by social workers. However the downfall of this theory is that it ignores the micro experiences of people with disabilities. This can affect the study by not being qualitative enough leading to generalization of problems faced by people with disability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was conducted in Alice which is a town in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study used qualitative research design for collecting data. The target population of the study include: social workers at the Department of Social Development and people living with disabilities in Alice. The total number of social workers in Alice was twenty-three (23) and the total number of people living with disability was 662 as at 2014.

Sample and Sample Technique

With reference to the application of qualitative method, the study used purposive sampling to select five (5) social workers and twenty-four (24) people with disabilities to participate in the exploration. In this study, the judgments of researchers have been based on people with disabilities. Thus, from 10 years of age to 65+ years people living with disability were selected to participate in the study. In addition, this sampling technique was also used to select social workers based on their areas of specialty for example those who focus on children, disability and the elderly.

Instrument

The study used in-depth interviews to collect data from the target population of twenty-nine (29) participants. The participants that were interviewed comprised of five (5) social workers from the Department of Social Development and twenty-four (24) people living with disabilities in Alice.

Data Analysis

The study used themes in analysing all the collected data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study aims to explore the approaches of social workers in helping people with disabilities particularly in Alice in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The findings were presented according to themes. Findings and their discussions are presented as follows.

Biographical Presentation of People with Disabilities and Social Workers

Race

All twenty-nine (29) participants were black African individuals and they speak isiXhosa has their home language.

Unit/Location

The findings showed that 29 participants have a place to stay, either at a unit or an institution they are studying.

Gender

Thirteen (13) of the 29 participants were males and the other sixteen (16) participants were all females.

Age

Out of the 29 participants the age range for females was from nineteen (19) years up to seventy one (71), while males range from twenty-five (25) up to seventy-two (72).

Occupation

Only four (4) female participants were found to be in the category of studying and were iden-tified as students as indicated above. Only three (3) male participants were having an average academic level as they employed either as manager, till operator or driver.

Out of the thirteen (13) male participants, the findings shows that ten (10) were unemployed and only three (3) were employed. Females dominated in the teaching field.

Grants

Fifteen (15) participants out of 29 were receiving grants as a way to cater for their wellbeing. Only eighteen (18) participants indicated that they were not receiving any form of grant.

Organization

The five (5) participants were selected from five (5) different organizations. All of the selected organizations are under the Department of Social Development.

Experience

The majority of the participants have an experience that ranges from 3 years to 10 years practicing social work. All of the participants work with people with disabilities. Three (3) of them have an experience of 10 years in social work service and the two (2) had experience less than 5 years. Three (3) of the participants are qualified social workers registered with SAC-SSP and are in positions that expose them directly to service people with disabilities. Two (2) of the participants are Auxiliary social workers who are based at the department of social services in Alice offices.

Area of Specialization

All five (5) participants deal directly with people with disabilities. The majority also assist children and elderly clientele.

Gender

Social worker participants comprised of three (3) females and two (2) males.

Race

Based on the race of the participants the majority were black. Five (5) social workers who

participated in the study were all Xhosa speaking as their first language.

University Qualification

Four (4) social worker participants hold a degree in social work each obtained from various South African universities and one (1) hold a diploma in social work.

Specialized Experience

In this study out of the five (5) participants working under the Department of Social Development were offered questionnaires to indicate their specialized experience. Out of the five (5) participants; two (2) indicated that they have an experience of more than 10 years in service and the other two (2) have 5 years' experience and one (1) is an auxiliary social worker with 3 years of service. In the study participants mentioned different ideas with regards to their experiences in the field of social work. Some participants expressed that being in the field of social work has brought about the required transformation in communities. While others regard social work as a discipline with the thought that there is room for social work and scope be expanded and further developed. In fact, all participants, however, acknowledged that their work is associated with some monotonous duties that almost equal to a routine.

The findings reveal that there is no clear specialized social work practice in Alice town. The lack of clarity with regards to specialized social work practice has been identified from the variety of duties performed by social workers in Alice. Social workers in Alice have been found to be dealing with issues such as grants, referrals, awareness campaigns. Lack of social workers with special skills in helping people with disabilities in Alice leads to high caseloads.

Ethics and Values as the Core of Social Work Approaches

The findings show that methods used by social workers in Alice town are dominated by remedial approach in helping people with disabilities. According to the study it can be summarized out that social workers were involved mainly in assessment of grants, referrals, awareness campaigns, support groups, and counselling of which all are remedial practice. Therefore the study can put it in summary that the implementation of social work approaches is paramount and should be put into consideration.

Parallel Education

The findings reveals that it is justifiable to point out that social work education in South Africa is relevant and importantly considering the vulnerabilities faced by people with disabilities. Most importantly, the study also highlights that although social work education offered is relevant, there is a need to expand well enough to be able to equip learners with expertise.

Furthermore, the study has identified the shortage of social workers in the field of practice as another factor being faced by Alice town. Many of the units have been found to be serviced by a single social worker who visits the units once per month resulting in poor service provision or none at all. Furthermore, the study summarized that high caseloads and shortage of social workers specifically in the rural areas lead to a situation where social workers only practice one method of social work or engage in one type of service being rendered.

Validity of the White Paper

The finding shows that even though participants acknowledged the validity of the White Paper however, participants provided conflicting statements based on personal knowledge and their thinking as to what constitute a White Paper of 1997. In summation, it was clear in the statements given by participants that even though the White Paper is valid, however it lacked clarity resulting in the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the document by various stakeholders, regarding what actually constitutes developmental social services that are presented in the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997. Therefore, the study can summarize that the lack of clarity in policies or developmental framework equals to poor service delivery.

Theme One: Lack of Resources

The majority of the participants revealed that lack of resources such as financial resources and facility resources are some of the major challenges facing them in Alice. Lack of financial

resources and lack of facilities are subthemes unveiled by this study.

Financial Resources

Participant C said that:

"Ever since I become a worker, transport system has always been a challenge for us. We are really pleading with the government to put in place a budget for our department, I mean they do budget but it is not enough for us to execute effectively and efficiently our duties."

Participant D said that:

"I my case traditional and religious beliefs are detrimental to social work progress simply because there are other psychological problems that cannot be resolved by social work such problems include ukhutwasa, such if not resolved may lead to a permanent disability conditions."

Participant E said that:

"Social work as a discipline lack proper funding that handicap efficiency and efficacy."

The Other Challenges Facing the Social Workers

The participants were asked about the other challenges they are currently facing in delivering services to people with disabilities in Alice town. Out of the 5 social workers, all of their responses included the lack of rehabilitation centres in the department of social development. The lack of financial resources according to the social workers limits the full implementation of the approaches of social workers to all clients including those with disabilities. On the other hand, two (2) of the social workers shared that physical resources were also a challenge for them in rural Alice town. The lack of facilities such as rehabilitation centres, vocational training schools or services was also a limiting factor to endorse the full extent of their approaches. Four (4) social workers expressed that transport was their greatest challenge to do home visits and to visit the Units where people with disabilities are found. One (1) of the social workers expressed his challenges in the field of social work associated with the origin of social work. Such a participant argued that it is difficult to fit social work as a profession into religious and traditional way of doing. As such the participant indicated believes as major setback that limits social work.

Furthermore, all social workers acknowledged that a lack of funding is a major challenge that is faced by the DSD and the government.

Lack of Facilities

It is clear to note in these findings that social workers in Alice are faced with several challenges as any other social workers in South Africa. Vocational training institutions, transport systems, rehabilitation centres and disability offices have been pointed as the mere challenges faced in the town of Alice. Below is some of the sentiment shared be participants regarding lack of physical facilities for helping people with disabilities.

Participant E Lamented that:

"There are no rehabilitation centres for people with disabilities in Alice. This makes it difficult for social workers to help people with disability attain immediate recovery, physic therapies to help build strength and capacities for self-functioning."

Participant C said:

"In Alice town there are no ready ortho-paedics facilities that help social workers enable people with disability to get wheel chairs, clutches, artificial leg repairs. Lack of the specialized professionals' in Alice limits and tends to undermine efficiency of social work approaches towards people with disabilities."

Assessment of the findings above justify that there are several factors that challenges the success of social work approaches in helping people with disabilities in Alice Town. The lack of facilities inevitably renders approaches of social work incompetent and less comprehensive. The lack of resources such as facilities can be blamed on the government's poor implementation of policies. The lack of structures, resources and facilities in rural areas in South Africa particularly Alice town affects the quality of service delivery consequently affecting other parts of the uncoordinated system. Hence, social work approaches are often sabotaged by such environmental factors.

Previous research by Vance (2017) also found out that "physical resources" is one primary challenge faced by social workers in rural areas. Then, high caseloads, a shortage of staff and multiple role responsibilities as some of the challenges with which they are confronted while practicing social work in rural areas. In the Sunday

Times (28 October 2007: 13), Govender (2007), reports the views of the Public Servants Association, which represents government social workers, that social workers have to manage with caseloads ranging from 600 to 3000 in extreme cases, while their British colleagues carry a caseload of only between 13 to 20 cases. In this newspaper article the shortage of social workers in South Africa is estimated at 50 000.

Social work is incredibly complex and demanding, but what some social workers feel they need is more time, resources and post-qualifying support to develop their skills and knowledge. On the other hand, Kinman and Grant (2011) points out that failing of recruitment, facilities and intellectual calibre are not the real problems. The lack of continuing professional development in a climate of increasing impoverishment of people with disabilities implies that there is always going to be shortage of resources but this shortage in resources should not be over amplifies to umbrella the shortages of social work administration in South Africa, lack in direction and constant update in scope of practice of social work is the main problem.

Furthermore, Bourke and Waite (2013) clarifies that the rural areas are the poorest, most under-served and historically most neglected. Also, Grut et al. (2012) asserts "that poor people with disabilities who live in poor rural societies experience unique problems in accessing health services." In addition, "their situation is influenced by multiple factors which unfold and interplay throughout the person's life course." The difficulties do not only affect the person with a disability and his or her family, but also impact on the relevant care unit. The barriers are rooted in a life in poverty, upheld and maintained by poverty-reinforcing social forces of the past and the present, and reinforced by the lack of the person's perspective of the health services.

Theme Two: Social Work as a Helping Profession

The findings show that majority of participants disagreed that social work assistance is helpful in their lifestyle. They stressed that social workers assistance is helpful. Based on the findings people with disabilities pointed out that social work is helpful to people with disabilities. More than half of the participants saw social work processes as unpopular as opposed mi-

nority concurred. One can argue that social workers need to aim attract popularity by providing satisfactory help. People with disabilities in Alice are not satisfied with social workers approaches used by social workers thereby; professional credibility of social workers leaves a lot to be desired in terms of effectiveness of social work delivery systems in rural areas. The findings expressed by social workers above are similar to the sentiments expressed by Elder-Woodward (2016) writings in the Scottish Development Centre which reported that the Welfare state has led to the creation of passive recipients of care and benefits meted out by a heavyweight bureaucracy according to some unformulated notion of "need". Elder-Woodward laid strong criticisms against professionals within bureaucracies who have been seen as deciding-what is "need"; who is in "need"; how much "need" should be met and the manner in which that need should be met. One can therefore argue that social workers have grown unsatisfied with social work service providers because of various factors mentioned above.

Nevertheless, the study would be academic injustice if it should conclude that social workers assistance is less helpful. The lack of resources is the major stumbling block that hinders the activities of social workers. Most of the problems are beyond their control. In the same vein, Townsend et al. (2017), state that "lack of funding" is the main challenge confronted by social workers in rural areas followed by, high caseloads, a shortage of staff and multiple role responsibilities as some of the challenges with which they are confronted while practicing social work in rural areas. In a nutshell, therefore, there a many factors that hinder social workers approaches in helping people with disabilities in South Africa Eastern cape in Alice town. Social workers approach to disability should not be ruled ineffective but requires partnership from various stakeholders as the government, non-governmental organisations and individuals towards rural areas especially towards vulnerable people with disabilities.

Barriers Faced by Social Workers in Providing Quality Services to People with Disabilities

Lack of Resources

The study identified two forms of resources that are lacking in Alice town namely facilities

such as rehabilitation centres, vocational training schools and funding. This can be summarized in the study as limiting factors to endorse the full extent of social work approaches in helping people with disabilities. Findings of the study in a nut shell noted that the absence of facilities for people with disabilities is a result of a lack of funding. To sum up it all funding from the government is not enough to cover fully the expenses of people living with disabilities. The study observed that Non-Governmental Organizations are also available to provide the funding, however, the funding provided is not enough to meet demand, and hence people with disabilities have remained a disadvantaged population in Alice town. It has been found out that lack of facilities amount to poor service delivery.

The study identified the lack of continuing professional development in an increasing impoverishment environment. Secondly, shortage in resources should not be over simplified to umbrella the shortages of social work administration in South Africa. On the other hand, lack in direction and constant update in scope of practice of social work according to the study is the main problem. The study also find out that lack of funding may lead to overcrowded living conditions and lack facilities enormous stresses on children with disabilities and their families.

Misconceptions

The finding shows that social work is not well promoted amongst people with disabilities considering that people with disabilities clearly showed that they have less knowledge of what social worker is. Based on the in-depth interview that was done with people with disabilities in Alice it can be summarized the people with disabilities have no clear information with regards to social workers, rather their knowledge of social work is infested with misconception. Furthermore, it can be summed up that most participants believed that Social workers are difficult when assessing people with disabilities for grants. Such a scenario throws more light on to the notion of shortage of social workers generally in the country and particularly in Alice. Therefore, a shortage of social workers indirectly leads to ineffective and inefficient service delivery which automatically has a negative impact on people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that high caseloads and shortage of social workers specifically in the rural areas leads to a situation where social workers only practice one method of social work or engage in one type of service being rendered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government, non-governmental organizations and other involved stakeholders should be willing to outsource funding from donors to strengthen their financial muscle such that they will be able to deal with prevailing conditions. Progress has to be made with regard to roles for government and civil society.
- Existing policies should be well implemented before adopting new policies in order to promote human dignity. Insight into the socio-economic and political context and thus the professional mandate for developmental social welfare will inevitably prepare and activate social workers for engagement in policy issues, challenging the micro and macro divide in both theory and practice, influencing and lobbying of government, as well as in challenging the allocation of resources and the distribution of social benefits.
- Wide tarred road networks should be well developed to allow effective and efficient provision of services to the rural sector to do away with discriminatory tendencies faced by people with disabilities.

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