

Social Exclusion of People with Disabilities in Relation to Social Work Education in Eastern Cape

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ABSTRACT The social exclusion of people with disabilities in South Africa has its own manifestations intensified by the lack of resources and a poor service infrastructure. The study aimed to investigate the causes of social exclusion of people with disabilities in relation to social work education in Alice. The study used a triangulation (both quantitative and qualitative) research design, which involved the use of questionnaires and interviews in collecting the data. Findings of the study reveal social work practice as associated with monotonous duties or an inescapable boring work routine. The study concluded that those social policies that government adopted to help people with disabilities have not been strictly and effectively adhered to. The study recommended that there is a need to equip more social workers with local based skills and knowledge to be able to professionally practice.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the struggle for justice and equal human rights, there is an unending significant search for an identity and a sense of belonging by persons with disabilities. Contextually, the complexities surrounding the struggle of people with disabilities hitches on a lack of agreement on definitions and little internationally comparable information on the incidence, distribution and trends of disability (White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WPRPD) (2015). There is a noteworthy continued vulnerability of persons with disabilities, particularly children with disabilities residing in rural villages of South Africa (WPRPD 2015). Significantly, it goes without saying that South Africa's level of human development does not reflect its natural wealth and policy implementation (South Africa and National Planning Commission 2011).

The paper begins with a problem statement followed by research objectives. Sequentially, a literature review on the South African social and geopolitical context with a particular attention on the exclusion of disable people and the contribution of social work profession to social protection of people with disabilities proceeded. Subsequently, the segment over viewing the research methods adopted for the study and the

presentation of the research findings. Finally, the researchers present findings in discussions, provide recommendations and formulate the conclusions.

Problem Statement

The social exclusion, among others is a vulnerable challenge faced by people with disabilities so eminent and profoundly significant, despite South Africa acknowledging that nobody should be above the law and denied of their rights to basic opportunities/benefits (Republic of South Africa 1996). Undeniably, in April 2013, the South African Baseline Country Report to United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) reported the existence of systemic inequalities and violations of rights experienced by people with disabilities and their families (Women Children and People with Disabilities 2013). The report indicated the weaknesses in the governance policies as the causes among others of social exclusion of people with disabilities. Consequently, the report findings correlate with the World Report 1 on disability of 2011 combined with the World Health Organisation (WHO) report. The report indicated that people with disabilities do not have equal access to health care, education, and

employment opportunities. Moreover, the report shows people with disabilities were not receiving the disability-related services they require, and instead, they experience exclusion from everyday life activities (World Health Organisation 2011). Alongside social exclusion, the lack of resources, unpleasant mind-set towards vulnerable people and inadequate service delivery pose major challenges to disability emancipation. There is need therefore, to reinforce efforts to implement social exclusion of people with disabilities.

Objectives of the Study

- The objectives of the present study are:
- ♦ To investigate the causes of social exclusion of people with disabilities in relation to social work education in Alice in the Eastern Cape.
 - ♦ To ascertain the effectiveness of social work profession to serving disabled people.

Literature Review

The democratic government in South Africa realised the historically created and the naturally emanated vulnerable barriers confronted by disable people, and thus, the government devised key policy instruments as a paradigm shift to better the lives of people with disabilities. Initially, this country aligned itself with disability as an evolving concept (WPRPD 2015). Constitutionally, South Africa acknowledges that nobody should be above law and be denied of their rights to basic opportunities/benefits (Republic of South Africa 1996). Therefore, people with disabilities are equal before the law and have a right to equal protection and benefit of the law.

Act Number 106 of 1996, ensures an environment conducive to the full and equal participation of men, women and children with disabilities in society, including equal access to opportunities, accessibility and the protection of the inherent dignity of the person (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In the same way, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA), Act 4 of 2000, gives effect to the Bill of Rights, which prohibits unfair discrimination. Thus, the Bill of Rights states

that everyone has the constitutional dignity to have his or her dignity respected and protected. South Africa outlaws discrimination based on disability and guarantees the right to equality for persons with disabilities (WPRPD 2015).

Additionally, the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act, Act 5 of 2000, recognises the economic rights of persons with disabilities to engage in entrepreneurial activities that promote self-reliance and independent living. Moreover, South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its Optional Protocol without reservation in 2007. Notably, this committed the South African government to respect and implement the rights of persons with disabilities (Department of Social Development 2015). Accordingly, South Africa conceptualised a framework for social protection embedded in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, under Section 27 recognising social security as a basic human right (Department of Social Development 2015).

Thus, the government introduced protective measures to care for the lives and reduce levels of deprivation. While the preventive measures acted as an economic stabiliser seeking to help people avoid falling in deeper poverty and reduce vulnerability (Department of Social Development 2015). Promotion measures sought to enhance the capabilities of individuals, communities and institutions to participate in all spheres of activity, whereas transformative measures tackle inequalities and vulnerabilities through changes in policies, laws, budgetary allocations, and distributive measures (Department of Social Development 2015). The developmental and generative measures increase consumption patterns of the poor, promoting local economic development and enabling poor people to access economic and social opportunities (Department of Social Development 2015).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used both quantitative and qualitative research designs in order to collect the data from the social workers professionals and the people living with disabilities in Alice. There-

fore, researchers used an exploratory research design to acquire insights on the investigation (Mofokeng and Green 2017). Consecutively, researchers chose a descriptive research design to offer an examination and explanation on youth vulnerability (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

Population

The population of this study comprised of the social workers professionals and people with disabilities from 10 to 65+ years.

Sampling Procedure and Techniques

Twenty-nine (29) disabled people and five (5) social workers dealing with disabled children elderly were chosen purposively for the study. Researchers used purposive sampling technique to select participants.

Research Instruments

The in-depth interviews were conducted for the purpose of obtaining information from the twenty-nine (29) people with disabilities and the semi-structured questionnaires to gather information from the five (5) social workers in Alice.

Data Collection Process

The study was cross-sectional in nature, so, researchers collected data at one stage in time between August and October of 2015. Researchers gathered data in the English language, and used interviewing communication techniques including minimal verbal responses, paraphrasing, clarification, reflection, listening, and probing as espoused by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009).

Data Analysis

All the information gathered for the purpose of analysis was done thematically. Quantitatively, the language of statistical relationships by variables into numerical categorical data was used. Researchers used moderate and advanced analytical data methods to analyse and offer an understanding of statistical findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitatively, the researchers presented the findings according to themes that emerged, and researchers used numerical figure to present quantitative data.

Biographical Details of the Disabled People and Social Workers

The researchers considered the academic level, area of specialisation, gender, grants and race, unit/location and work experience of participants as the most important characteristics that might require research scrutiny. Therefore, researchers present the biographical characteristics as follows:

Academic Level

The findings indicate that out of thirty-four (34) participants, four (4) participants from different universities in South Africa had a degree in social work, while one had a diploma. The academic level of participants indicated educational disparity that absolutely mirrors the social exclusion experienced by disabled people in the study area. Certainly, this finding reflects discriminatory tendencies against people with disabilities so eminent in the South African communities. Similarly, the Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper 2009 indicated that many disabled adults were not educated and this has negatively impacted their disabled children (Government of South Africa 2009). In addition, the findings also show that most of the disabled people in the country suffer social exclusion from the conventional learning environment (Government of South Africa 2009). In other words, there is clear social elimination of disabled people from accessing fundamental educational privileges (Government of South Africa 2009).

Furthermore, the Disability Rights Policy of the Gauteng Provincial Government in 2010 stated that, about thirty percent (30%) of people with disabilities had no education as compared to thirteen percent (13%) of the able-bodied population (Gauteng Provincial Government 2010). According to the Gauteng Provincial Government (2010), people with disabilities, who had

post-secondary education had the lowest prevalence at only three percent (3%) compared to those who had no schooling at only ten percent (10, 5%), primary level five percent (5%) and secondary level of education four percent (4%). Clearly, this shows that these disabled people could not have access to job opportunities due to low skills or poor education background.

Area of Specialisation

It must be mentioned that social workers help disabled people, and nearly every one of them indicated that they assist children and elderly clientele. The study indicates that out of thirty-four participants, fifteen (15) were male participants, only five (5) male participants were formally employed and ten (10) male participants were unemployed. Out of the thirty-four participants, nineteen (19) were female participants and only seven (7) female participants were formally employed, while four (4) female participants were students studying in tertiary education, and eight (8) female participants were not employed.

Gender of Participants

The study reflects a gender-skewed balance dominated by female participants. This finding may definitely mirror the desire by researchers to promote the Affirmative Action and other government initiatives meant to empower the historically disadvantaged women. Absolutely this finding may reflect the ineffectiveness of support structures available to assist women with disabilities.

The Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper 2009 noted that the South African society is still very patriarchal and discriminatory with women still typically viewed as second class citizens, subservient to men and in need of protection (Government of South Africa 2009). Women's social roles are defined through motherhood and homemaking, obviously, placing the disabled women on extreme oppression as compared to non-disabled women (Government of South Africa 2009).

In addition, women with disabilities experience more discrimination from being unable to live up to the demanding ideals for womanhood imposed by society (Gauteng Provincial Gov-

ernment 2010). According to the Disability Rights Policy of the Gauteng Provincial Government of 2010, only twenty-four percent (24%) of women with disabilities were employed compared to thirty-eight percent (38%) of able bodied women (Gauteng Provincial Government 2010). Contextually, women with disabilities' circumstances need social consideration. In fact, it is clear that the vocal and critical women's movements defending the advancement of women has unfortunately, marginalised women with disabilities (Gauteng Provincial Government 2010).

Grant Receiving Participants

Out of the study population of thirty-four (34) participants, only fifteen (15) participants were receiving government social disability grants to cater for their wellbeing, while nineteen (19) received nothing.

Race of Participants

Findings show that all thirty-four (34) participants were of black African origin speaking isiXhosa.

Unit/Location

Researchers considered shelter as an important component to find out the magnitude of social exclusion experienced by disabled people. Participants indicated that they had shelter at an institution where they were studying. However, participants indicated that although they had a shelter, the facilities were not user friendly to people with disabilities. This directly connects with the Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper in 2009, which documented that more than eighty percent (80%) black disabled children live in less privileged homes with access to poor medical care and opportunities (Government of South Africa 2009).

Same sentiments shared by the UNICEF in 2012 stated that the impact of inadequate living conditions is particularly negative for children with disabilities. UNICEF (2012) indicates that there is discrimination against disabled kids, in the sense that they have often been denied access to their basic rights such as good houses and water among others in the country. Most

likely, children with disabilities live in traditional dwellings and informal settlements (UNICEF 2012). In addition, it is interesting to point out that most of these disabled kids live with their families in overcrowded areas and outside toilets (UNICEF 2012). Notably, this kind of lifestyle has brought most of the disabled kids to the level of neglect and ignorance among others in the societies (African Child Policy Forum 2011).

Work Experience of Participants

Findings reveal that participants had working experience ranging from three (3) to ten (10) years. Findings show that participants were professionals and worked with disabled people. The study shows that only two (2) participants worked as auxiliary social workers.

Theme 1: Social Work Roles

Findings indicated that participants shared a common view that social work practice is an uninteresting practice and has some relationships with tedious responsibilities that is difficult to escape. Participants viewed their duties as only limited to providing grants to children, helping people with disabilities and office work. Undeniably, this finding mirrors the enrolment criteria based on bursary funding efforts, and this could mean that one becomes a social worker out of his or her own choice. This finding contradicts the SACSSP code of ethics. Participants viewed their duties as only limited to caseloads in providing grants to children and people with disability and administration. Unquestionably, the findings reflect the sentiments that social work practitioners were definitely practicing just because they needed a job.

This finding could be reflecting a lack of passion driven specialised social work practice in Alice town. Positively, this finding mirrors the enrolment and selection criteria of social work students based on bursary funding efforts. These findings may suggest that students only become social workers through the motivation of funding, and not necessarily motivated by their personal career choices. This finding without doubt reflects the National Development Plan's motive to expand the social welfare ser-

vices with more education and training for social work practitioners through academic funding without developing identified talents and careers (National Planning Commission 2011).

This finding echoes Sadler et al.'s (2009) articulation on a new philosophy that social workers and doctors should not treat disability as a health and welfare issue, but as a human rights and development issue (Sadler et al. 2009). Sadler et al. (2009) went on to argue that the medical model of disability was inappropriate and that doctors and social workers should not run the lives of people with disabilities (Sadler et al. 2009). Therefore, one can note that the lack of consistency in the implementation of policies possibly equals to poor service delivery and such are clear gaps in social work in need of expansion. More importantly, in Mdlankomo et al.'s (2017) social work participants indicated that they make referrals, grants, counselling, and awareness campaigns as the means to assist disable people.

The findings revealed that there are inadequate social worker professionals in relation to the number of clients and this is clearly another factor facing disabled people particularly in Alice town. Following the verdict of research findings, the Social Work Indaba in Durban of 2015 deliberated much on serious challenges concerning the training of social workers.

Nicholas et al. (2010) explain that university institutions train social workers to implement the developmental social welfare policies and programmes based on specific social work approaches such as values, principles and ethics that uphold the social work profession. Approaches of social workers are seen as a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation (Nicholas et al. 2010).

Social work approaches involve local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context such as values, principles and ethics of the profession that recognise the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences (Nicholas et al. 2010). Regrettably, the study findings confirm that a lack of experienced and qualified social workers in rural Alice town creates an ugly dent regarding service delivery for

vulnerable people with disabilities. More so, most social workers have more than one area of specialisation thereby increasing the number of caseloads. Concisely, the parallel social work education cannot provide social work students with enough knowledge on issues relating to disability. The study findings indicate that the relevancy and effectiveness of social workers approach are shrouded in obscurity.

Theme 2: Ethics of Social Work

The study grouped each of the social work duties that participants mentioned into major social work approaches. Consequently, conventionally, the study indicates that casework approaches are hopelessly inadequate to dealing with the deeper problems underlying the symptomatic manifestations of people with disabilities deprivation because of a lack in ethics and values. The study shows that a narrow casework training offered no alternative forms of intervention that might effectively address social problems available because social workers lacked appropriate professional education as well as the practical experience to make a meaningful contribution (Midgley 1997).

The Department of Social Development (DSD) (2015) does not deny that it collaborated with the Howard University of Social Work to help in social work capacity and curriculum development. Thus, social policy researchers argued that the introduction of social work training along the developmental approach to welfare was in response to the country's unique history of inequality and the violation of human rights due to apartheid policies (Nicholas et al. 2010). Such policies based on racial grounds definitely resulted in extreme inequalities in service delivery and compromising the rights of the poor particularly people with disabilities (Midgley 1997).

Theme 3: Social Work Education

According to the findings, participants shared contrasting views concerning social work education in South Africa. On one extreme, are those viewing social work education offered currently in South African universities as appropriate and adequate to provide the required

social transformation in the lives of disabled people. On the other hand, some participants highly questioned the relevance of social work education and practice arguing that social work is not necessarily adequate enough since the currently trained social workers are failing to bring about the required change in the lives of people with disabilities as anticipated. Thus, participants argued in their views as follows:

'...Social work education is not necessarily adequate to the present day considering a wide range of problems arising with the advancement of societies. Students need to train at least for 2 years practically in the field before they are fully employed...'

'...Of course I am an auxiliary social worker but honestly to this day I am asking myself the relevance of social work in the African context. Social work is a borrowed phenomenon that is not informed by the African problems; rather to me I see it as a discipline developed to deal with western kind of problems...'

'...In my view social work is crucial in our society, hence there is need to train more social workers to help in dealing with problems that we are facing in our communities. We also need to borrow ideas from foreign based organisations to expand the scope of our problem solving approach...'

'...Social work education is adequate and relevant in our life time, however there is need to bridge foreign based knowledge with indigenous knowledge in order to expand and strengthen our helping process...'

According to the findings, participants found it difficult to relate theory education to social work practices. Undeniably, this finding reflects that social worker training does not provide enough and relevant education to deal with unique problems and challenges in society. Unquestionably, this finding indicates the need for social work educational problem responsive transformation. The report from Indaba restates that social workers do not receive adequate training to handle societal challenges associated to people with disabilities (Mdlankomo et al. 2017).

Consequently, this finding could reflect a lack of supervision and this definitely mirrors the reality that some rural social workers have no immediate colleagues available with whom to discuss practice matters and to bounce off deci-

sions taken in respect of clients. Unfortunately, this may certainly cause rural social workers to engage with people outside of the work situations leading to a breach of confidentiality (Pugh 2007; Pugh and Cheers 2010.). In view of the need for supervision, Green (2003) recommends that, rural social workers must have agency support, adequate supervision and proper training to ensure they can practice competently, professionally and securely in rural and remote locations.

Theme 4: Scope of Practice

Participants stated that social work professionals need to revisit the basics and standardised way of practicing the profession to realise the formulation and implementation of simple policies, readjustment of already existing policies, and making sure, the current policies are functionally effective. The following are views from participants.

'...Professionals should go back to the drawing board and inquire from the original road-map the way forward to social work...'

'...In this century more researches are paramount to bring about relevant answers to specific problems since research produces empirical data...'

Findings show that social workers were failing to bring about the required social changes in the lives of people with disabilities. Unquestionably findings suggest that the lack of skills and expertise can help in developing the lives of people with disabilities. The findings show a possible lack of professionalism and complicated way of service delivery. Positively this reflects the increasing need of research and social workers to continuously stay current with approaches and techniques rather than rely on outdated approaches.

Theme 5: Misconception

Participants did not know a social worker and lacked information about social workers. They did not know where to find a social worker and if they happened to know the social worker, the frequency of meetings was at a minimum. Participants had knowledge of a social worker simply assessing people for grants. Hence, the duties of social workers amongst people with disabili-

ties are unrecognisable. The following are some of the responses shared by participants.

'...They help us get grants...'

'...What do they do...?'

'...I know a social worker but have no idea what type of services they offer...services have not been adequately marketed...'

'...There are several things that we disabled face here at Melanie Old Age Centre but social workers are not here to provide solutions. Also in our homes and communities, we are at a disadvantage, especially end of month when we have to travel to town to buy. My wheel chair makes it hard. Social workers are not helping us much there...'

'...They are not fair to me because until now they don't want to recommend the disability grant to me. They say I was injured at work and received compensation therefore, I do not qualify but I am unemployed and my compensation was little and had no pension...'

Findings indicate confusion among people with disabilities about social workers. Definitely, the qualities exhibited by social workers during service delivery do not reflect their social work titles and expectations of the profession.

Theme 6: Social Exclusion

Findings show that participants listed a series of challenges mainly dominated by systematic discriminatory tendencies. The lack of immediate support system in the family structures according to people with disabilities predisposes them to family abuse of their grants by family members and community stigma.

'...Living with a disability is a very painful experience; since everything upon you is blamed on your family history and your condition is secretly believed to be a punishment from the Gods and a form of a payback...'

'...My sister's children steal my money and they buy alcohol with my money...'

Participants expressed their concern on the form of societal discrimination they received, which is partly traditional in nature. Many of the old participants mentioned abuse of funds by their family members, especially grandchildren. Definitely, this finding drives the point home that people with disabilities are always discriminated against. According to the Integrated Na-

tional Disability Strategy White Paper of 2009, legislation has contributed to the social exclusion of people with disabilities by failing to protect the rights of people with disabilities (Government of South Africa 2009).

Additionally, through legislation, there is creation of barriers preventing people with disabilities from accessing equal opportunities, hence academic inequalities at the expense of people with disabilities. Fundamental social work approach to the concept of 'person-in-situation' or 'person-in-environment' could be a strategy to bringing about both individual assistance and social reform to disabled people (Cornell 2006). These people are in an environment and situation that needs both individual assistance and social reform. Basically, emphasis should be on the importance in social work with people with disabilities and families of the interaction between the person and the environment (Cornell 2006).

Theme 7: Practical Services

Participants indicated that besides receiving the grant they were hoping that the government could at least provide for those whose disability requires immediate attention such as those faced with chronic illness and intellectual disability. In addition, participants indicated that their expectations from the government aimed at breaking down traditional perceptions that discriminate against people with disabilities by either design or default.

'...I am worried of my brothers and sisters whose condition is beyond their capabilities. It requires the government to offer unlimited services to these people...'

'...If only the government can enforce some policies that will criminalise the labelling and connotations that we people of particular category daily receive it will be liberating internally...'

This finding shows the need for support for people with disabilities whose fate seems unnoticed. Absolutely, this finding highlights that in situations when people with disabilities cannot represent themselves, they have a right to choose or nominate a family member to represent them.

Theme 8: Misconception Around Social Work Approaches

Findings show participants having contrasting views that might reflect a misconception surrounding social work approaches as participants from one extreme indicated that social work approaches are irrelevant and cannot help the cause of people with disabilities. Almost twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents acknowledged and noted the misconceptions surrounding social work approaches in assisting disabled people.

CONCLUSION

The study identified that those social policies that the government adopted to help people with disabilities have not been strictly and effectively adhered to. In fact, there is a need for more social workers to be employed in positions to assist people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that there is need to equip more social workers with local based skills and knowledge so that they will be able to help people with disabilities professionally. Also, mainstreaming disability social work education specifically for helping people with disabilities. Social workers should operate under the guidance of principles and ethics helping them understanding the target clients, preventing harm of clients and restoring the dignity of impaired persons. Social work practice should promote the profession through community development models among people with disabilities.

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