Multicultural Education

INDIGENISATION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND INTERVENTIONS: AFROCENTRIC AND CULTURALLY INFORMED PERSPECTIVES

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A B S T R A C T

In Africa and the South African context social work teaching and practices are not balanced, as it is predominantly Eurocentric approaches and models that are included in the curriculum, with less or no recognition of Afrocentric approaches, which results in social work training not being fully aligned with the experiences and needs of African clients. The above misalignment results in social work services that do not respond to the needs and challenges of African clients; thus, being culturally insensitive. A comprehensive desktop electronic research was carried out to gather relevant data on social work training, approaches and practices. Social workers in Africa increasingly describe current social work approaches as unhelpful or inappropriate. This paper revealed that social work interventions that are based on an African worldview (behaviours, culture, and experiences) will be more responsive to the needs of clients. Without acknowledgement of this indigenous knowledge and experiences of African people, there will be an increase in policy and theory misalignment which will render the social work redundant within the African context.

A R T I C L E I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In Africa, the Western paradigm that governs the provision of social work practice does not always take cognisance of the African cultural dynamics that impact on the effectiveness of social work practices as it is implemented among Africans (Asante, 2014). Increasingly, there is a view among black social workers in South Africa that social work approaches are unhelpful or inappropriate in the Third World contexts in which they find themselves (Belgrave & Allison, 2009). Social workers experience the Westernised social work approach as unproductive considering the psychosocial and socio-economic challenges, levels of poverty, and other social issues in Africa, which requires different approaches (Belgrave & Brevard, 2015). The problem that this paper will address is the deficiency of Western social work approaches and the lack of sensitivity to African culture in the practice of social work. There is a dire need for social welfare approaches and processes to be indigenised, and sensitive and responsive to the realities that face the majority of South Africans (Loyd & Williams, 2017; Asante, 2014).

This imbalance originates from 'experts', in western countries who modernised and designed social welfare systems based on foreign knowledge systems, and this practice continues to influence social work education, theory and practice in African contexts and communities today. The problem with social work practice in Africa, currently, is that, following its development in the West, it came to Africa grounded in values and ideologies stemming from capitalism, social Darwinism, the Protestant ethic, and individualism, all of which are 'un-African'. It is undeniable that the current status quo relegated indigenous knowledge systems as inferior. African thought, places value on the spiritual dimension of phenomena, while Western thought focuses

on the visible and physical reality, which is not key in African thought. For Africans, supernatural causes are the explanation for everything. In South Africa, several social work scholars have argued that the absence of authentic African-rooted theories and models implies that the African lived experience is silenced within the existing social work body of knowledge and practice (Mathebane, 2016; Ross 2010; Shokane & Masoga 2018; Thabede, 2008).

In outlining the concept Afrocentrism perspective, Tricia Bent-Goodley, Colita Nichols Fairfax and Iris Carlton-LaNey (2017) allude that Afrocentricity is a concept that existed long before it was named and identified by scholars. The manner of life that is Afrocentric, or African-centered, predates Western understanding and civilization (Asante, 2014; Schiele, 2000). Afrocentrism and indigenization movements are centered on the notion that African expertise and knowledge belong in the assisting fields. Afrocentricity is a useful theory that social workers can apply in their work since it starts with African philosophies, history, and culture when interpreting social and psychological phenomena. This allows for the creation of pertinent strategies for societal change as well as personal, family, and community healing. The authors emphasise the need to transform the social work intervention framework, to respond better to the challenges of African clients. These views are in line with a study conducted by Thabede (2005), who highlights key gaps in the current social work models and interventions, which is widely based on Eurocentric approaches.

Thabede (2008), firstly, highlights that social casework theory gives no acknowledgement of the relationship between the living and the dead (ancestors). The author is of the view that this is very important when dealing with African clients, and that it is should be included in the teaching and practice of social workers, and taken into consideration when assisting African clients, because most black Africans believe in a life after death and for many indigenous African cultural groups, the ancestral spirits form the basis of their religion. According to Thabede (2005), each African tribe has a unique term for their ancestral spirits. For example, the Venda speak of midzimu, the Tsongas call their spirits swikwembu, the Zulus refer to them as amadlozi or amathongo. The second gap in the social work teaching program is related to Western approaches and theories' incapacity to recognize African perspectives on marriage and their realities. This has left a gap in the approach to providing marital guidance and counselling that recognizes polygamous marriages as a reality among African communities. Thirdly, the different stages of human development, both psychosocial and psychosexual, do not take African experiences into account (Geiger, 2010; Malatji & Ndebele, 2018; Ross & Deverell, 2010). Some African tribes still make use of tribal schools, where participants go through certain rites of passage. People in some African communities will, for example, never confide in a person who has not been through the traditional rites of passage associated with becoming a man or a woman. The role of clan names in the establishment of a client-worker relationship has not been acknowledged in Western casework literature either (Russell, 2003; Mathebane, 2018).

The aim of this paper is to examine the current thinking and responsiveness of social work interventions in relation to African clients.

The objectives are as follows:

1. To review a selection of the recent literature to understand the current practice of adopting a Eurocentric approach within an African context

2. To gain a thorough understanding of the cultural responsiveness of current social work practices, to help inform a suitable response to the challenges that African clients are confronted with through the application of relevant approaches

2. LITERATURE REVIEW UNDERSTANDING AFROCENTRIC AND INDIGENISED SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICE

Afrocentric social work practice is an approach within the field of social work that centers on the experiences, cultures, and perspectives of people of African descent. It emerged as a response to the limitations and biases of mainstream social work practices, which often overlook or misunderstand the unique challenges faced by black individuals, families, and communities (Brydon, 2011; Graham, 2002; Gray, 2005; Marais & Marais, 2017).

The Afrocentric paradigm offers a crucial organising element for the development of social work knowledge at the individual, group, societal and global levels (Schiele, 2000). While highlighting the distinctive contributions, capacities, and qualities of Africans throughout the diaspora, it also emphasises the value of humanity (Bent-Goodley, 2005, Kang'ethe, 2023.). It serves as a reminder to social workers that they must

address the human condition and be committed to the advancement of all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or location in society (Harvell, 2010). By doing this, it offers a perspective that is open to all people, while also underlining what it means to be an African diasporan.

Gray (2001, p.3) further adds that Afrocentrism is.

an idea and a perspective which holds that African people can and should see, study, interpret and interact with people, life, and reality from the vantage point of African people rather than from the vantage point of European people, or Asian, or other non-African people, or from the vantage point of African people who are alienated from Africanness.

This means that Africans should view phenomena from the vantage point of an African worldview, which, in turn, is informed by African culture (Midgley, 2008; Mungai, 2015; Mwansa, 2011; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008; Schiele, 2000; Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019).

According to Bent-Goodley (2005) and Schiele (2013), key elements of African-centred thought include promoting the fundamental goodness of people, recognising the importance of family and community, encouraging individual and collective functioning, understanding the role and significance of spirituality, and acknowledging the critical ways that people are interdependent. These concrete notions of fortitude and linkages encourage a sense of agency that can be interjected into practice, policy, and research, as well as in different fields of practice (Borum, 2014; Byrdsong, Mitchell & Yamatani, 2013; Schiele, 2010). The African-centred practitioner understands how to utilise these ideas to inform innovative practices and programmes. These practitioners will create best practices that highlight the significance and potential contribution of the individual, family, community and group unit (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Borum, 2007; Manning, Cornelius & Okundaye, 2004; Mickel, 2013, 2005; Moore, Madison-Colmore & Moore, 2003; Roberts, Jackson & Carlton-LaNey, 2000; Stewart, 2004; Valandra, 2007; Wang, Wong, Tran, Nyutu & Spears, 2013). For example, in noting the important ways that spirituality can be interwoven into the practice experience, the African-centred practitioner will recognise spirituality as a protective factor and will understand how to use spirituality as a tool for intervention, understanding and relationship building, which Western literature does not cover (Daniels, 2012; Edgell, 2007; Martin & Martin, 2002; Wheeler, Ampadu & Wangarl, 2002).

According to many scholars, including Schiele (2000), Marais and Marais (2017), Munford and Sanders (2011), and Mwansa (2011), the knowledge base of the social sciences and helping professions is characterised by a European-American cultural hegemony that legitimises the existential experiences, paradigms and theories that have emerged from Western intellectual history and thought, which is at the heart of this drive to embrace and advocate for the Afrocentric social work interventions and practices. Due to their habitual unconscious acceptance of the Western worldview, perspective, and conceptual framework, to the complete exclusion of their own, Africans have experienced challenges with this approach, with the main one being the loss of their own worldview. The difficulty lies in replacing Western methods of thinking, being and feeling, with ones that are relevant to African cultural realities (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019, Kang'ethe, 2023).

The above assertions are further supported by Mathebane (2021), who submits that Afrocentric social work should also concern itself with the liberation needs of African people, including their spiritual and moral development. This spiritual and moral development has the potential to benefit the entire world and its ecology of knowledges, as espoused by Santos (2014). The rich spiritual traditions of Africa may potentially add value to the extremely bad state of global social relationships.

Owing to the above assertions, it is undeniable that Afrocentrism social work interventions align well with the principle of "ubuntu". This view is further supported Mungai (2015), Zvumoya (2020) and Mathebane (2016), who suggest that the Afrocentric paradigm has identical principles with ubuntu, which, in Africa, exemplifies the application of African values and ethics in the service of humanity. Accordingly, while social work theories make Western theories and philosophies their reference point, the Afrocentric paradigm is based on traditional African philosophies, history, culture, values, and ethics. Ubuntuism advocates for the use of indigenous strategies and localised frameworks when addressing modern challenges faced by the African populace, rather than using the Westernised methods. The use of borrowed theories, models, frameworks, and strategies in social work has been seen as "African professional poverty and deprivation" (Mathebane, 2016; Ross, 2010; Shokane & Masoga, 2018; Thabede, 2008). To respond to this, existing Eurocentric practice models have been adapted to address so-called minority issues. Some of these existing practice models are called 'ethnic sensitive', 'ethnic minority' or 'cross-cultural' social work practices. Africans have not used such approaches sufficiently as a theoretical base to develop new social work practice models (Mwansa, 2011). Schiele (2020) further emphasises that diagnostic and intervention paradigms suffer from Eurocentric cultural universalism, because the knowledge base of the helping professions is based on Eurocentric social science theory and

research, and the cultural values of Africans have not been sufficiently utilised as a theoretical base to formulate new human service practice paradigms and problem-solving techniques. Establishing a distinct order of knowledge, based on African culture and the African worldview, is a challenge. This culturally based indigenous knowledge would lessen the issue of relevance that the helping professions are confronted with in a country like South Africa, with its diverse cultures (Shokane & Masoga, 2018; Thabede, 2008).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The desktop research was conducted following a logical approach, specifically the use of a focused review mapping synthesis (FRMS). The process commenced with the review of literature sourced from academic literature. The focus of the search was on publications that were circulated and disseminated between 2013 and 2022, with the focus on studies conducted in Africa, with most of the participants being black, and which were centred around culture and Afrocentrism, the African worldview, and indigenous social work practice.

According to Brandury-Jones (2017) and Grant and Booth (2009), a focused mapping review explores a sample of literature in detail, to explore common trends and to identify contemporary practices. The advantage of using a sample of papers to explore the phenomenon is further supported by Platt (2016), who posits that the distinctive feature of the focused mapping review is that it seeks to establish trends from an appropriate body of literature. Moreover, literature reviews aim to provide an overview of the state of science concerning a certain topic and to identify gaps in existing knowledge (Fawcett, 2013). Similarly, the aim of the FMRS is to address epistemological questions that relate to a particular research field. This requires attention within the review process, not only regarding theoretical and methodological issues, but often ethical and political issues (Soares & Yonekura, 2011) In this paper, the aim of the mapping review was used to identify and read through the studies on the practice of social work, through the lens of the Afrocentrism approach, as well as cultural and indigenous social work practices. The interest of the researcher was to explore the applicability of and responsiveness to the current Eurocentric approaches that are utilised by social workers when assisting clients in an African context. To do this, the researcher sought to identify recent papers, where the key focus was on advocacy of indigenous and Afrocentric social work practices.

The researcher selected potentially relevant papers through academic scholastic searches. This process assisted the researcher to successfully identify recent articles, where the focus was on the recognition of the indigenous and Afrocentric approach to social work. To identify studies meeting our criteria, a literature search was conducted from 3-10 May 2023, using the following databases: ProQuest Applied Social Science Index & Abstracts, EBSCO CINAHL, EBSCO Medline, EBSCO PsycINFO, EBSCO SocIndex, EBSCO Family, Google Scholar, Society Studies Worldwide, and Scopus.com. Using the specific inclusion criteria, the following terms were searched within each database:

"Afrocentric", "African-centred" OR "culturally centred", Ubuntu" OR "'Bantu", "Eurocentric", "African worldview" and "African social work intervention"

The identified papers were then read to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria: research articles that discussed original research with participants who are social workers practicing within an African context. Articles were scrutinised against the inclusion and exclusion criteria as stated below.

## 4. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

To be included within our analysis, studies had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) the study had to be conducted within Africa; (b) the majority of study participants had to be black; (c) the study had to be described as an outcome study, or a behavioural health or psychosocial intervention; (d) the intervention had to be described as an African-centred, Afrocentric or similarly tailored intervention, based on the principles of an African-derived cultural orientation for black clients; and (e) the study had to be published within a peer-reviewed journal. Studies excluded from our analysis were as follows: (a) those that only reported quantitative findings; (b) unpublished studies; (c) studies lacking an experimental design; and (d) dissertations or master's theses. The search was intentionally limited to peer-reviewed publications, since these studies have been assessed by experts in the field for methodological quality and accuracy and are thus considered to be rigorous and ready for future evaluation by scholars (Rhoden, 2019).

5. ASSESSMENT OF METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR

To assess methodological rigor, this study used a similar rating as applied in Jackson and Hodge's (2010) review of CSIs with Native American Youth, which was based on standards of assessing empirically validated interventions by the American Psychological Association (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000; Kim, 2008). The six standards used to rate methodological rigor in our study included (a) randomisation of sample; (b) comparison with other treatments or standard services; (c) definition of a specific problem or population; (d) the use of validated and reliable outcome measures; (e) the use of treatment manuals or curricula; and (f) a large sample size (i.e., more than 20 per group).

Moreover, in ensuring that the method is correctly applied, the author followed the key steps of the FMRS (see below), as suggested by Bradbury-Jones, Breckenridge, Clark, Herber, Jones and Taylor (2019).

Key steps of the FMRS
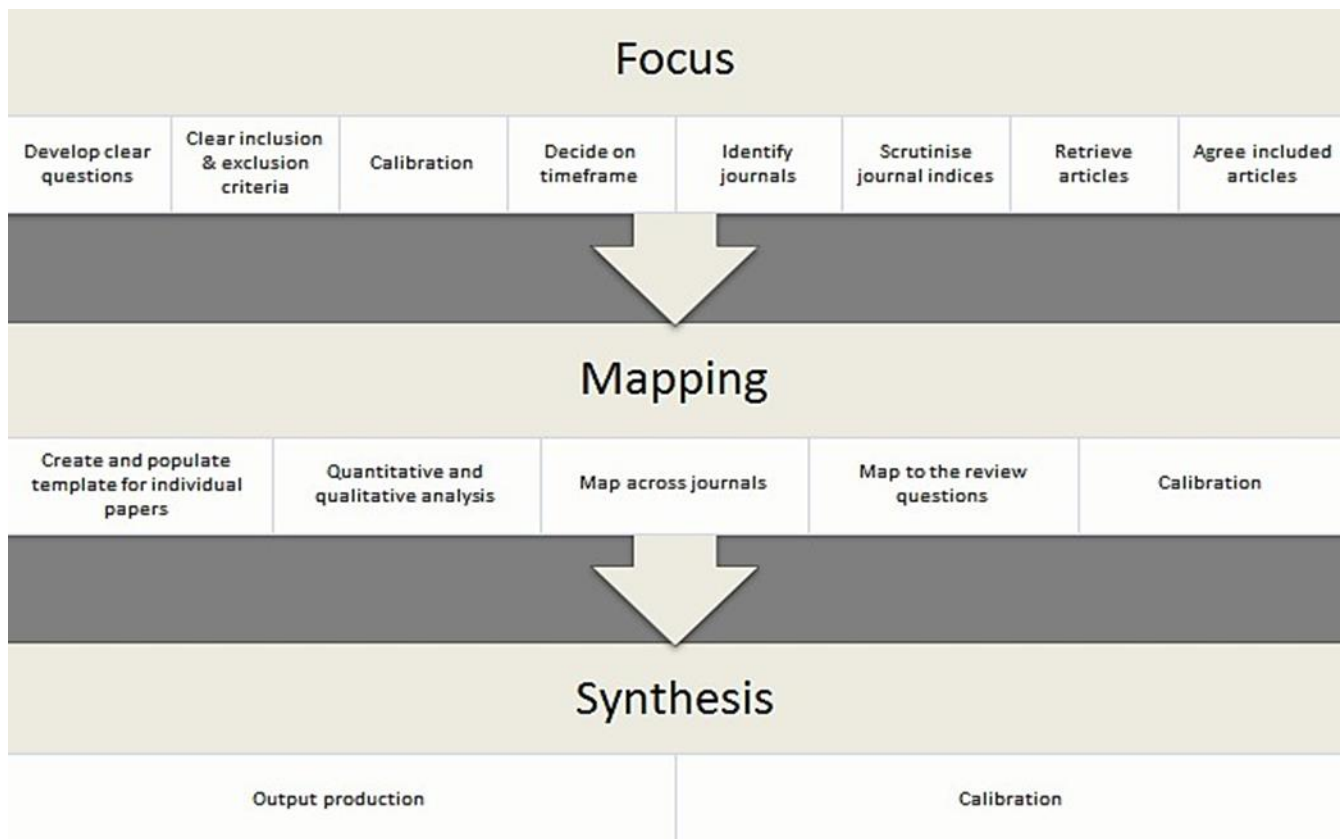
6. UNDERSTANDING AND CONCEPTUALISING AFROCENTRIC SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE VERSUS THE EURONCETRIC APPROACH

UBUNTU

The paper definitively ascertained that social work theory and practice developed in Western contexts is ineffective and culturally irrelevant to local social challenges. This view was further supported by Mungai (2015), who cited that the Afrocentric paradigm has identical principles with ubuntu, which in Africa exemplifies African values and ethics in the service of humanity. Ubuntu advocates for use of indigenous strategies and localised frameworks when addressing modern challenges faced by the African populace, rather than using the Westernised methods. Ubuntu is a Nguni term that relates to 'humanity'. According to (Lefa ,2015; Onalu, & Ingram, 2023), ubuntu is central to the African way of life or African culture and, as such, it relates to the well-being of people. The basic tenets of the concept of ubuntu, for instance, mutualism and empathy, relate well with social work practice. Similarly, Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) conclude that

ubuntu can be seen as a value of African social work, together with service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, the importance and centrality of human relationships, together with integrity and competence. It is also important to note that the philosophy of ubuntu can also be seen in all the values of social work practice in the African context. For instance, regarding social injustice, ubuntu could be incorporated in societies where social injustices occur and, through the practice of ubuntu, people could become empathic and considerate, and find social injustice unacceptable. Many academics have contended, according to Schiele (2000) and Thabede (2008), that the European-American cultural hegemony that supports the existential experiences, paradigms, and theories that have arisen from Western intellectual history and thought is what defines the knowledge base of the social sciences and helping professions. These claims lead proponents of Ubuntu adoption and Afrocentric social work to argue that client experiences, belief systems, and cultures should all be considered during interventions. The rationale behind this point of view is the notion that the main cause of social problems in an African context stem from the believe systems that Africans hold, such as witchcraft and the believe in ancestors (Thabede, 2008). The above assertions by authors suggest that there is a need for social intervention methods that are based on the experiences and needs of African people. Such interventions would likely ensure that clients are more responsive to interventions. This author agrees with the previously mentioned authors, as well as with Mungai (2015) and Schiele (2000), who posit that there is a need for knowledge production, in which African scholars and their academic contributions can find expression on the global stage. The following points clearly demonstrate the significant shortcomings of implementing Eurocentric approaches in the South African context and highlights the realities of African people, which social work practice should be addressing.

- Experiences of African people

- Recognition of African culture and spirituality and the key tenants of understanding human behaviour

- Recognition of the role played by extended family within the helping profession.

- Recognition of the significance of rite of passage, for example, transition of young boys and girls into adulthood, as well as other rituals such libation ceremonies, which plays a significant role in the helping profession.

Moreover, Belgrave and Brevard (2015) emphasise the importance of culturally sensitive assessment and diagnosis when working with African clients. Based on the vast variations in cultural inclinations that exist among South Africans, and the differences that exist between Western and Afrocentric social work, it is important that social workers adopt the framework for cultural relativity, as propounded by Brydon (2011), that allows for intercultural translations and dialogue, where possible. Cultural competence refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognises, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each (NASW, 2000; IASSW & IFSW, 2004). The above view was also supported by Mathebane & Sekudu, (2018), who advises that social workers should also extend this principle in their work with children living with disabilities. Mathebane, (2018), further emphasises that social workers need to approach each African clan, who is raising a child with congenital abnormalities, with an open mind and allow the holistic assessment outcomes to determine how the African worldview could be best applied in their chosen intervention (Brydon, 2011; Graham, 2002; Gray, 2005; Marais & Marais, 2017; Midgley, 2008; Mungai, 2015; Mwansa, 2011; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008; Schiele, 2000; Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). This author agrees with the above assertions and would further add that most African people do not believe in institutionalisation of their family members, because it is regarded as in conflict with their cultural beliefs. According to Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013, p.93), the institutionalisation of children, people with disabilities, the elderly and child offenders has not been very successful in the African setting. Such institutions never existed in the African setting, as there were other methods of taking care of orphans, people with disabilities, the elderly and child offenders. Institutionalisation came from the West, and it is being used, but with minimum success (Onalu, & Ingram, 2023; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013, p.93).

From the discussions above, it is now clear that ubuntu relates to the community taking care of itself through mutualism, peace, harmony, and compassion. This challenges the social worker, who prescribes to the Afrocentric approach, to have a basic understanding of the dynamic cultural worldviews of their clients, and to avoid imposing solutions on clients. However, it should be noted that the adoption of a culturally sensitive approach has been widely criticised by other scholars, who cite that there are different cultural perspectives within an African context and, as such, it will be impossible to implement this perspective, because of the question of whose culture should be prioritised. This argument does not have merit, since there are also different cultures in the European context, but common ground was found, which resulted in, among others, the

colonialised theories imposed in Africa. Practitioners of Afrocentric social work is committed to developing a deep understanding of African and African diasporic cultures, histories, and values. This cultural competence should help them to provide more effective and relevant support to their clients.

Williams and Graham (2010) caution against imposing Western diagnostic frameworks and advise that social workers should strive to use culturally sensitive methods for assessment and diagnosis. Ethnic-sensitive practices shape help-seeking behaviour, service use, satisfaction with services, and treatment outcomes. With South Africa's rainbow nation, coupled with the move towards indigenising social work education and practice, it remains necessary for social workers to incorporate ethnic sensitivity into their practice. It is important for every social worker to become a culturally competent practitioner, to be able to work with clients in a way that is congruent with their beliefs, values, traditions, and expectations (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Clark,2004). To develop this ability, social workers must develop self-awareness and be cognisant of how their own beliefs, values and expectations have been shaped and moulded by their personal experiences of culture, ethnicity, religion, and class. In dealing with clients, it is of the utmost importance for the social worker to be aware of the client's background and to use that awareness in the treatment process (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012; Onalu, & Ingram, 2023). This also calls for a holistic Afrocentric assessment, as will be discussed in the next section.

7. HOLISTIC AFROCENTRIC ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSIS

This approach considers the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions of a person's well-being. It recognises the interconnectedness of these aspects and aims to address them in a comprehensive manner. Moreover, this approach recognises the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, which entails collaboration with professionals from various disciplines, such as healthcare providers, psychologists, educators, and community organisations. This collaboration ensures a comprehensive approach that addresses different aspects of the client's life. In line with Afrocentric approach, as canvassed by Mathebane (2018) and Naami, & Mfoafo-M'Carthy, (2023). recognition should be given to the role played by the traditional leadership, extended family members and spiritual healers, who are important stakeholders in resolving the client's challenges. Moreover, assessments of clients should also be holistic: Afrocentric social workers should conduct a thorough assessment of the client's needs, strengths, challenges, and resources, across different domains of their life, including their physical health, mental well-being, social support, family dynamics, economic situation, cultural background, and more (Gray & Webb, 2010). This assessment provides a holistic understanding of the client's situation. The assessment should further employ systems theory, which will assist the practitioners to understand the client's interactions with the various systems, such as family, community, and society, and enable the social worker to recognise how changes in one system can impact others and, subsequently, work towards addressing systemic barriers (Gómez, 2010; Vázquez, 2005). Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) assert that an Afrocentric assessment should recognise and acknowledge community and collective identity. Afrocentric social work acknowledges the importance of community and collective identity in the lives of black individuals and seeks to strengthen social networks and support systems within the community. It also recognises the interconnectedness of physical and mental health - addressing physical health concerns can positively impact mental well-being and vice versa. There are undoubted virtues to ubuntu, in whatever structures of society it is may manifest, and the emphasis on collective responsibility and communal caring, as seen in extended family systems, for example, regarding caring for the elderly and children, (Naami, &Mfoafo-M'Carthy,2023). But, unfortunately, with the romanticisation and idealisation of traditional communities and of ubuntu, their potential downsides have often been overlooked. Ubuntu has become corrupted, in some instances, by those who are inclined to favour their own family or tribal group over others; thus, contributing to nepotism, which has been used to subjugate some groups or persons, and to hinder the progress of individuals, who must not be seen to be above the group or community. Pawar and Cox (2004) wrote about the "mean spirited, superstitious, religious, constraining and backward" characteristics of traditional communities that need to be eradicated. Afrocentric social work values collaboration between clients, practitioners, and the community. It encourages a partnership-based approach, where clients actively participate in the decision-making process. Afrocentric social work practice recognises that the experiences of black individuals and communities are shaped by historical, cultural, and social factors, and it seeks to address these factors in a holistic and empowering manner. It aims to create a more just and equitable society by honouring and validating the unique experiences and strengths of black individuals and communities. In line with the above sentiments, Mathebane (2020) alludes that the Afrocentric practitioner should acknowledge and affirm the traditional social support system, inherent in the African clan system, which can potentially be mobilised when dealing with challenges associated with African clients, as part of collaboration and intervention. The following key elements should be taken into consideration when working with African clients.

8.   RECOGNITION OF ANCESTRAL BELIEF SYSTEMS IN AFRICAN CONTEXT

The Afrocentrism approach advocates for the social workers, who deal with African clients, to recognise and have a basic understanding of the belief systems and customs that characterise African culture, so that they can begin where the African client is emotionally (Ruparanganda & Ruparanganda, 2016, p.11; Thabede, 2005). Moreover, practitioners need to understand that the worldview of the African client apprises both their behaviour and the rituals they perform to address their life challenges. Furthermore, it is undeniable and generally accepted in an African worldview that the departed occupy and play a significant role in the lives of the living. It is believed that those who have passed in the world of the living, have only transitioned into the form of eternal live, and they will always have a connection with those who are still in physical form. However, there are some criticisms, especially from European scholars and other religious perspectives, about Africans worshipping their ancestors (Speicher, 2000, p.443). This criticism is perpetuated by the fact that Africans remember those who have departed by performing rituals such as libation ceremonies and visiting the graves of the departed, as part of the endless spiritual connection that the living has with the departed. The purpose of such visits to the grave site, and communication with the departed, is only to honour them, seek their blessings and to show respect, not to worship (Schiele, 2000; Asante, 2000; Naami, &Mfoafo-M'Carthy,2023). Ancestors are regarded as spiritually gifted spirits, who also serve as a medium between the living and God, and, as such, African people look upon their ancestors as a source of strength and guidance, especially after the proper ritual has been performed. Practitioners, who are assisting African clients, need to be cognisant of the reality that most of the problems experienced by African clients are associated with their failure to appease the ancestors, which may, in turn, result in diseases, misfortunes and lack of progress in life.

9.   RECOGNITION OF THE EXISTENCE OF WITCHERYAND SUPERNATURAL POWERS

When working with African clients, social workers must be aware of the prevalence of the belief in witchcraft. There is a strong believe among some clients that the reason for them having issues is because they are being bewitched. Social workers, who do not share the client's cultural views, may find it difficult to discuss a client's difficulties with witchcraft, because witchcraft is not logical or scientific (Thabede, 2005; Naami, &Mfoafo-M'Carthy,2023). The purpose here is not for social workers to agree with the client's cultural views, but to have a basic understanding of what constitutes their clientele's belief system and worldview (Higgs & Smith, 2002, p.101). However, it is also important for social workers to understand that, at times, clients may try to mask their own character flaws by blaming problems on witchcraft. Deaths, divorces, accidents, and psychological psychiatric issues do not merely happen in African communities; they are frequently blamed on witchcraft (Graham & AI-Krenawi, 2003, p.10). The critical point that this paper wants to relate is that belief in witchcraft is a reality among African clients and it plays a critical role in how they view the world around them. To extend the discussion further, it was also noted that belief in the existence of traditional healing holds a fundamental space for African clients.

African clients strongly believe in the healing power of traditional medicines and when confronted with psychological, psychosocial challenges, diseases, and misfortune, they would consult traditional healers with the intention of understanding their predicaments and to seek intervention and a diagnosis of what they are going through (Mazama, 2003, p.121). Thabede (2008), captured this well by emphasising that diagnosticians, known as isangoma (traditional healers) in isiZulu, have a duty to diagnose the problem. The diviner is charged with the responsibility of determining the cause of the sickness that may threaten the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. It is important for social workers to acknowledge these realities and find a way for accommodating this belief system within the helping process. For example, if during the helping process the client request the space to also consult traditional healers, this should be accommodated without judgment.

10.   RECOGNITION OF RITUALS AND RITES OF PASSAGE

In African culture, rituals and rites of passage are performed as a metaphor for the passage of youth and children into maturity, and roles involving accountability and obligations (Thabede, 2008). In African culture,

rites of passage are typically carried out by isolating and withdrawing individuals from the group, into a holy space, to provide them with important knowledge (Mungazi, 1996). Among such practices are initiation schools, which help young boys to make the transition from childhood to maturity. When initiates separate from society, to dwell in solitude in the forest or in specially built traditional huts, far from the communities, they are carrying out a rite of passage (Hammond-Tooke, 2002; Mbiti, 2005). This simply challenges social workers to be culturally sensitive when working with African clients, and to understand that Eurocentric models and approaches may have different perspectives on what constitutes a rite of passage or might even be silent on the matter - for example, what is regarded as an adult, in terms of Eurocentric approaches, theories and models, may not be applicable in an African context. The process of human development or behavioural development differs from culture to culture and is based on the experiences of a particular group and, therefore, the social worker needs to take this into consideration when working with African clients.

Considering the different paths that people from different cultural backgrounds take towards adulthood, it becomes clear that people, who may be regarded as adolescents in some Eurocentric cultures, may be considered fully-fledged adults in some African cultures. Thabede (2008) narrate that, in Western cultures, the process of reaching adulthood is different and is characterised by different stages, as put forth by different theorists such as Freud, Erikson. Marais and Marais (2007) assert that most social scientists, who were introduced to the mainstream developmental theories of Freud, Erikson, and Kohlberg in human behaviour courses, completed this education exchange without knowing that these conceptualisations of normal life phases in the development of humans, describe women and culturally different people as deficient and abnormal. What social workers must realise is that the notion of human development is closely linked to people's cultural background. Part of the education and training of social workers must include an experience of deliberate cultural immersion in various cultural settings, where they might eventually hope to practice after graduation. This will help to improve their ability to provide social work services cross-culturally.

11.   IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The social work profession's commitment to the uniqueness of individuals should be reenforced with knowledge about appropriate ethnic- and culture-related responses. This is based on one of the principles of social work, which emphasises that every individual is as unique as his/her thumb print. Because of this perspective of individuality, it simply means that the client's cultural and ethnic background cannot be overlooked, since ethnic group membership tends to affect problem generation and resolution. Sheafor and Horejsi (2012) attest that people are shaped by their backgrounds and life experiences, which are determined by ethnicity, culture, religion, and socio-economic class. These, in turn, influence the client's thoughts and behaviour. As emphasised throughout the article, it is important for social workers to recognise the cultural and traditional ways of doing things in an African culture. Moreover, it is important for social workers to assess the worldview of the client, including the believes of the client, and determine how those behaviours and experiences are influencing their behaviour and development. The author also cautions that advocacy for indigenised social work approaches does not entirely imply eliminating Eurocentric approaches, but rather calls for collaboration and balance between the two approaches. In other words, social work instructors should ensure that social work students gain an understanding of the traditional protocols and conventions of clan membership and its custodians, and of the spiritual background of the African, including important rituals and ceremonies normally conducted and observed. The social work fraternity should put effort into understanding the African clan's totem and praises, and the way in which these aspects influence the perceptions of African communities, as revealed in the way in which the clan deals with congenital abnormalities. The social work fraternity should acknowledge and affirm the traditional social support system, inherent in the African system, which can potentially be mobilised when dealing with challenges associated with African clients. A failure to create this balance will results in redundant social work interventions that do not respond to the needs of the clients. One of the limitations of this study is that it relied on desktop review as opposed to raw data from participants and most studies were conducted with social workers without extending to the clients themselves to provide their perspective regarding the service received. Nonetheless the findings of the study may not be applicable in other context primarily because different people have different experiences of life and cultures and traditions which shapes their worldview.

12.   CONCLUSIONS

Acceptance and application of the Afrocentric paradigm does not mean the exclusion of other theoretical

paradigms. Instead, it means an additional, fresh, and legitimate approach to understanding human behaviour and developing social work interventions. The starting point towards addressing current imbalances, inequalities and biases would be to recognise that all forms of knowledge are particularistic and situated in their local context. Western knowledge too is particularistic to the West, as is Afrocentric knowledge to Africa. The existence of Eurocentric knowledge is not a problem, but the imposition of such a particularistic knowledge to other localities, through coloniality of power, is a problem. Therefore, international social work should be a combination of various forms of social work theories and practices, developed across the world. The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that the African-centred worldview, which the helping professions should understand as the basis of their intervention with African clients, consists of the following enduring and core cultural issue: openness to rational, irrational and spiritual categories of knowledge and being; a belief in a Supreme Being, which predates the arrival of Christianity; belief in the ancestors; belief in the spiritual nature of a person; belief in witchcraft and culturally defined rites of passage.

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