

Publisher



African Journal of Social Work

Afri. j. soc. work

© National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Author(s)

ISSN Print 1563-3934

ISSN Online 2409-5605

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

### AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK TO TACKLING EMERGING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Wairire, G., *PhD* & Mthetwa, E, *PhD*

*We feel highly honored to bring to you our first issue as Editors of the AJSW. In this issue, Felix Kakowa writes about professionalising social work in Malawi. In Malawi, social work training started with a community development certificate in 1964 and later a certificate in social welfare in 1978. In 2006, the first degree programme was introduced. As of 2016, three universities offered degree programmes. Despite this long history, social work has not been fully professionalised. Most of the work that social workers should be doing, especially at senior levels, is being done by non-social workers. This applies to both government and non-government social work positions, although there are signs of improvement. Further, there is no regulating or coordinating body for social work education, research and practice. A regulating body of social work in Malawi would enhance development of the profession. Current social work teaching and practice follows Western models, some of them not very appropriate to the local context. Recognition of indigenous approaches, local socio-economic conditions and cultural underpinnings would assist in contextualising the curriculum and ultimately, making social work in Malawi culturally relevant. Reflective and evidence based practice could help in this process. The researcher used desk research to review social work practice and education in Malawi and argues that the best way to nurture the profession is for social work educators and practitioners to interact and learn from each other. A reflexive approach where curriculum and practice would inform each other is recommended. Consequently, contextually relevant curriculum and a strong theory backed practice would be achieved.*

*Toang and Naami, Ph.D, write on sexism against women. They say although women have made incredible progress over the years, the problem persists. Sexism affects women regardless of their race, age, culture and socioeconomic status. This research sought to understand the experiences of Sudanese women regarding gender-based violence before and after migration to the United States of America, specifically, the state of Iowa. The study demonstrated the practice of stereotypical gender roles, although there were changes in the role the women played in the United States. Evidence from the study indicated the presence of gender-based violence before and after migrating to the United States. Sensitivity to the Sudanese culture as well as community outreach and empowerment programs could help reduce gender-based violence against Sudanese women while they reside in the United States.*

*In the second paper, Ian Ndlovu, PhD, argues that so much has been said and written about Zimbabwe's political and economic problems with very little mention of Zimbabwe's street children who are a common feature of the urban landscape. Street children's life experiences can be viewed in the context of stigmatised identities living on the margins of society. The research explored life experiences of street children in Bulawayo in the context of their day to day activities and claims for space. The study employed an ethnographic approach based on the understanding of street children as autonomous social actors. Their street image, their journeys and how they projected themselves into the future emerged from their dynamic interactions amongst themselves and their immediate environment. Their life experiences define who they are and how they navigate living on the margins of society; crossing physical, social and moral boundaries.*

*Tarvinga Muzingili's paper looks at social work and environmental problems in Zimbabwe based on perspectives of social work practitioners. Data was collected from 25 social work practitioners from seven non-governmental and governmental organisations in Zimbabwe using in-depth interviews. Two key informant interviews were also done. Social work practitioners said the profession ought to acknowledge the severity and complexity of the environmental problems facing Zimbabwe and reflect this in social work education and practice. It was also said the profession should not stand aside as it is now; but must engage itself in green social work to deal with current challenges being caused by environmental crisis. The researcher established that social workers could contribute through enhancing current curricula, engaging in further research and building social awareness through environmental social work.*

*Environmental injustice is one of the challenges facing social workers globally, write Takudzwa Leonard Mathende and Tatenda Goodman Nhapi. Their research explored pathways for environmental social work engagement in Zimbabwe. The authors reviewed media reports on environmental degradation in selected Zimbabwean locations and discussed the results in light of potential roles of social workers in ensuring environmental*

justice. The article recommends inclusion of environmental issues in the social work curricula, including fieldwork and collaboration with state and non-state actors who are currently involved in environment justice.

Ronald E. Hall, Ph.D., a Professor of Social Work, argues that the post-colonial root of African problems is directly related to skin color. Under the cloak of personal preference, light skin among African women has replaced dark skin as the native ideal. The aftermath is manifestation of the Bleaching Syndrome. Social work professionals have overlooked the Bleaching Syndrome as relative to practice. Furthermore, in social mores Africans tend to idealise light-skinned members of the population as it is believed their skin color is associated with an overall better quality of life. As such social work professionals are confronted by issues which did not require intellectual consideration in the past. They are thus challenged for the future to develop creative strategies i.e.: Bleaching Syndrome less confined to Western colonial bias. In this way those who treat African and African descended people can decipher the maze of colonial tradition. Their efforts will enable a suitable environment for more comprehensive treatments applicable to African women and others of African descent.

Witness Chikoko, Emelia Chikoko, Professor Victor. N. Muzvidziwa, PhD and Watch Ruparanganda, PhD, argued that non-governmental organisations have important roles in the fight against substance abuse and sexuality issues among adolescent street children of Harare Central Business District. In their research that adopted a qualitative methodology based on street ethnography, they found that some of the non-governmental organisations face numerous constraints which compromised the delivery of services to the adolescent street children.

The last two articles by Nigel, Hall, IFSW Human Rights Commissioner, discuss the lives of two important social workers in Zimbabwe, and indeed in Africa as a whole. Josephat Mathe, a well-known member of the social work fraternity in Zimbabwe, died at St Anne's Hospital, Harare, Zimbabwe on 23rd April 2013. Joe had been unwell for more than eight years previously, had suffered from diabetes and his sight had been badly affected. Following a mass organised at his house in Strathaven, Harare, his body was taken to his rural home in Dufuya Village, Lower Gweru for burial on Saturday 26th April. He left behind his wife, three children and five grandchildren. Nigel, in a review of a Father Ted Rogers's memoirs, said Ted 'has put together a remarkable memoir of his life in the first volume of a series of books on Christian Lives in Africa, published by Cluster Publications in 2012. Ted notes in his Introduction that his main motivation for writing these memoirs was to recognise those who worked with and helped him, most on a voluntary basis'.

From this issue, it is clear social workers in Africa are now using the profession to tackle emerging issues such as climate change, sexism and identity, as well as the more traditional challenges, responding to the call for contextual practice. It is our desire to see more African research generating evidence to tackle these and other emerging problems affecting the lives of people in Africa and other parts of the world.