

Gaps Manifesting in African Social Work: Eclectic Contexts in Africa



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ABSTRACT

Although the discipline of social work is pivotal in rejuvenating socio-economic welfare in ubiquitous corners of the world, it has paradoxically scored poorly in managing and leveraging welfare-based interventions in many African countries. The paper discussed social work gaps in social welfare in some African countries. The paper used a review of literature methodology that drew variegated literature from different research engines such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Research Gate, and a few books and book chapters. The study has the following findings: poor professional conceptualisation, inadequate social workers in African countries, social work's visibility deficits compared to its sister disciplines, absence of social workers in institutions of learning, poor policy and leadership involvement, social work gap in dealing with indigents, and social work suffers from gender stereotyping. The paper recommends that for social work to leverage its service delivery interventions, a collaboration between the forces of government NGOs and other social service professional bodies is necessary. The paper also advocates that the discipline be catapulted to its noble and honorable status as a very important discipline that enhances and turns around the service delivery process for a country's citizens. The paper is very important for scholarship in that its content will add knowledge to the domain of social work by offering suggestions for leveraging social work service delivery, as well as informing policy and programmatic improvement in social work service delivery in the countries discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

In ubiquitous contexts around the globe, social work is a very important discipline in addressing the needs of the neediest people in society.¹ It has the professional tenacity to facilitate welfare to the marginalised population of any society and its noble task of responding to the moral and ethical imperatives of caring for the disenfranchised in society.² It is a practical-based profession that empowers people to tackle their problems.³ While medical professionals prescribe the problem one faces, social workers facilitate people's

¹ J. V. Rautenbach and V. S. Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work?," in *Introduction to Social Work*, ed. J. V. Rautenbach, M. Maistry, and A. L. Shokane (Claremont: JUTA, 2022).

² Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work?"; N. Hall, *Social Work around the World V. Building the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development* (Switzerland: International Federation of Social Workers, 2012).

³ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work?."

social empowerment process. The profession believes in people's potential and capacity to address their problems, with social workers as a guide or facilitator.⁴ This means it is facilitative and not prescriptive. However, because of the social work-related problems many countries, especially those in the developing part of the world, continue to experience, such as gender inequalities, school violence, homelessness, hunger and famines, corruption and other forms of impunity, degraded environment, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, and today, COVID-19, the prevalence of diseases, gender-based violence, youth apathy, and governance deficits, social work researchers must consider it important to thoroughly discuss social work gaps that continue to wreak havoc the welfare of their countries hoping to come up with strategic recommendations that members of social service professions can act on to mitigate these challenges.⁵ Therefore, this paper, using a review of literature drawn from different research engines such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Research Gate, and a few books and book chapters, intends to fill in the gap inherent in social work interventions in selected African countries in the hope of coming up with some strategic recommendations to mitigate them.

After the introduction, the paper will discuss the study's methodology and then begins to discuss the gaps in social work under the heading: Social work gaps in African countries: eclectic contexts, where the following gaps will be thoroughly discussed. Poor professional conceptualisation, inadequate social workers in African countries, social work's visibility deficits compared to its sister disciplines, absence of social workers in institutions of learning, poor policy and leadership involvement, social work gap in dealing with indigents, and social work suffers from gender stereotyping. The conclusions and a bibliography follow the discussions of these gaps.

As the world continues to modernise with forces of modernisation and globalisation occupying a central place, there is an acute demand for social work to facilitate the process of welfare acquisition.⁶ Perhaps the role of social work will be important as social ills continue to take a huge toll in most societies. Such social ills, among other things, constitute gender-based violence, school violence, homelessness, hunger and famines, corruption and other forms of impunity, a degraded environment, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, and today, COVID-19, amid variegated life miseries and apathy leading to suicidal ideation and other life desperations.⁷ Perhaps this researcher needs to stress that the drivers of poverty in many African countries have been too strong and appear to linger for far too long. Bad governance and corrupt regimes have majorly contributed to the quagmire.⁸ It is worrying that the youthful population of many African and Asian countries is swimming in a "sea of poverty." They report apathy to life due to joblessness, which forms a fertile ground for stress, depression, and suicidal tendencies.⁹ While these social ills call for a lot of social work application, their increase may be a pointer to inadequate social work engagement, ineffective social work skills, or simply the situation getting out of hand due to other extraneous factors.

Perhaps a worrying state is that the current social work dispensation appears more curative or remedial than it is in addressing the problems.¹⁰ It is good to point out that this state of problems that social work ought to address amid other factors motivated the initiation of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and the subsequent promulgation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015. It is poignantly clear that the Millennium Development Goals' stocktaking was done in 2015 and gave leeway to the advent of SDG. Social work remains a global tool for intervening in many social ills recognised by these global instruments.¹¹

⁴ J. Walsh, *Generalist Social Work Practice. Intervention Methods* (Australia, UK, USA: Cengage Learning, 2009).

⁵ M. Berg-Weger and V. Murugan, *Social Work and Social Welfare. An Invitation*, 6th ed. (New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

⁶ Berg-Weger and Murugan, *Social Work and Social Welfare. An Invitation*.

⁷ Namso Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice," *International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research* 7, no. 1 (2016): 191–203.

⁸ Akeem Adewale Oyelana and S M Kang'ethe, "Exploring the Role of Ethics in Fostering Strong Public Servants in Selected African Countries," *Journal of Social Sciences* 47, no. 2 (2016): 98–103.

⁹ Jonathan W. Kanter et al., "The Nature of Clinical Depression: Symptoms, Syndromes, and Behavior Analysis," *The Behavior Analyst* 31, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03392158>.

¹⁰ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

¹¹ Sanjiv Kumar, Neeta Kumar, and Saxena Vivekadhish, "Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS): Addressing Unfinished Agenda and Strengthening Sustainable Development and Partnership," *Indian Journal of Community Medicine* 41, no. 1 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0970-0218.170955>.

It is also worth noting that the advent of newer global crises like COVID-19 presents another challenge to social work. For instance, as the disease takes a huge toll, the need to offer care to those who succumb to the disease, offer them hope and trust, and connect them to sources of hope, for example, linking them to philanthropic bodies, heralds that social work will remain a pivotal discipline.¹² Inopportunately, one wonders whether the globe has enough of these social workers or whether social workers enjoy adequate recognition as a profession with values, skills, and knowledge base to significantly intervene in addressing some of these quagmires.¹³ Perhaps because of the need for countries' goodwill to offer social workers a recognizable niche to inculcate their professional ethos, there is a call today for social work engagement in political advocacy, governance, policy formulation, and restructuring of organizations.¹⁴ However, in many of these settings where social work needs to be conspicuous, there is a glaring gap that this paper endeavours to explore.

Perhaps a more imminent gap in African social work is the curriculum deficit that most countries' social work departments manifest.¹⁵ This is perhaps because social work is a relatively young profession largely influenced by forces of colonialism and, therefore, following the curriculum of its erstwhile colonial masters like Britain, France, and the USA, among others.¹⁶ The fact that the African countries' curricula were crafted to address the problems of a Western world setting renders their interventions ineffective. Imperatively, the curricula need to reflect the challenges or problems of a particular geographical locale.¹⁷ This has driven African social workers to overly engage in curative or remedial interventions, thereby scoring low on adequacy and proficiency in addressing people's problems. This manifests a serious gap that calls for governments amid different important social service delivery pragmatists and NGOs to debate. Imperatively, Africans need an effective and clinical social work profession. Importantly, there must also be an acute paradigm shift to ensure that social work becomes developmental.¹⁸ This follows many clarion cries from social pragmatists such as Osei Hwedie, Mel Gray, and Roderick Mupedziswa, imploring African governments and other social service professions to ensure that social work becomes developmental and sheds its remedial nature.¹⁹

Further, the above pragmatists have also made formidable advocates for countries to indigenise their curricula and, therefore, position social work to address the unique challenges of a particular social setting.²⁰ However, and inopportunately, this is being realised at a snail's pace in many countries, or it takes many decades.²¹ This researcher also believes that while countries such as South Africa appear to be making some commendable inroads in their quest to achieve social work indigenization, some countries may not have started the journey for social work indigenization.²² This may explain the social work gaps manifested by many countries in Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The paper reviewed literature that benefited from diverse English language journals to proffer requisite literature to inform several themes. The journals were sought from diverse Google search engines such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Research Gate, and a few books and book chapters. The main words that were used to get the requisite literature included. *African social work*, *gaps in social work*, and *social in*

¹² Fuqiang Zhao, Fawad Ahmed, and Naveed Ahmad Faraz, "Caring for the Caregiver during COVID-19 Outbreak: Does Inclusive Leadership Improve Psychological Safety and Curb Psychological Distress? A Cross-Sectional Study," *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 110 (2020): 103725.

¹³ Berg-Weger and Murugan, *Social Work and Social Welfare. An Invitation*.

¹⁴ M. Gray, L. Kreitzer, and R. Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 8, no. 2 (2014): 101–16.

¹⁵ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

¹⁶ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

¹⁷ Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy."

¹⁸ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

¹⁹ Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy."

²⁰ Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy."

²¹ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

²² T. Nomngcoyiya, R.M. Kajiita, and S.M. Kang'ethe, "Indigenous Social Work Education and Interventions: A Viable Path to a Culturally Friendly Social Work Service Delivery in Africa," in *Critical Social Work Studies in South Africa - Prospects and Challenges*, ed. A. Keet, N. Peremal, and V. Goliath (Stellenbosch: Nelson Mandela University Press, 2022), 213–32.

diverse African countries. About 15 articles were realised, with 10 proving useful in providing themes that delve into social work dynamics in various countries of Africa.

SOCIAL WORK GAPS IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES: ECLECTIC CONTEXTS

Poor Professional Conceptualization

Professional disciplines will likely suffer obscurity and visibility deficits if they experience poor conceptualization and marketability.²³ Indeed, the African fathers of indigenization, such as Mel Gray, Osei Hwedie, and Roderick Mupedziswa, are in accord that the current social work profession needs to be adjusted and restructured to reflect the needs of local people.²⁴ Although social work is not as old as its sister professions, such as sociology and psychology, its growth and effectiveness have not been as healthy as they should be, given its pivotal role in handling welfare among the citizens of a particular country. It has suffered significant obscurities, especially in the hands of sociology. There could be several reasons, one being that social work has suffered an immense curricula deficit in that few institutions of learning in many African countries have social work curricula. In contrast, all African universities have a strong sociology curriculum.²⁵ Perhaps South Africa is an exception, where among its 26 national universities, only a few do not offer social work curricula. Inopportunately, many African universities do not have a social work curriculum or are in the nascent stages of introduction.²⁶ While ardent social workers have been concerned and questioned the situation, perhaps a reasonable answer is that the governments took a long time to recognize the pivotal role of discipline in handling social welfare matters. An undocumented observation in countries like Kenya, where social work is only a smaller section of the broader sociology Department, indicates that jobs where social workers should be the managers are usually occupied by sociologists or even other professionals. Perhaps an analysis of the professional competencies and differences between social work and sociology has not attracted meaningful attention.

Perhaps it is good to give a snapshot but a succinct difference between social work and sociology. Unequivocally, social work is an advocacy-driven discipline whose one of the cardinal goals is to connect individuals or groups of people with the requisite resources so that they can improve their well-being.²⁷ This is to help them fulfil the two lower ladders of the five ladders of the Maslow Hierarchy of needs. While the lowest rank of the ladder aims to guarantee or address basic needs of food, water, and shelter, the second rank aims to address psychological needs. This includes feeling safe and confident.²⁸ The fulfilment of these needs prepares them to go to stage three, making them embrace or experience the spirit of belongingness in tandem with experiencing love and esteem needs. Further, social work empowers people to address most of their life vulnerabilities by helping them acquire skills to cope with issues that affect their overall quality of life.²⁹ Besides conducting some therapeutic processes such as counseling, the discipline conducts referrals to sources of help.³⁰ This is important because most indigents, especially in the developing part of the world, cannot afford to know the avenues of assistance. Ignorance and sometimes the geographical vastness of their domiciles is confounding.³¹ Further, while social work is a practical discipline, sociology, on the other hand, is a theory-driven discipline specializing in studying people's social behaviours. Sociologists are good researchers who analyze data to inform their conclusions and interventions, especially policy and programmatic ones. In summary, while sociologists look at the problem-solving process of human behaviour from a theoretical lens, social workers look at problem-solving from both a theoretical and a practical/ or pragmatic lens. This explains that while a sociologist

²³ S M Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana," *Journal of Social Sciences* 41, no. 3 (2014): 423–31.

²⁴ Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy."

²⁵ Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana."

²⁶ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work? ."

²⁷ Walsh, *Generalist Social Work Practice. Intervention Methods.*

²⁸ E O Aruma and Melvins Enwuvesi Hanachor, "Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Assessment of Needs in Community Development," *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability* 5, no. 7 (2017): 15–27.

²⁹ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice"; Brian J Heraud, *Sociology and Social Work: Perspectives and Problems* (New York/Toronto: Oxford Press, 1970).

³⁰ Berg-Weger and Murugan, *Social Work and Social Welfare. An Invitation.*

³¹ Scott R Bauer, Michael C Monuteaux, and Eric W Fleepler, "Geographic Disparities in Access to Agencies Providing Income-Related Social Services," *Journal of Urban Health* 92 (2015): 853–63.

may offer requisite advice for problem-solving, a social worker would offer pragmatic advice embedded with some practical demonstrations.³²

The scenario above, therefore, points to the need for social workers to strengthen their advocacy skills to motivate and drive variegated developmental stakeholders to launch a stronger advocacy front that will give social work adequate weight and professional conceptualization. This will drive it to achieve the same growth dynamic as the other sister professionals, such as psychology and sociology.³³ This researcher thinks that these conceptualization gaps need to attract some journal articles or book chapters, if not books, so that social work advocacy can be strengthened through some presentations in local and international conference forums.

Inadequate Social Workers in African Countries

Unequivocally, the professional growth of a discipline is determined by the magnitude of the professionals doing professional tasks in a particular domain amid policy support and, of course, their professional aptitude. Social work may have taken the same direction. While many social workers in many developing parts of the world, such as those from the African region, realise there are many social work jobs in the Western world, they miss out on the economic opportunities because their countries do not produce any social workers or, if they do train them, they face immense professional obscurity.³⁴ Social work has not been included in many universities' educational curricula. This has denied the profession an opportunity to grow significantly because of inadequate social workers.³⁵ Indeed, many African countries suffer immense curriculum deficits because their institutions of learning have not introduced any social work courses, whether at certificate, degree, master, or Ph.D. levels.³⁶ However, there is a glimmer of hope as several countries are now staging a paradigm shift in recognizing social work as an important profession by initiating university social work programmes.³⁷ Social work programmes have been started in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Swaziland, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Egypt.³⁸

In most of these countries, the programmes are taking off or are in the nascent stages of development. However, South Africa's social work environment is elegantly promoted by a stronger policy environment that is statutorily regulated by the South African Social Service profession (SACSSP). SACSSP in South Africa is a statutory body established in terms of Section 2 of the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (the Act). Its mandate is to determine, guide, and direct all the operations of social service professions in the country by setting the standards for the education and training of social service practitioners such as social workers. The body must be commended for having achieved a quality assurance role in the operations of social workers in the country.³⁹

Although South Africa has twenty-six (26) institutions offering social work, these institutions have not produced enough social workers to meet all the country's social work needs. Current research indicates that by 2020, the country had 36,002 social workers.⁴⁰ Evidence also abounds that the country faces the challenge of retaining social workers, especially against the capital flight to the Western world, where they receive lucrative salaries.⁴¹ Due to the poor working environment, some studies indicate that social workers in South Africa suffer immense stress, burnout, and lower job satisfaction.⁴² This has contributed

³² Walsh, *Generalist Social Work Practice. Intervention Methods.*

³³ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice"; Heraud, *Sociology and Social Work: Perspectives and Problems.*

³⁴ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

³⁵ Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana."

³⁶ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work?"; Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy."

³⁷ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work? ."

³⁸ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

³⁹ Enola Proctor, "The Pursuit of Quality for Social Work Practice: Three Generations and Counting," *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 8, no. 3 (2017): 335–53.

⁴⁰ Adrian DuPlessis van Breda and Ronald Mark Addinall, "State of Clinical Social Work in South Africa," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 49, no. 3 (September 8, 2021): 299–311, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-020-00761-0>.

⁴¹ Simplice A. Asongu, Joseph I. Uduji, and Elda N. Okolo-Obasi, "Fighting African Capital Flight: Trajectories, Dynamics, and Tendencies," *Financial Innovation* 6, no. 1 (December 17, 2020): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40854-020-00179-0>.

⁴² Taetske Calitz, Adrie Roux, and Herman Strydom, "Factors That Affect Social Workers' Job Satisfaction, Stress and Burnout," *Social Work* 50, no. 2 (2014): 153–69.

to high caseloads and reduced the visibility and proficiency of social workers in various social service domains. Inopportunately, cases of South African citizens engaging in service delivery strikes against many of the social service domains could, to a certain extent, be attributed to the low number of social workers and their poor working conditions and caseload. It is unequivocally difficult for overwhelmed workers to be productive.⁴³ This shortage of social workers has contributed significantly to the lack of capacity to implement policies and programmes.⁴⁴

Although there is an impression that South Africa has flooded the market with social workers, this is just a mirage. This researcher believes that the dwindling state of employment of social workers in South Africa has made the country look like it has produced more social workers. As the above scenario has unfolded, the excruciating workload that the service social workers are experiencing proves that the country still demands social workers. This researcher also believes that as the challenges of social workers attract sound debate, whether locally or internationally, it is important that countries are encouraged to train social workers who can specialize in a particular subdiscipline.⁴⁵ This researcher believes that although the versatility of current African social workers is a plus in handling various problems, the scenario is also a drawback because it denies them some specialisation that could lead to effectiveness in service delivery. Perhaps there is no time in South Africa when the services of social workers are more important than during this epoch of coronavirus, when the current President, Cyril Ramaphosa has been imploring social workers to be employed to handle the much desirable psychosocial support of those succumbing to the disease, alongside getting involved in unleashing a strong advocacy campaign for the society to increase the disease resilience and enforce compliance with the WHO safety protocols.⁴⁶ This, perhaps, has set the pace for more recognition of discipline from the country's highest echelons.

Social Work's Visibility deficits compared with its Sister Disciplines

Although social work is believed to have borrowed a lot from its sister disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics, this researcher believes this is not a significant reason for the discipline to be obscured.⁴⁷ Although this chapter may not promise to be exhaustive in proposing possible reasons for its invisibility and, by extension, obscurity, this researcher thinks that social workers, by nature of their obligation as practitioners, have not vibrantly engaged in much research compared to members of its sister disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, to make it globally visible and competitive. Another crucial factor is that social work, compared to its sister disciplines, is a relatively newer discipline while its sister disciplines, such as sociology, are older.⁴⁸ Another puzzling reason is that many learning institutions have decided to place social work in sociology departments, making academics and learners think it is part of the sociology discipline. To a larger degree, this has contributed to obscuring social work and making it appear as a "baby" of sociology. This does not demean or trivialise social work research. However, the poignant message is that engagement in social work research has been lower when compared to its sister disciplines, such as psychology and sociology. Perhaps the biggest hurdle to its possible growth and visibility is its poor conceptualisation, as this article indicates.

How social work has been conceptualized could largely contribute to its invisibility. Since it is associated with dealing with people suffering from various vulnerabilities, this, compared to its sister disciplines, such as sociology, has somewhat demeaned it.⁴⁹ This researcher thinks this is a wrong mindset, as the discipline is very important if its overarching goal is to help people help themselves. With global poverty still overwhelming billions of people and with social work expected to address their welfare

⁴³ Kgalema Mashamaite, "Public Service Delivery Protests in a Democratic South Africa: A Dilemma for Local Municipalities," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 25 (2014): 231–37.

⁴⁴ Calitz, Roux, and Strydom, "Factors That Affect Social Workers' Job Satisfaction, Stress and Burnout."

⁴⁵ Walsh, *Generalist Social Work Practice. Intervention Methods*.

⁴⁶ Z. Mahlali, "COVID-19 in South Africa: More than 1800 Social Workers Recruited, Says Lindiwe Zulu, the Minister for Social Development," *IOL*, May 11, 2020; Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "Unpacking South African Institutions of Higher Learning Efforts and Hurdles to Respond to COVID-19: Social Service Professionals' Lenses," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 21, no. 1 (2022): 84–99.

⁴⁷ Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana."

⁴⁸ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice"; Heraud, *Sociology and Social Work: Perspectives and Problems*.

⁴⁹ Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana."

challenges, perhaps social work should carry more weight of respect than other social service disciplines.⁵⁰ Perhaps the erstwhile UN policy documents of the Millennium Development Goals and the current SGDs should have a special place in advocating for the role and importance of social work in dealing with many of the people's welfare problems and challenges. This could undoubtedly increase its visibility.⁵¹

This researcher also believes that the profession may have suffered a gender deficiency, especially among global communities that strongly subscribe to patriarchy.⁵² Inopportunely, patriarchy makes people see women as lesser citizens compared to their male counterparts. They, therefore, demean women and their contributions and reduce confidence in affairs pioneered and driven by women. People with patriarchal lenses may have some professional condescension to the fact that social work was pioneered by women such as Jane Adams, while Frances Perkins and Whitney Young also contributed immensely to its growth and development.⁵³

Absence of Social Workers in Institutions of Learning

Social workers, along with other members of social service professions such as psychologists, are better placed in processing psychosocial challenges such as pent-up anger, grief, emotional doldrums, levels of dissatisfaction, and people's temperaments arising from pernicious life agonies.⁵⁴ This researcher's plea is that all the service delivery institutions employ social workers or psychologists to process the above life agonies and despondencies. Unfortunately, this is one of the largest lacunae that most countries in the developing part of the world glaringly display.⁵⁵ Perhaps these countries have not adequately conceptualized the role of social workers, undermined existing psychosocial challenges, never taken stock of the impact, or lacked an understanding of their occupational spinoffs.⁵⁶ Paradoxically, while many service delivery institutions in the developed part of the world have recognized the need for social workers to intervene in matters of psychosocial importance, very few of these African institutions have considered placing social workers as professionals to manage the many occupational psychosocial challenges people face.⁵⁷ This lacuna is believed to affect productivity perniciously and compromise workers' welfare and social well-being, with some people stressfully tolerating their occupational careers instead of joyfully processing them.⁵⁸ Further, the absence of social workers in school settings, for example, could explain learners' and instructors' stress levels and emotional despondence.

Perhaps episodes of students burning and vandalizing school property in some countries, such as Kenya and South Africa, could be controlled if these schools had professional social workers who could help mediate between angry students and institutional management. The result has wreaked havoc on the lives of the schools or their institutions while the society and, by extension, the government are left to bear the cost of the destruction. Further, perhaps episodes of some instructors resorting to substance abuse to force coping and resilience may have their psychosocial doldrums addressed by the social workers, especially those with clinical experience.⁵⁹ Evidence abounds that institutions employing social workers to offer the much-desired psychosocial support have proved fruitful in averting such challenges.⁶⁰

However, this does not mean that institutions of higher learning in South Africa, whose students are year-in-year-out holding protests and sometimes vandalizing their campuses, have not employed members of social service professions, such as social workers/psychologists, not at all. This researcher thinks that averting such student protests requires the attention of an interdisciplinary team, with each

⁵⁰ David McCoy, "Critical Global Health: Responding to Poverty, Inequality and Climate Change Comment on 'Politics, Power, Poverty and Global Health: Systems and Frames,'" *International Journal of Health Policy and Management* 6, no. 9 (January 3, 2017): 539–41, <https://doi.org/10.15171/ijhpm.2016.157>.

⁵¹ Denison Jayasooria, "Sustainable Development Goals and Social Work: Opportunities and Challenges for Social Work Practice in Malaysia," *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* 1, no. 1 (March 3, 2016): 19–29, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-016-0007-y>.

⁵² S.M. Kang'ethe, "The Woman and the Girl Child Phenomenon and Gender –Based Violence (GBV) in Botswana," in *Human Rights and Social Equality: Challenges for Social Work*, ed. S. Hesse, vol.1 (UK: Ashgate Publishers, 2014), 125–32.

⁵³ Herschel Knapp, *Introduction to Social Work Practice: A Practical Workbook* (Sage Publications, 2008).

⁵⁴ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work?"; Knapp, *Introduction to Social Work Practice: A Practical Workbook*.

⁵⁵ Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana."

⁵⁶ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work? ."

⁵⁷ Berg-Weger and Murugan, *Social Work and Social Welfare. An Invitation*; Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work? ."

⁵⁸ Calitz, Roux, and Strydom, "Factors That Affect Social Workers' Job Satisfaction, Stress and Burnout."

⁵⁹ Kanter et al., "The Nature of Clinical Depression: Symptoms, Syndromes, and Behavior Analysis."

⁶⁰ Rautenbach and Nadesan, "Chapter 1: What Is Social Work? ."

profession contributing according to its level of comparative advantage.⁶¹ This researcher believes that the students' indiscipline reflects the cultural attrition causing a behavioural spinoff that contributes to a state of moral deficit.⁶²

Poor Policy and Leadership Involvement

The social work discipline prepares graduates with versatile skills, including policy development, leadership, and management skills. This is poignantly clear in the South African Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) curriculum, where policy matters in one of the institutions are handled under the module *SWK 120: Policy and Legislation: Social Work, Social Development, Social Welfare, and Social Security*. The module, though named differently in different institutions in South Africa, is taught in virtually all the 18 South African institutions offering social work.⁶³ Further, the programme prepares its students for management and administration in a module, *SWK: 326: Management and Administration of Social Work Services*. This module is taught in the programme's third year and may bear a different name and a code in different institutions.⁶⁴ Although this researcher cannot guarantee conclusive research on the social workers' leadership involvement, it is apparent that social workers in many African settings are not aggressive in clinching leadership positions and appear to be left in the leadership peripherals of many countries.⁶⁵ This has perhaps opened room for global advocacy for social workers to be conspicuous in leadership positions in many countries. Perhaps this is why Nigel Hall, in his advocacy book, *Building the Global Agenda for Social Work*, calls for more aggression of social workers, especially in the developing part of the world, in offering leadership.⁶⁶ Unequivocally, this researcher thinks that ascending social workers to higher leadership positions in a country will likely aid its professional conspicuity and lessen its obscurity.

Social Work Gaps in Dealing with Indigents

Imperatively, social workers in countries where they are aggressive are believed to be on the frontline in facilitating the turnaround of the indigents to ensure them a decent living, such as having modest accommodation, affording them a decent meal, and living a life with some degree of dignity befitting a human being, and possibly fulfilling the first ladder of the Maslow Hierarchy of needs.⁶⁷ Interestingly, social workers do not appear to be winning the war, or the process is moving at a snail's pace. This is especially the case when the world is beset by a floodgate of problems of hunger, diseases, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, life miseries, violence such as gender-based violence, and, in South Africa, some spates of xenophobia.⁶⁸ These social ills are usually driven by the apparent endemic environment of unemployment, with some countries, such as South Africa, experiencing an unemployment rate of 40% of their economically active population.⁶⁹ Furthermore, unemployment among African countries is expected to likely increase as the global crisis, such as COVID-19, continues to take a huge toll.⁷⁰

Inopportunately, COVID-19, especially at its peak in 2020, overwhelmed caregivers, especially in many countries of the developing world, with few or no social workers around to encourage and offer them professional guidance.⁷¹ This researcher is worried that the war between Russia and Ukraine may

⁶¹ Satya Dev Gupta, "Comparative Advantage and Competitive Advantage: An Economics Perspective and a Synthesis," *Athens Journal of Business & Economics* 1, no. 1 (December 31, 2014): 9–22, <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajbe.1-1-1>.

⁶² Nomngcoyiya T., "The Impact of Cultural Attrition on Youths' Behaviours. A Study of Ulwaluko and Intonjane Practices in Mthatha and Mount Frere Areas, Eastern Cape" (University of Fort Hare, 2018).

⁶³ Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, *Prospectus* (University of Fort Hare, 2022).

⁶⁴ Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, *Prospectus*.

⁶⁵ Hall, *Social Work around the World V. Building the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development*.

⁶⁶ Hall, *Social Work around the World V. Building the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development*.

⁶⁷ Aruma and Hanachor, "Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Assessment of Needs in Community Development."

⁶⁸ Kang'ethe, "The Woman and the Girl Child Phenomenon and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Botswana"; S M Kang'ethe and V Duma, "Exploring Dimensions of Post-Apartheid Xenophobic Sentiments towards African Immigrants in South Africa," *Insight on Africa* 5, no. 2 (2013): 157–68.

⁶⁹ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice."

⁷⁰ A. Makuyana, S.P. Mbulayi, and S.M. Kangethe, "Psychosocial Deficits Underpinning Child Headed Households (CHHs) in Mabvuku and Tafara Suburbs of Harare, Zimbabwe," *Children and Youth Services Review* 115 (August 2020): 105093, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105093>.

⁷¹ Zhao, Ahmed, and Faraz, "Caring for the Caregiver during COVID-19 Outbreak: Does Inclusive Leadership Improve Psychological Safety and Curb Psychological Distress? A Cross-Sectional Study."

further deepen the global crisis in that these countries are sources of the market to some countries, such as Kenya, which sells tea to Russia, as well as the fact that Russia plays a pivotal global role in the production of oil. The possible increases in food prices around the globe are likely to worsen poverty and its concomitant ramifications.

In South African settings, as in other countries such as Kenya, a manifestation of a litany of social vices that includes a preponderance of school violence and substance abuse points to a lack of effective social work engagement in alleviating the situation. This researcher thinks that the fact that most social work training is generic without any specific specialisation may render social workers inadequate.⁷² This researcher challenges this training *modus operandi* or arrangements. While social workers' versatility has its advantage, especially in resource-strained settings of most developing parts of the world, in that one social worker can assist several needy cases, paradoxically, the complexity of the challenges besetting people today requires some significant specialization. Globalisation, though a panacea in some ways, has also presented a constellation of social ills that require well-skilled manpower.⁷³

Social Work suffers from Gender Stereotyping

Perhaps the fact that social work suffers immense gender stereotyping may have contributed to its low growth dynamics. This is because it suffers gender emancipation, making it considered, just like nursing, a profession for women.⁷⁴ This has made many men avoid training in the profession. Perhaps this is due to the patriarchal leaning of many countries, especially those from Africa, where women and girl children's matters do not experience as much support as male children and men.⁷⁵ This could be one of the reasons why the profession may have lost some of its visibility compared to its sister disciplines of psychology and sociology.⁷⁶ This proves that the gender inequality and inequity that both the Millennium Development Goals MDG) and the SDG have espoused to correct continue to pose a developmental lacuna to women and the professions associated with them.⁷⁷ Another possible reason social work may have been associated with women is its aetiological genesis. Mary Richmond and Jane Adams, alongside other women personalities such as Frances Perkins and Whitney Young, pioneered the profession's development.⁷⁸ However, this does not mean that male fraternity members were excluded. Although social work largely suffers a serious gender imbalance, paradoxically, the recent decades have seen the elevation of the male gender motivated to engage in social work matters, especially in the field of research. For instance, Africa has seen the prominence of male social workers such as Osei Hwedie and Roderick Mupedziswa, especially those heading the social work campaign of curriculum indigenization.⁷⁹ Perhaps also the fact that social work was associated with assisting indigents and those suffering various vulnerabilities may have motivated many patriarchal-leaning people to undermine it and consider it as a profession of women. This researcher believes these factors could contribute to social work manifesting developmental gaps and losing some degree of visibility and conspicuity compared to its sister professions of psychology and sociology.

CONCLUSION

For social work to claim its pivotal place among other social service professions, it requires the forces of the government of the day, NGOs, and other bodies that perennially need social work to robustly advocate for the discipline to be catapulted to its place as a very important discipline that enhances and turns around

⁷² Walsh, *Generalist Social Work Practice. Intervention Methods*.

⁷³ S M Kang'ethe, "Panacea and Perfidy of Globalisation as an Engine of Social Development in Developing Countries," *Journal of Human Ecology* 47, no. 2 (2014): 193–200.

⁷⁴ Kang'ethe, "The Woman and the Girl Child Phenomenon and Gender –Based Violence (GBV) in Botswana."

⁷⁵ Kang'ethe, "The Woman and the Girl Child Phenomenon and Gender –Based Violence (GBV) in Botswana."

⁷⁶ Umoren, "Social Work Development in Africa: Encouraging Best Practice"; Heraud, *Sociology and Social Work: Perspectives and Problems*.

⁷⁷ Kumar, Kumar, and Vivekadhis, "Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS): Addressing Unfinished Agenda and Strengthening Sustainable Development and Partnership."

⁷⁸ Knapp, *Introduction to Social Work Practice: A Practical Workbook*.

⁷⁹ Kang'ethe, "Exploring Social Work Gaps in Africa with Examples from South Africa and Botswana"; Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa, "The Ending Relevance of Indigenization in African Social Work. A Critical Reflection on ASWEA's Legacy"; Ernest Osas Ugiagbe, "Social Work Is Context-Bound: The Need for Indigenization of Social Work Practice in Nigeria," *International Social Work* 58, no. 6 (November 1, 2015): 790–801, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872813515013>.

the process of service delivery to the citizens of a country. This is dire in countries like South Africa, which incessantly faces periodic service delivery protests. Imperatively, the crucial role of social work in administration, governance, negotiations, and advocacy for improving services must be strengthened. This can reduce the deficit in social work conceptualisation, which makes citizens think of social work as only a profession that addresses acute challenges such as distributing food handouts. This researcher would wish that social work be viewed as a profession with the force to address all aspects of human welfare, from governance to politics, and offer other developmental facets of service delivery. Further, social work needs to be freed from gender stereotyping that has motivated many countries, especially in Africa, to view social work as a profession of women and not the male gender. This may have robbed its vigour and opportunity to grow and gain respect alongside other sister professions such as psychology and sociology. This also calls for social workers to work hard to compete with other sister professions in research and other service delivery tasks. A snapshot comparison of the South African social work professionals' Google citations against the country's psychologists and sociologists does indicate skewed results, with psychologists and sociologists tending to demonstrate higher research citations. This gap needs to be filled if social workers are to match their recognition and visibility with other social service professions.

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