

# Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk

## A professional journal for the social worker

Vol. 59, No. 4, 2023



Doi: <https://doi.org/10.15270/59-4->

w: <https://socialwork.journals.ac.za/pub> e: [socialwork@sun.ac.za](mailto:socialwork@sun.ac.za) eISSN: 2312-7198 (online)

### EDITORIAL: RETHINKING “CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME”

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In this issue, we challenge readers with the salient question of whether charity always begins at home, particularly as the world witnessed a surge in armed conflicts around the globe in 2023, with devastating consequences for millions of people. As children are among the most vulnerable members of societies, the first three articles of this issue focus on them as a target group. Thereafter, attention is turned to women, older persons, and people dealing with mental health issues, as vulnerable groups. Recognising that social work, especially in a forensic context, increases the likelihood of secondary traumatic stress among social workers, we have also addressed this topic in the issue. In conclusion, a disaster-specific approach to the social work curriculum in an undergraduate social work course is presented. We also offer a book review covering the challenges arising from the interplay of culture and human rights through the lenses of emancipatory social work and Afrocentricity in a globalised world.

The year 2023 has seen *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* join countless organisations, NGOs, institutions, and governments worldwide in calling for an immediate ceasefire in all war-ravaged countries. The social work discipline has consistently advocated for non-violent solutions, human rights, and self-determination. It is evident that the voices and actions of social workers are crucial in global conflicts such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing civil war in Ethiopia, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the political turmoil in Myanmar, the escalating tensions over Taiwan, Iran, and North Korea, and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Wars and conflicts in these strategically important regions or those with a direct impact on global affairs are more likely to receive extensive media attention, and social workers are rightfully responding and participating in advocating for human rights across various platforms, particularly on social media.

Throughout its evolution, social work as an academic and practice-based discipline has indeed been synonymous with the pursuit of human rights and social justice for the most vulnerable. However, what is currently overshadowed by global events and not always showcased in the global mainstream media is the violence perpetrated in home environments and communities not involved in transnational conflicts. For example, closer to home for most of the article contributors and readership of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, South Africa's crime statistics

for the third quarter of 2023 reveal that the country's per capita murder rate for 2022/23 was the highest in 20 years, reaching 45 per 100,000 — a 50% increase compared with 2012/13. This number includes 881 women and 293 children who were murdered, with the total number of all murders translating into 75.4 per day (South African Police Service, 2023). These statistics emphasise the desperate need for social workers to facilitate interventions, conduct research, and act in solidarity to voice the hardship suffered by the most vulnerable people in society.

Nevertheless, news broke that in the Gauteng province of South Africa (Eybers & Sonnekus, 2023), the Department of Social Development plans to take over all new foster care cases on 1 April 2024 from designated child protection organisations. According to social workers and other stakeholders in the field, this may have devastating effects on the rendering of social work services to vulnerable children and their families. This also comes after many non-governmental social welfare organisations, some having provided social work services for more than three decades, have not received the government subsidies as promised, leaving these organisations without the necessary funding to continue their services.

However, it seems that the media and political spin around the above mentioned crime statistics, and the ramifications in funding and child protection services in South Africa have a significant effect on silencing the voices of social workers. Most social media platforms where social workers are collectively active hardly mention these issues, with comments limited to individuals. Some say they keep quiet for fear of intimidation and even more limited funding. Hence, there may be many valid reasons for the lack of a strong, collective, and immediate response by social workers, stakeholders, organisations, and supporting activists, but it could also be that, unwittingly, we are globally so enmeshed that the maxim "charity begins at home" has faded somewhat on social action platforms in the face of authentic engagement in social activism for social change elsewhere, and where not bound by political, financial or organisational constraints.

In the South African context, Chibaya (2022: 201) argues in his research into the voices of social workers on their role in protest actions, that the affiliation of social work and the state needs to be redefined to allow for genuine human rights and social justice activism. He concludes: "Further, to echo a comment of a participant in this research: while social workers engage in social protest actions, who is doing the work? In determining an informed course of action and role, social work practitioners must thus critically and continually engage with the contextual realities of the poor and vulnerable, the discursive concepts of human rights and social justice, and social work ethics." With this as a point of departure in rethinking "charity begins at home", the articles in this issue of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* focus in particular on "those who are doing the work", each based on empirical evidence within diverse contexts.

Family preservation services are considered essential, allowing children to remain with their families, thereby avoiding their placement outside of family care. In an article exploring the perspectives of heads of families on the effects of family preservation services on family cohesion, Zibonele Zimba, Pius Tanga, and Zintle Ntshongwana share findings from a qualitative study involving semi-structured interviews with 20 heads of families. The authors conclude that family preservation services are a definite mechanism for rebuilding families.

Still on the theme of care of children, Constance Gunhidzirai reports on an assessment of the well-being of street children in Harare Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe, using the ecological systems approach. The study, based on survey data from 202 purposively sampled street children, concludes that street children require multi-component psychosocial and developmental interventions to enhance their well-being. A third article focusing on children, was submitted by Roxanne Groger and Raisuyah Bhagwan, exploring and describing adoptive families' experiences of formal and informal support during the pre-adoption phase. Empirical research in the South African context on prospective adoptive parents' experiences of support from social workers, family, friends, and the adoption community, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal is limited. The study by Groger and Bhagwan found that participants had varied experiences of support offered by social workers and organisations, but more positive, informal support from family, friends, and the adoption community.

The second theme of this issue, focuses on female entrepreneurs. Tanusha Raniga employs a qualitative methodology to study how female entrepreneurs, selected from a clothing bank, solve poverty-related problems. She discusses three strategies relevant to value chain development: access to assets, dealing with risks when reinvesting capital, and enabling multiple stakeholder support. She offers some recommendations to bridge the gap between social work and social entrepreneurship to advance developmental social work research.

In the third theme, Stephan Geyer, Jill Chonody, and Barbra Teater alert readers to the dearth of studies focusing on the loneliness of older persons in the developing world, such as in South Africa. They report on a cross-sectional study that explored the loneliness of older South Africans (N = 118) before and during COVID-19 to inform gerontological social work. The survey incorporated a standardised scale of loneliness and items to assess the type and quantity of contact with others, physical health, mental health, and socio-demographic variables, as well as the factors that contributed to overall loneliness, emotional loneliness, and social loneliness. Results indicated a statistically significant increase in social, emotional, and overall loneliness from pre- to during COVID-19, and the authors recommend gerontological social work services from a socio-ecological resilience perspective for alleviating loneliness among older South Africans.

As to the fourth vulnerable target group dealt with in this issue, Lehlogonolo Kwena Poopedi and Nontembeko Joyce Bila report on the experiences of social workers providing mental health services at a mental health facility in Tshwane, South Africa. The authors indicate that the incidence of mental health problems is ranked third after HIV and other infectious diseases in determining a disease burden. They emphasise that social workers are key professionals in rendering interventions and services aimed at treating persons with mental health problems. The findings of their qualitative study reveal that social workers are adequately equipped to provide mental health services and constitute some of the key mental health service providers.

Rendering social work services to the various vulnerable target groups as listed in this issue, necessitates proactive coping strategies to reduce the impact of secondary traumatic stress on social workers, especially those working in a forensic context. This prompted Baatseba Babra Mashego, Pieter John Boshoff, and Erika Fourie to describe the association between the frequency of different coping strategies and the frequency of secondary traumatic stress

symptoms in forensic social workers. The authors applied a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional descriptive design and found that avoidant and emotion-focused coping strategies were linked to an increase in secondary traumatic stress symptoms. They conclude that employers and therapists must support forensic social workers by offering techniques that encourage the use of problem-focused coping strategies, aimed at alleviating symptoms of perceived secondary traumatic stress.

In the final article of this issue, Sipiwe Motloun and Bongane Mzinyane adopt a collaborative autoethnography to reflect critically on the experiences of social work academics who integrated disaster-specific approaches into the social work curriculum of two undergraduate courses at a South African university. This curriculum adaptation was in response to the KwaZulu-Natal floods of 2022. The authors found that collaborative autoethnographic accounts contribute important lessons for social work education, practice, and research in the era of natural disasters exacerbated by climate change.

Finally, this issue offers a book review of “*The tensions between culture and human rights: Emancipatory social work and Afrocentricity in a global world*,” edited by Vishanthie Sewpaul, Linda Kreitzer and Tanusha Raniga. Simon Murote Kang’ethe holds the view that the authors of the book are unequivocally challenging social workers to combat harmful cultural processes that pose serious human rights violations, and have cogently addressed the tensions between cultural practices and human rights. He highlights that the human rights framework employed is predominantly Western-centred rather than Afrocentric, creating a noticeable gap that could hinder the efforts towards indigenisation and decolonisation in Africa.

This concludes the Journal issues for 2023. Next year marks the 60th volume of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, and therefore the Journal will start the year with a total revamping of its policies and website, which will be operational by mid-February 2024.

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**December 2023**

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