

842 RE-POSITIONING SOCIAL WORK IN THE AGENDA TO DEAL WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND SOUTH AFRICA'S TRIPLE CHALLENGES

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Violence against women (VAW) and the South African triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality are on the national agenda and require urgent attention from all stakeholders. Although social work is ethically bound to deal with VAW, poverty, unemployment and inequality, its voice in the fight against them is silent. Current interventions to address these social challenges have gaps. This article reviews literature to re-position social work in the agenda to deal with VAW and the triple challenges. It is time that South Africa face up to these issues with social work playing its central role in winning the battle.

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WOMEN AND SOUTH AFRICA'S TRIPLE CHALLENGE

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INTRODUCTION

In South Africa unemployment, poverty and inequality are socio-economic problems regarded as the 'triple challenge'. This triple challenge, together with violence against women (VAW), is on the national agenda and requires urgent attention from all stakeholders in the country. Although these problems have been prioritised by the government, the voice of social work is silent. Moreover, social work has been left behind, although it is ethically bound to deal with these challenges. The question posed then is: Do social workers use the available literature to position themselves as far as VAW and the three challenge are concerned? Considering where the country is in terms of policy and the fact that it is a global player, it is important to reflect critically on these issues in order to ascertain to what extent the country has achieved its policy aim and programmes. It is within this framework that this article provides an overview of VAW, inequality, poverty and unemployment in the South African context through a literature review. The article repositions social work to deal with VAW and the triple challenge of unemployment, poverty and inequality in order to achieve empowerment, liberation and the emancipation of South African women.

Violence against women, poverty, unemployment and inequality are the significant and enduring social problems that not only affect the day-to-day lives of millions of women, but their significant others as well (Edleson, Lindhorst & Kanuha, 2015:3). Thompson (2016) confirms that poverty, inequality and unemployment have a negative impact on the individual and the family. The interrelation between these issues makes them more complex to deal with. As indicated by McCartan, Morrison, Bunting, Davidson and McIlroy (2018:3), the way poverty interacts with unemployment and inequality creates a complex setting for reflective practice that understands and responds to power relationships between social work and the individual or family. In view of this, social work plays a seminal role in addressing these issues and proactively engaging in the development process alongside other disciplines.

In South Africa social workers offer services ranging from prevention, early intervention as well as statutory and after-care services to women in distress. Progress has been made by social workers in responding to these challenges, even though some gaps have been identified in the implementation of social work services. The diagnostic report on VAW indicates that there is lack of alignment in the overall conceptual and planning frameworks for dealing with VAW. The intended outcomes, activities and indicators set out in the annual performance plans of different departments have led to ineffective prioritisation of VAW. This includes the Department of Social Development (DSD), the lead department responsible for the implementation of the National Victim Empowerment Programme, which is the national programme assisting victims of violence. The report also registered that innovative approaches to addressing the workforce supply are commendable, although the DSD remains constrained by a dire shortage of skilled staff (Department of Social Development, 2016). These gaps remain serious stumbling blocks to effectively ending VAW and dealing with the triple challenge. Hence, the need for social work to continuously re-position itself to resolve these challenges for the current and future generations of women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In examining the issues of VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment, one needs to delve into the relevant theoretical moorings. Although there are many theoretical approaches to explain these issues, this study is built on feminist theory. Feminist theory is adopted because it interrogates how societies foster patriarchal family structures in which men have power over women (Jack, 2014:28). In the past it

seemed to make sense to distinguish among varieties of feminist theories (liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism). Today, it is more useful to conceive of feminist theories in the plural, as a series of theoretical approaches marked by rapid development and comprised of interlocking voices and responses to earlier theoretical traditions. Feminist theory addressing VAW in South Africa focuses on gender relations within patriarchal systems as they are evinced through the interactions between men and women. This interaction happens in the private as well as the public sphere.

Feminist theory is a philosophy promoting equality between women and men that encompasses attitudes and activities that affect every aspect of their lives. It also appreciates the presence of both men and women (Dube, 2016; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:475). Feminist theory is not only about women; it is about the world, engaged through critical intersectional perspectives (Ferguson, 2017:270). Many of feminist theorists' greatest achievements as well as fiercest arguments result from and reflect intense political passions over the best ways to understand and improve the lives not only of women, but also of men and children (Ferguson, 2017:270). Feminist theorising has also expanded beyond one-factor expositions of patriarchal structures (DeKeseredy, 2011) to examine socio-economic interpretations as well. Therefore, re-positioning social work to deal with issues of poverty, unemployment, inequality and VAW is important in fully addressing the social context of women in South Africa. The adoption of feminism in this study is relevant because of the current status quo in South Africa, where most men hold more power, control and dominance than women both in the private and the public spheres. Importantly, it should be borne in mind that women do not want to be men, and that the capacity of an individual to perform a particular task should not be based on the biological features that distinguish men and women. There is a need to create an enabling environment that fosters equality, freedom and justice between men and women.

OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATION DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE TRIPLE CHALLENGE

The preamble of the Women's Charter (1994) notes the following:

We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, African, Indians, European and Coloured, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women, and that deprive us in any way of our inherent right to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to anyone section of the population (Preamble, Women's Charter of 1994, 17 April).

This preamble is an influential statement in a South African historical process stemming from the march by women to the Union Buildings in 1956. It also expresses the dreams of empowerment and of the liberation and emancipation of women in South Africa. Consequently, the preamble gives a background to the history of the country. Reflection on VAW and the triple challenge in South Africa is critical in determining the country's progress in empowering women, as highlighted in the 1994 Women's Charter for Effective Equality that was informed by the Women's Charter of 1954.

To address the triple challenge and VAW, the government is guided by international and regional treaties and conventions on human rights, national legislative entities and a policy-enabling environment that are aligned with international conventions. These include CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2000, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and the National Development Plan Vision 2030.

The government, with the help of social workers, has enacted programmes such as the Integrated Victim Empowerment Programme, the National Council against gender-based violence (GBV), Thuthuzela care centres, shelters for abused women, national emergency response units for victims of gender-based violence through the 24-hour GBV command centre, one-stop centres to offer a continuum of support services to deal with VAW, among other things. These programmes are offered

across various spheres of government by social workers. On 1 November 2019 the South African President, Mr Ramaphosa, indicated that 200 social workers would be employed to strengthen services to deal with VAW. Importantly, South Africa held its first national dialogue where women met with various government officials to discuss the scourge of gender-based violence in 2018. Additionally, several programmes have been implemented to address inequality, poverty and unemployment among women. These include micro-credit plans and entrepreneurship development, agricultural skills, and literacy and numeracy training.

The South African government also works closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNDOC), the United States Agency for International Development (UNAIDS) and World Health Organization (WHO) to empower women. Furthermore, various government programmes, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) provide vital services to women who have experienced violence. Despite all these efforts, VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment remain rampant and those mostly seriously affected are women (Department of Social Development, 2014:8; Graaff, 2017:1; Mogale, Burns & Richter, 2012:580). While levels of poverty, unemployment, inequality and VAW are undoubtedly high, their consequences are more fully evident if they are acknowledged as harmful to the social functioning of women. Over the years many changes have occurred that necessitate a review of these issues. Hence, a deeper understanding of these problems could assist social workers to reposition themselves in improving the social conditions of women.

THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994 there have been intense debates about the extent of VAW in South Africa and its impact on the social functioning of women. The year 2019 marks 25 years of democracy in South Africa and 25 years of a national commitment to gender equality and ending violence against women, yet women continue to experience high levels VAW on a daily basis (Abrahams, Matthews, Martin, Lombart & Jewkes, 2013; Matthews, 2010; Nduna & Nene, 2014). In South Africa VAW is now recognised as a major social and public health problem (Dekel, Abrahams & Andipatin, 2018; Goodrum, Felix, Self-Brown, De Veause-Brown & Armistead, 2019) that can no longer be ignored. Statistics indicate that VAW in South Africa is among the highest in the world and cuts across all economic and racial groupings (Department of Social Development, 2016:1). South Africa's high rates of violence have prompted a concomitant and a consistent increase of the budget for policing since 2011. In the 2017/18 financial year the policing budget was R86.7 billion, which represents a 62.5% increase since 2011 (Flynn, Gould, Hsiao & Naicker, 2018). This suggests the need for an urgent response to tackle this problem. There is also recognition that in South Africa VAW is complex (Zungu, Saluwu & Ogunbanjo, 2010:1), widespread and occurs in endemic proportions (Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje & Brobbey, 2017:10).

VAW is inherently linked to gender roles, stereotypes, notions of masculinity and patriarchal values (World Health Organization (WHO), 2009). Most organisations, both public and private, including academics and civil society, recognise that authenticating the extent of VAW and producing reliable comparative data to guide policy and monitor progress have been difficult (Devries, Mak, García-Moreno, Petzold, Child, Falder, Lim, Bacchus, Engel, Rosenfeld, Pallitto, Vos, Abrahams & Watts, 2013:1527; Ngoma, Fergus, Jeeves & Rolly, 2016:1211). Except for research conducted independently by departments, organisations and researchers, there is a paucity of statistics from nationally representative population-based surveys on VAW in South Africa. This makes it difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of how VAW affects women nationally. To some extent this could lead to a setback in developing comprehensive initiatives that respond to women's needs nationally.

Despite the difficulty in obtaining accurate statistics, various studies in South Africa have highlighted physical and sexual violence as the most common types of violence experienced by women. The number of murders of women by intimate partners is six times higher than the global average (Seedat, Van Niekerk, Suffla & Ratele, 2009). A study conducted by Ngoma, Fergus, Jeeves & Rolly

(2016:1213) based on a sample of 450 participants demonstrated that 23.6% of women experienced sexual physical violence or sexual violence (10.0%). Another study by Statistics South Africa (2017) showed that one in every five women older than 18 years has experienced physical violence. These rates of sexual violence remained consistently high in the national crime statistics during the period 2012-2015 (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017:10).

Statistics South Africa (2018:8) also confirms that rape targeting women and girls is a serious problem in South Africa. The 2016/17 Victims of Crime statistical release reported that 250 out of every 100 000 women were victims of sexual offences, compared to 120 out of every 100 000 men. Using the 2016/17 South African Police Service statistics, in which 80% of the reported sexual offences were rape, together with Statistics South Africa's estimate that 68,5% of the sexual offences victims were women, produces a crude estimate of the number of women raped per 100 000 as 138. This figure is among the highest in the world. And it is for this reason that South Africa has been labelled "the rape capital of the world" (Statistics South Africa, 2018:8). These statistics and the increase rate of VAW are too serious to ignore.

THE TRIPLE CHALLENGE AS RISK FACTORS IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There are multiple factors that contribute to VAW. A growing body of evidence shows that risk factors for VAW are multiple, including socio-demographic factors such as low education, child abuse experiences, alcohol abuse, attitudes accepting VAW and gender inequality (Djakanovic, Jansen & Otasevic, 2010:728; Peltzer, Phaswana-Mafuya & Pengpid, 2017; World Health Organization (WHO), 2016). Therefore it is imperative to understand and explore the risk factors that contribute to the widespread occurrence of VAW, since they have an impact on the progress of the legislative frameworks and programmes that aim to promote the quality of life of women. These factors can be perpetrator-related or victim-related, or related to both perpetrator and victim (Gass, Stein, Williams & Seedat, 2011; WHO, 2016:1).

The common explanation for VAW in South Africa is often based on linking the socio-economic deprivations of the majority of the black population by the apartheid regime (white minority rule) and recourse to violence. The core of the argument is that apartheid institutions ensured the peripheralisation of black people, led to the establishment of Bantu enclaves (townships) and the provision of substandard education (Mazibuko & Umejesi, 2015:6591; Ramafamba & Mears, 2012:). Although some studies on violence in South Africa argue that the culture of violence is a contributory factor to the high rates of VAW, it is also important to bear in mind the structural root causes of violence in South Africa, including high levels of inequality, unemployment, poverty, the legacy of apartheid and the dominant patriarchal values. These multifaceted factors make the problem complex and difficult to combat. Several studies confirm that the risk factors for VAW include poverty, unemployment, income inequality, patriarchal notions of masculinity that valorise toughness, risk-taking and defence of honour, exposure to child abuse in childhood, weak parenting, access to firearms, alcohol abuse and weakness in the mechanisms of law enforcement (Gass et al., 2011; Heise & Kotsadam, 2015; Peltzer et al., 2017:2; WHO, 2016:1).

The trends of VAW in the South African context highlight a number of key issues related to VAW. These include corrective rape for lesbians and violence against elderly women. 'Corrective' rape is also used as a 'punishment' for people who do not fit traditional gender roles, and they are usually women because they have less control over their economic situation, which makes them economically vulnerable; and they have less control over their own sexual activities (Department of Social Development, 2018:13). Poor black women who live in townships are more likely to become victims of corrective violence. Rape perpetrated against grandmothers has increased to alarming proportions, and although the South African Police Services (SAPS) does not keep statistics of crimes perpetrated against the elderly, media reports have painted a bleak picture of this phenomenon (Cotze, 2018; Department of Social Development, 2018:13).

Against this backdrop, there is a need to understand such violence within the context of women's status in society, and not in isolation from the norms and social structures and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence their vulnerability to violence (Burman, Johnstone, de Haan & Macleod, 2010:7). The socio-economic and psychological dynamics underlying the violence has received increasing attention as a national intervention priority. The cross-cutting drivers of violence include persistent and widespread poverty, chronic unemployment and income inequality (Seedat et al., 2009:2).

INEQUALITY

South Africa remains the most unequal country in the world measured in terms of gender, power, social control, income and wealth between men and women, different races, class and ethnic groups and cultures (Department of Social Development, 2018; Keeton, 2014). When inequality is patently evident, vulnerable groups such as women or those who do not conform to traditional gender roles face multiple forms of discrimination and violence (South African Human Rights commission, 2017). South Africa has among the highest levels of income inequality and homicide rates (Seedat et al., 2009:1015).

Social ideas of patriarchy and social norms that encourage male dominance, control and power over women's subordination are still valued and prevalent across different races and ethnic groups in the country. Power and control are issues in almost all acts of violence (Seabi, 2009:17). The author further indicates that control and power are expressed in many ways apart from overt violence, for example, by making belittling comments, boasting about conquests, making cruel comparisons or forcing someone to do something against their will, among others.

These patriarchal attitudes often privilege men over women. Oakley (1972) and Giddens (2005) argue that patriarchy leads to gender inequality and subordination of women to the extent that women do not have control over their sexuality. Graaff (2017) explains that inequality is rooted in gender roles that are observed through social interactions and positive or negative reinforcement from influential people such as parents, significant others, the neighbourhood or community at large. Sigsworth (2009) found that power imbalances in gender inequality and discriminatory patriarchal practices against women are the principal causes of VAW.

Oakley (1972) describes the socialisation of children into their expected gender roles as beginning with the modelling of the behaviour of their same-sex parent. For instance, girls model their mother's behaviour, whereas boys model the ideals of their fathers. Giddens (2005:489) supports the view that, from a tender age, the socialisation process differentiates the girl child from the boy child; for example, children are given gender-specific toys and clothes. Girls get dolls and kitchen utensils, while boys get cars, guns and helicopters to play with. Added to this, there are even specific colours for toys or clothes given to either boys or girls; girls' colours are predominantly pink and purple, whereas boys' colours are predominantly blue, red and green. Likewise, girls may be praised for taking an interest in dolls and childcare, while boys showing an interest in the same things may face penalties in the form of ostracism, ridicule and social isolation (Anderson, 2008; Moleketi & Motsoane, 2013). The justification is that boys are socialised to view themselves as breadwinners and heads of households, while girls are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers and carers. As a result, women are expected to adopt those traditionally defined and prescribed roles and qualities which fit them into a relationship of dependence on men. These qualities include gentleness, passivity, submission and striving to always please men (Kambarami, 2006:3).

In most African cultures men are the head of the household or the marital relationship, which indirectly promotes either verbal or physical abuse towards their female partners. This has been observed in many parts of South Africa, which shares common socio-cultural features with other African countries (Zungu et al., 2010). Such social ideas of masculinity encourage male dominance, control over women and gender power imbalances and contribute to male perpetration of, and women's vulnerability to,

violence (Ngoma et al., 2016:1211). Power grants privileges to certain groups of people while denying them to others; privileged groups such as men can discriminate against and commit violence against non-privileged groups such as women (Seabi, 2009:23).

The implications are that children learn and perform their roles based on their gender and become socialised in such discriminatory traditional gender roles by the very social fabric that discriminates against women. This further entrenches the gender division of labour, unequal access to resources and opportunities, with the possibility that most women come to accept the violence perpetrated against them as a cultural given (Leburu & Phetlho-Thekisho, 2015:410). There is a need to confront traditional gender roles that are so prescriptive and oppressive, and to challenge the notion that women are viewed universally solely in reproductive terms as well as all the systems that are against equality between men and women (Leburu, 2015:34). Emphasis must be placed on transforming the mind-set that condones male dominance and female submission, including promoting a recognition of the abilities and power of women. Moreover, the traditions, culture, customs and practices that perpetuate VAW require serious analysis and deconstruction.

South Africa's transition into democracy brought about a greater official recognition of human rights, including women's rights. Despite the progress made by government to close the gap between men and women through various programmes and initiatives, most women are still exposed to various forms of violence both in the private or the public sphere. There are still major imbalances and inequities between men and women. The SADC Gender and Development Monitor (2016:xii) indicates that the challenges to achieving gender equality continue to be generally similar to what they were when world leaders gathered for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Gender inequality is still an impediment to women accessing the basic services and resources required to take a role in decision-making positions in national governance, despite the significant progress made during the past 20 years.

The South African Beijing Progress Report (2015:25) indicates that the majority of South African women rely largely on health services that are delivered by the government. This is demonstrated by the low percentage of private medical scheme coverage as well as the number of women using private health facilities. Statistics South Africa (2013:23) revealed that 38.8% of South Africa women are less likely to visit private health facilities when they need health care than men (39.9%). Findings further indicate that access to private medical scheme cover is lowest for black African women (9.3%) compared to 70.7% for white women, 9.1% for black African men and 70.5% for white men. Therefore, increasing access to public health care would significantly benefit the majority of black African women.

The study conducted by the Business Women's Association (2017:35) provides a comprehensive analysis of women on boards and in executive management positions of companies in the private sector in South Africa, especially in companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The 2017 Census reports that only 20.7% of directors and 29.4% of executive managers are women. Women account for only 11.8% of positions at the top leadership levels of organisations. Moreover, women hold only 19.1% of directorship positions at JSE-listed companies. Of the 2,671 directors of JSE-listed firms (excluding subsidiaries), women hold only 511 seats. The share of JSE-listed companies with at least three female directors decreased from 35.9% in 2015 to 25.6% in 2017. This decline is problematic as the share of companies with the required critical mass of at least three women directors has declined and suggests the number of companies with more gender-diverse boards has dropped.

In 2001 the average annual income of households headed by women was R27 864, compared to R63 626 for households headed by men. By 2011, despite an increase in the average income for females, households headed by women still earned less than 50% of households headed by men. The median earnings for a white man were six times higher than for an African woman. The disparity is not a result of unequal pay for the same kind of work, although that remains a factor. The main reason for

pay discrepancies was that Africans, especially women, were more likely to be employed in lower-level jobs than their white counterparts were (South African Beijing Progress Report, 2015: 16).

There is still a gender bias in the justice delivery system, with a low representation of women in management positions in the judiciary and sitting on the bench. Seychelles is the only country where the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is a woman, who was appointed to the office in 2015 (Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender and Development Monitor 2016:5). Greater representation of women in the judiciary and on the bench as well as in other sectors of the justice delivery system could lead to greater access to justice intervention options by fostering greater confidence in women to approach the courts who would otherwise be intimidated by the very male-centred outlook of the personnel of the courts. The contention here is that an increase in the number of women judges could lead to a stronger ethos for gender-aligned judgments and accelerate the uptake of women into the judiciary and promote legislative transformation. This is because women's access to justice is not facilitated primarily by the various legislative enactments, but by the state's capacity to turn them into accessible national tools that could shift structural inhibitors to women's access to its facilities (SADC Gender and Development Monitor, 2016:5).

THE CONTEXT OF POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Poverty is one of the crucial dimensions of the social dynamics that have contributed to South Africa's burden of VAW. It remains among the most problematic areas of statistics in general and for gender statistics in particular (United Nations, 2015:180). Poverty poses severe barriers to access to traditional sources of wellbeing, status and respect; this could in turn lead to feelings of shame, humiliation and loss of self-respect (Seedat et al., 2009: 1015). Poverty and unemployment are on the increase in South Africa (Meyer, 2014; Triegaardt, 2008) as is the case globally. That these two factors have a strong spatial dimension is demonstrated in the enduring legacy of apartheid (Statistics SA, 2018: xviii).

Nearly half of the population of South Africa is considered chronically poor and living below the poverty line of ZAR 992 per person per month (Statistics SA, 2018: xviii), with women more significantly affected by poverty than men. Among all South Africans, African females face the greatest risk of poverty (Posel & Rogan, 2009:26) and poverty levels are consistently high among black African female-headed households living in rural areas (Statistics SA, 2018:xxii) and townships. Statistics South Africa (2017:17) indicates that South Africa made progress in reducing poverty between 2006 and 2011, but poverty levels rose again in 2015. Approximately 40% of the population (21.9 million people) lived below the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) in 2015, which was an increase from 36.4% in 2011. The results show that black African women and people in the rural areas are mostly confronted with an ongoing struggle against poverty. Findings show that 38.1% of women were living below the LBPL in 2011. and this proportion rose by 9.4% to 41.7% in 2015, compared to men.

The government has introduced initiatives to empower women economically in order to address poverty and unemployment. For instance, credit schemes and financial initiatives that grant women better terms for borrowing money by removing stringent collateral requirements, lowering interest rates and spreading the credit repayment periods. Furthermore, the country has made remarkable progress in the successful institutionalisation of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) processes in annual budget cycles (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2014:5). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development indicates that the eradication of poverty is an important requirement for sustainable development. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights as one of the legal entities adopted by South Africa regards a life free from poverty and hunger as a fundamental entitlement (United Nations, 2015). However, the eradication of poverty remains one of the greatest problems facing South Africa.

The South African shadow report on the implementation of the CEDAW (2011:14) confirms that women in South Africa are still living in poorer conditions compared to men and have less access to the opportunities and development resources that are necessary to overcome poverty such as land, housing, resources, employment and education. There is considerable empirical evidence which shows that on

average households headed by women are more vulnerable to poverty than households headed by men (Bhorat & Van Der Westhuizen, 2012:5; Lampietti & Stalker, 2000; Posel & Roga, 2009:26). As United Nations (2015: xiv) noted, gender discrepancies in the distribution of poverty are rooted in inequalities in access to economic resources in many countries. Lower proportions of women than men earn their own cash income from labour as a consequence of the unequal division of paid and unpaid work. Most married women do not have control over household spending on major purchases and about one tenth of married women are not consulted on how cash earnings are spent. Additionally, most working-age women are more likely to be poorer than men when they have dependent children and no partners to contribute to the household income, or when their own income is non-existent or too low to support the entire family.

Most women work longer hours than men as they often carry many more of the household and care responsibilities. Yet this often goes unrewarded, as it falls under the ambit of traditional roles and women's unpaid care work. This affects women's ability and opportunities to participate in the labour market, as well as to earn an independent income. Yet when all of women's work is taken into account, their economic contribution increases dramatically and is generally greater than that of men (Levendale, 2017:4).

THE CONTEXT OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

While poverty and inequality remain the key challenges in the country, unemployment has risen over the years. Natrass (2014:87) indicates that South Africa has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world and the country struggles to generate sufficient jobs (Statistics SA, 2018: xiv). The unemployment rate is three times higher than the median (Natrass, 2014). Statistics South Africa (2017) reports that unemployment rose from 20% to 27.7% in 2017. In analysing the dimensions of unemployment, it is clear that the vulnerable groups and the previously marginalised populations are mostly affected by unemployment. To illustrate this, in March 2005 31.4% (2.285 million) of women were unemployed in contrast to 22.4% (1997 million) of men (Statistics SA, 2005). The National Planning Commission (2012: 24) concluded that the country's number one failing was that few people work. Aliber, Kirsten, Mharjh, Nhlapo-Hlope and Nkoane (2005:94) observed that unemployment in South Africa is clearly chronic rather than acute or cyclical.

The extent of unemployment has become more definitive now that apartheid structures have been incorporated into a more unified nation (Triegaardt, 2008:487). Consequently, the labour market is characterised by several challenges, including high levels of unemployment, which reached 25.1% of the workforce in 2015 and 27.7% in the third quarter of 2017. Racial and gender disparities are still predominant in the labour market. Although an increased number of women participate in the economy, most women find it harder to find a job. There is also a structural mismatch between labour demand and labour supply of unskilled workers (Statistics SA, 2018: xiv). The South African labour market is more favourable to men than it is to women, and men are more likely to be in paid employment than women, regardless of race. The *Quarterly Labour Force Survey* released by Statistics South Africa revealed that the official unemployment rate has been relatively high since 2008. The rate increased from 23,2% in the first quarter of 2008 to 27,2% in the second quarter of 2018. Throughout this period the rates were higher amongst women than men, with 29,5% in the second quarter of 2018 compared to 25,3% for men (Statistics SA, 2018).

Research indicates that the lack of economic independence among women is a driver to VAW (Goldblatt, 2019; Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002; Ludsin & Vetten, 2005; Gass, Stein, Williams & Sedaat, 2010). A study conducted by Mokgatle and Dauda (2014:330) with a sample of 271 revealed that 60% of women who were unemployed experienced some form of violence. Another study by (Monakali, Mokgatle-Nyhabu, Oguntibeju (2011) found that women who were economically inactive were at risk of experiencing violence. While the above authors confirm that there are women who are not economically dependent upon men but at risk of experiencing violence, Kiss, Schraiber, Heise, Zimmerman, Gouveia and Watts (2012) confirmed that educated, economically independent women

are less likely to be abused. This is because they are more confident about leaving such relationships or reporting violence to the relevant authorities (Sibanda & Msibi, 2016:12). Foa and Foa (in Conroy, 2014:3) also confirm that women with fewer resources become economically dependent on their partners, which in turn limits their negotiating power over sex and their ability to mitigate physical violence.

Though women who are not economically dependent are at risk of experiencing violence, women with more economic power and resources also experience violence. Sibanda and Msibi (2016:12) also argue that women's economic dependence may be a risk factor of violence. For example, since 1994 many women became educated and entered the labour market. For some men, this represents a loss of their power and authority. Culturally, men have been ascribed the roles of the head of the household, provider and protector. Because of the high unemployment rates in South Africa, many men are unemployed and some are solely dependent on women for survival. Some men feel that women have usurped the roles that were previously ascribed to men, generating anxiety and insecurities (Reid & Walker, 2005; Sigsworth, 2009). In this context, VAW becomes a prominent mechanism through which to reinforce male power and authority (Abrahams, Jewkes, Martin, Matthews, Vetten & Lombart, 2009).

DISCUSSION

From the examination of the data and the literature above, it is evident that the triple challenge of inequality, poverty and unemployment still persists in South Africa. These problems require immediate attention from the government and civil society in order to combat VAW, as they are the major risk factors. Despite the advances made for South African women by the government, the living conditions of most women, especially African women, remain characterised by inequality, poverty and unemployment. Consequently, the literature shows that the effects of violence are borne by women irrespective of their socio-economic status. Although women of low socio-economic status are more vulnerable to violence, identification of the extent to which they experience violence differs and therefore beyond the scope of this study. In this article it was important to locate those factors associated with violence than impact on the nature of the financial and economic power between men and women. While the social conditions that fuel VAW are complex and rooted in the past apartheid dispensation, the greater empowerment of women will go a long way to combat VAW.

Social work is not an end in itself; it serves broader objectives. Therefore, it cannot be viewed in isolation from the community and government. Globally, social work is involved with poverty, unemployment, inequality and VAW. Social workers have been involved in promoting social justice and assisting vulnerable groups like women, who are mostly affected by these social problems. On a daily basis, social workers are working on these issues and with the risk assessment, working creatively and innovatively to help women understand their situation, and change and improve their conditions where possible. Social workers need to address VAW, unemployment, inequality and poverty simultaneously to build an inclusive society that would generate growth and development.

As mentioned earlier, social workers are currently dealing with VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment. Recent government initiatives highlight the critical role of social work in addressing these issues. However, with the increasing rate and complexity of VAW and the challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality, there is a need to strengthen the current strategies of implementing services. Furthermore, there is a need for social workers to take a leading role in dealing with these issues, because they have first-hand information through their direct interactions with women in various communities. A comprehensive approach is needed to address these challenges.

Firstly, social workers should conduct and strengthen community-based educational programmes, including dialogue between men and women that promote equal relationships. Parenting education on gendered roles should be conducted to educate parents about how gendered roles perpetuate VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment. Consequently, school-based programmes that promote changes

in attitudes between boy and girl children on VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment reduction should be presented. Equally, social workers should be at the forefront of media campaigns and interventions that seek to create awareness that will lead towards altering gender norms and promoting women's empowerment. Media interventions can be done through television, radio, newspapers and social media.

Women's empowerment and development needs particular attention, which require critical analysis, planning, organising and social action from social workers. Such skills can be transferred to women to improve their leadership and decision-making abilities. Women's empowerment and development require fostering and promoting economic opportunities for women through work on business training and development, job training, and placement in different sectors. Women can be capacitated through financial education and labour market opportunities. Another aspect of empowerment requires social workers to help women discover their own resources and their own ability to generate influence and positive change. Women and girls should be empowered and mentored on policies and interventions relating to inheritance and ownership of assets. When implementing these initiatives and interventions, it is important to engage both men and women to avoid friction and conflict between them. Importantly, working with both men and women will help to create and strengthen harmony between the two groups.

The way in which these issues are intertwined creates a complex setting which is difficult to address effectively. Hence the need for further research, more experience, and the continuous development of skills and knowledge among social workers with regard to these issues, which should not be seen in isolation from each other. Inclusion and participation of women in decision making and the economy could serve as a meaningful platform to address the VAW, inequality, poverty and unemployment in order to develop and implement initiatives and programmes that address women's needs. Similarly, the participation of women in the economy is essential to eradicate poverty, promote growth that is inclusive, equitable and sustainable. It is important to develop comprehensive and coherent strategies that address the problems that South African women face through help from government and civil society.

It is therefore about time that South Africans face up to the triple challenge and VAW, with social work specifically playing its vital role in combating these problems. The issues mentioned above have a serious bearing on the social work profession and women's lives. As stated earlier, social workers are ethically bound to deal with VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment. However, in general, the voice of social work as a profession is silent on these matters. Therefore measuring progress made by the profession remains a challenge. Ongoing research is required to map the conceptual domains of VAW, poverty, unemployment and inequality in order to improve women's lives. Such research is also necessary to obtain accurate information about the nature of these problems and the nature of the social work interventions aimed at addressing them. It is also necessary to examine the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the current social work services and interventions. This can be done through evaluation research, where both social workers and women collaboratively engage and determine what is working, what is not working, and what the outcomes and impact of the interventions are. Consequently, to improve on the existing interventions, new approaches and interventions could be developed and tested. Social workers must be at the forefront of developing, testing and implementing programmes, interventions and services in order to end VAW, poverty, inequality and unemployment for the current and future generation of South African women.

CONCLUSION

A review of literature from various sources was undertaken to reposition social work to deal with VAW and the triple challenges in South Africa. Repositioning social work provides an opportunity to engage with critical issues, trends and patterns emerging from the prevalence of VAW and the triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment. The review of the literature was undertaken in order to understand these problems and develop evidence-based interventions that respond to women's needs.

This review is essential as the year 2020 marks 64 years since the women's march of 1956, and 26 years year of democracy during which the country acknowledges and celebrates the strides made since 1994 towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Despite the noticeable progress made, women continue to experience various forms of violence, poverty, inequality and unemployment. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that VAW and the triple challenge remain major problems in South Africa and need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

For more than two decades South Africa has sought through a wide range of policies, programmes and initiatives to address the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment, which are major contributory factors towards making women vulnerable to violence. Furthermore, the current initiatives and programmes have gaps. Regrettably, social work is not at the forefront of these initiatives and its voice remains unheard, although it is ethically bound to deal with these issues. Social work is endowed with the knowledge and skills to address these issues and to improve the social conditions of women in South Africa. It is therefore important to include social work among the disciplines that are at the forefront of developing initiatives and programmes to deal with VAW and the triple challenge. The extensive involvement of social work could benefit the construction of alternative scientific tools to challenge and curb VAW and the triple challenge for the current and future generations of women.

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