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The psychosocial needs and coping strategies of black African mothers following the birth of a child with Down Syndrome: Implications for indigenisation of SA social work practice

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study aimed at exploring the psychosocial needs and coping strategies of black African mothers following the birth of a child with Down Syndrome (DS), in order to highlight implications of such needs for the indigenisation agenda of Social Work in the South African context. The study adopted a qualitative research design, purposive sample and utilised a method of a focus group discussion of seven participants, as well as four individual interviews to collect the data. The research sample was drawn from existing DS support groups in Tshwane. The analysis of collected data was done using a method for analysing qualitative data adapted from Terre Blanche and Kelly in Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 139). The method outlines 4 steps in data analysis; namely, familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration and lastly interpretation and checking.

The study reveals that, despite attempts by contemporary African practitioners to transform Social Work practise in order to align it to the needs and aspirations of African consumers, a lot of work is still required. The findings show that mothers need on-going psychosocial support ranging from the individual, family and community level to assistance with practical needs such as grants and stimulation of the child; as well as information about the condition. The study also shows that, in coping with the incidence of giving birth to a child with DS, black African mothers turn to the elders for support as well as to God and in some cases traditional healers and prophets. In the light of the above responses, the researcher further found that there is a general lack of fit between the conventional professional approach to psychosocial support and understanding of needs of black social work clients. Such lack of fit results in failure on the part of professional helpers to tap into various personal and family resources.

It is therefore recommended that current intervention models be modified to include professional values and principles that are in line with general cultural beliefs and norms of African people. Such modification would include more emphasis on a systemic

approach to problem solving that would view an individual as a part of a whole (i.e. the family system, particularly the extended family systems).