

The psychosocial needs and coping strategies of black African mothers following the birth of a child with Down Syndrome: Implications for indigenisation of South African Social Work practice.

MBAZIMA SIMEON MATHEBANE
9702361D

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in Social Work.

Johannesburg
2006

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. I have given full acknowledgement to the sources that I have used.

.....
Mbazima Simeon Mathebane

.....
Date

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Almighty for granting me the physical, intellectual and emotional abilities to successfully carry out the study.

I would like to thank the following people for their immeasurable support, guidance and contribution to the success of the study:

- **Mrs D Maseko and Mrs Linda Smith, my supervisors whose helpful comments have been appreciated.**
- **The Down Syndrome Association (Tshwane), particularly Mrs Dawn Molepo, facilitator of the Atteridgeville Down Syndrome Support Group for allowing me access to the mothers.**
- **All the mothers of children with Down Syndrome who participated in the study without whose time and co-operation, the study would have not been possible. These mothers kindly welcomed me into their homes and their lives and openly shared their experiences with me. I dedicate the study to them.**
- **Mrs Beverly Kriel for her input, support and advice, the Gauteng Department of Health for funding my studies and my family whose love and support has constantly given me the impetus to keep going.**

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).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	II
Acknowledgements	III
Abstract	IV
Table of contents	V

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aims of the study	2
1.3 Rationale	3
1.4 Anticipated value of the study	4
1.5 Underlying Assumptions	4
1.7 Research methodology	5
1.7.1 Research Design	5
1.7.2 Research Sample	5
1.7.3 Research tools	6
1.7.4 Data Gathering	6
1.7.5 Data Analysis	7
1.7.6 Limitations of the study	7
1.8 Ethical Issues	8
1.8.1 Introduction	8
1.8.2 Potentially emotions provoking study	9
1.8.3 Respondent's right to informed consent	9
1.8.4 Confidentiality of personal information	9
1.9 Definition of terms	10

2. Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Down Syndrome	11

2.3 Down Syndrome in South Africa	13
2.4 Prevention and Management of Down Syndrome	13
2.5 Effects of Down Syndrome on the individual and family	17
2.6 Forms of support	20
2.7 The origin of the social work profession	21
2.8 Indigenisation of social work in the black African context	22
2.8.1 Introduction	22
2.8.2 Comparative analysis of black African social life and social work practice	23
2.8.3 The indigenisation challenge for African social work practice	25
2.9 Conclusion	26

3. Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design	28
3.2 Research Methodology	28
3.2.1 Sampling	28
3.2.2 Data Collection	29
3.2.2.1 Introduction	29
3.2.2.2 Focus Group	30
3.2.2.3 Individual Interviews	32
3.3 Data Analysis	32
3.4 Limitations of the study	33

4. Chapter 4: Presentation and analysis of findings

4.1 Demographic details	35
Table 1. Summary of participants' characteristics	35
4.2 Emotional and Social needs	35
4.2.1 Initial disclosure of bad news	35
4.2.2 Practical needs and resources	36
4.2.3 Participant's emotional reactions and ascribed meaning	38

4.3 Formal support or Social Work intervention	40
4.4 Family reactions and ascribed meaning by other informal systems	42
4.5 Impact of Support Group	44

5. Chapter 5: Summary of the study, main findings and recommendations

5.1 Introduction	45
5.2 Main findings	46
5.2.1 Black African mother's needs and coping strategies	46
5.2.2 Handling of their needs at a formal or professional level	47
5.2.3 Handling of their needs through informal support systems	47
5.2.4 The extent to which social work intervention is informed by the needs of the mothers	48
5.2.5 Implications for the indigenisation agenda of Social Work in South Africa	48
5.3 Conclusion	49
5.4 Recommendation	50

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Ethical clearance certificate	52
6.2 Appendix B: Letter of permission of access from DSA	53
6.3 Appendix C: Participants information sheet for individual interview	54
6.4 Appendix D: Participants information sheet for focus group interview	56
6.5 Appendix E: Participants consent form for individual interview	58
6.6 Appendix F: Participants consent form for a focus group interview	60
6.7 Appendix G: Interview guide for individual interviews	62
6.8 Appendix H: Focus group prompts	64
Reference List	65