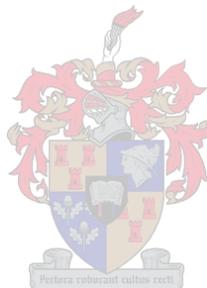


# **SOCIAL CASEWORK: AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE**

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**Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work at  
the University of Stellenbosch.**

**Promoter: Professor Sulina Green**



**April 2005**

**Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

## **ABSTRACT**

Of the three primary methods of intervention in social work - casework, group work and community work - the focus of this study is on social casework. Every country structures its own model of casework practice and this model is determined by the social conditions and the diversity of ethnic groups and their specific cultures. For any social work intervention to be effective it must incorporate the cultural elements and nuances that influence the life of the people in a given country.

In South Africa the implementation of the western paradigm of casework normally leaves out of account the dynamics of African culture. Consequently, current practice in social casework will have need to undergo a fundamental paradigm shift in order to address the needs of clients in a culturally sensitive way.

The problem that this study will address, therefore, is the lack of sensitivity to African culture in the practice of social casework. Not surprisingly, research on the indigenization of casework in South Africa is meagre. This study attempts to contribute to the scientific inquiry about indigenizing casework theory and practice in South Africa.

The aim of this study is to present an Afrocentric perspective on the method of social casework that will provide guidelines for practice in African communities in South Africa. To achieve this aim, four objectives are pursued: to describe casework within the context of the history of social work; to identify cultural elements that are essential to practice casework with African clients; to determine to what extent social caseworkers are culturally sensitive; and to investigate how far social caseworkers are equipped to render services to African clients.

An exploratory study which is qualitative in nature was conducted. The phenomenological research strategy was used where the researcher, through in-depth interviews with respondents, developed insight into the experiences of social workers with regard to their practice of casework with African clients. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten respondents who were social workers employed either by the state or by private welfare organizations in the Limpopo Province.

The findings of the study are that social work training does not adequately prepare social workers to practice casework effectively with African clients. Indeed, social workers practising casework are not always culturally competent. Guidelines to be considered when practising casework with African clients are presented, and ways are suggested of how social workers can achieve cultural competence in service rendering to African clients. For social casework to succeed in South Africa, it is crucial that caseworkers acknowledge the existence of the African worldview, which is profoundly informed by African culture, and also incorporate the implications of this worldview in their casework framework of practice with African clients.

## OPSOMMING

Van die drie primêre intervensiemetodes in maatskaplike werk - gevallewerk, groepwerk en gemeenskapswerk, is die fokus van die studie is op gevallewerk. Elke land stel sy eie model vir die beoefening van gevallewerk saam en die model sal afhang van die sosiale toestande en die diversiteit van etniese groepe en hulle spesifieke kulture. Vir maatskaplike werk intervensie om effektief te wees moet die kultuur elemente en nuanses wat die lewe van mense in 'n bepaalde land beïnvloed, in ag geneem word.

In Suid-Afrika neem die implementering van die westerse paradigma van gevallewerk normaalweg nie die dinamika van die Afrikakultuur in ag nie. Gevolglik moet die huidige beoefening van gevallewerk in Suid-Afrika 'n fundamentele paradigma skuif ondergaan ten einde die behoeftes van kliënte in 'n kultuur sensitiewe manier aan te spreek.

Die probleem wat hierdie studie derhalwe sal ondersoek is die gebrek aan sensitiwiteit vir die Afrika kultuur in die beoefening van gevallewerk. Dit is ook nie verbasend dat navorsing oor die verinheemsing van gevallewerk in Suid-Afrika gebrekkig is nie. Die studie beoog om 'n bydrae te lewer tot die wetenskaplike ondersoek van die verinheemsing van gevallewerk teorie en praktyk in Suid-Afrika. Daar bestaan 'n dringende behoefte om gevallewerk benaderings en prosesse te kontekstualiseer en te verheems ten einde sensitief te wees vir en te reageer op die sosiale realiteite wat die meeste Suid-Afrikanners ervaar.

Die doel van die studie is om 'n Afrosentriese perspektief van die gevallewerk metode van maatskaplike werk, wat riglyne sal verskaf vir die beoefening van gevallewerk in Afrika gemeenskappe in Suid-Afrika, aan te bied. Om dit te bereik is vier doelwitte vir die studie gestel: om gevallewerk binne die konteks van die geskiedenis van maatskaplike werk te beskryf; om die kultuur elemente wat essensieel is vir die beoefening van gevallewerk met Afrika kliënte, te identifiseer; om by gevallewerkers vas te stel tot watter mate hulle toegerus is om kultuur sensitief te wees en om die mate waarin gevallewerkers bevoeg is om dienste en Afrika kliënte te lewer, te ondersoek.

'n Verkennende studie wat kwalitatief van aard is, is onderneem. Die fenomenologiese strategie is gebruik waartydens die navorser met behulp van in-diepte onderhoude met respondente insig ontwikkel het in die ervarings van maatskaplike werkers in die beoefening van gevallewerk met Afrika kliënte. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is met tien respondente wat maatskaplike werkers in diens van óf die staat óf privaat welsynsorganisasies in die Limpopo Provinsie is, is gevoer.

Die bevindinge van die studie is dat maatskaplikewerk-opleiding maatskaplike werkers nie voldoende voorberei om gevallewerk met Afrika kliënte effektief te beoefen nie. Inderdaad is maatskaplike werkers wat gevallewerk beoefen nie altyd kultuur sensitief nie. Riglyne wat oorweeg kan word vir die beoefening van gevallewerk met Afrika kliënte word aangebied en maniere waarop kulturele kompetensie bereik kan word in dienslewering aan Afrika kliënte word voorgestel. Vir maatskaplike werk om suksesvol te wees in Suid-Afrika is dit kardinaal dat gevallewerkers erkenning sal verleen aan die bestaan van 'n Afrika wêreldbeskouing wat hoofsaaklik ontleen is aan die Afrikakultuur en dat die implikasies van hierdie wêreldbeskouing vir hulle deel sal maak van hulle gevallewerk praktyk raamwerk met Afrika kliënte.

*To my mother Zodwa , my wife Jennifer and my sons Siza and Zanusi*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God Almighty I Give Thanks.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for the role they have played in assisting me to complete this work.

I am indebted to my study leader and promoter Professor Sulina Green whose constructive criticism and constant support and belief in me during this very long academic walk is highly appreciated and will never be forgotten.

I would like to express my gratitude to the NRF for funding part of this study.

I want to acknowledge and appreciate the support I received from the Department of Social Work at the University of Stellenbosch during the course of this study, my periodic consultations with the Department contributed immensely to the success of this study.

I would like to acknowledge and appreciate the financial and academic support I received from the Center for Afro-American Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor particularly the South African Initiative Office. CAAS made it possible for me attend Research Summer Courses at Umich. I am indebted to Prof Charles Moody for making it possible for me to be the proud recipient of the Moody Scholarship for two years.

I would to acknowledge and appreciate the inspiration I received from Dr Brent Crite and Dr Derrick Cogburn at the University of Michigan.

I would like to thank the University of Venda Research and Publications Committee for funding part of this study.

I would like to thank Dr Lalendle for sharing some of his time and resources with me in the course of this study.

I would like to thank Dr LD Mogorosi for his support, input and continued interest in my study.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Ms T. Mashamba for everything she has done to assist me in this study.

I would like to thank Mr Shumani Rammbuda and Ms Mpho Molefe for being there for me from time to time when I needed help.

I would like to thank Ms S Winckler for her help with the editing of the dissertation.

I want to thank all my friends and colleagues who supported me in various ways.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Social casework is one of three primary methods of intervention in social work practice together with group work and community work. The researcher has been lecturing in social work at the Universities of the North and Venda respectively for the past fourteen years. These universities are situated in the Limpopo Province. As a lecturer, the researcher became aware of the lack of indigenous theory that can empower social workers to be effective in practising social casework with African clients. Agencies at which students were placed for practical work required them to have indigenous theory because of the nature of the clients to whom they were expected to render services. By reading the curricula in the departments of Social Work in South Africa, the researcher realised that indigenous theory does not form part of what is taught to social work students. Readings prescribed for the various courses in social work do not include readings on African culture and indigenous theories of helping, largely because little has been done to develop indigenous theory in South Africa.

In the researcher's opinion, the practice of social casework in South Africa should undergo a fundamental shift to be relevant, contextual and culture sensitive. Every country should structure its own model of social casework practice and such models should be determined by the conditions of the specific cultures. Ejaz (1989:25) states that social work in various countries must respect and examine indigenous characteristics. For social work interventions to be effective, they must incorporate the cultural elements and nuances that influence the life of the people in a given country. Siegel (1994), though, points out that those people who are attracted to the social work profession in India are from the more affluent and educated strata of society and they may identify more readily with the values and the behaviours of the West than with those of the indigenous populations they serve. The researcher believes that social casework

practice in South Africa can be meaningful and relevant to the African population only if it is sensitive to the African world-view, which is informed by African culture.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

In South Africa, the Western paradigm of casework does not always take cognisance of the African cultural dynamics that impinge on social casework practice as implemented among Africans. Siegel (1994:61) has stated that social work educators in Third World countries like India stress the need to assess the wisdom of unilaterally transferring Western social work theory and practice methods to their own social work programmes, and are calling for the development of indigenous theory for the social work profession. McKendrick (1990:62) has also stated that Black social workers in South Africa increasingly describe social casework as unhelpful or inappropriate in the Third World contexts in which they find themselves. They experience casework as unproductive in the face of poverty, disease and unequal distribution of material resources. In a multicultural country like South Africa, there is a need to be aware of cultural differences and the impact they may have on casework service delivery. Studies have also been conducted elsewhere, particularly the United States of America, where researchers such as Devore and Schlesinger (1996) and Schiele (2000) produced publications on ethnic and cultural issues and social work practice. In this study, the researcher will focus on African cultural issues and social casework practice.

The problem that this study will address is the lack of sensitivity to African culture in the practice of social casework. Research on the indigenisation of casework in South Africa is meagre. The study will therefore contribute to scientific inquiry into the area of indigenising casework theory and practice in this country. For the purposes of the study, social casework will be defined as one of the primary methods of social work practice used by professional social workers to help individuals and families to solve intrapsychic, interpersonal, socioeconomic and environmental problems through direct relationship (Barker, 1999:448). According to Perlman (1957:4), the nucleus of the casework event is in “a person with a problem [coming] to a place where a professional representative helps him or her by a given process.” In casework theory and practice,

the assumption is that the current theories of personality, problem, place and process are universally applicable. Casework, especially in the United States of America, has embraced Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which provides an explanation for many facets of human behaviour (McKendrick, 1990:9). The conventionally accepted paradigms and approaches of Western thought, however, do not provide an adequate understanding of African people. Baldwin (1976:8) states that the traditional social pathology view of black behaviours is based on the Eurocentric conception of the definition of reality or, more precisely, on a European distortion of the reality of Black people.

In this study, the researcher argues that there is a dire need for social casework approaches and processes to be contextualised/indigenised/Africanised in order to be sensitive and responsive to the realities that face the majority of South Africans. In considering the problems that social workers deal with, it becomes clear that casework in its present form is of little or no value to African clients, apart from enabling them to access material assistance.

Three examples that substantiate this argument are discussed. Firstly, social casework theory gives no acknowledgement of the relationship between the living and the dead (ancestors). Hammond-Tooke (1993:149-154) states that all the southern Bantu believe in a life after death and that the ancestral spirits form the basis of their religion. Every group has a special name to refer to their ancestral spirits: Zulus refer to ancestral spirits as *amadlozi* or *amathongo*; Tsongas use the word *swikwembu*; Sothos refer to *badimo* and the Venda talk about *midzimu*. The ancestors are spirits of the dead members of the clan. The importance of ancestors is vested in the belief that they continue to take a close interest in the affairs of their descendants. Generally speaking, they are benevolent and deeply concerned with the wellbeing of their children.

Secondly, Western casework theory involves no approach to marital guidance or counselling that acknowledges polygamous marriages as a reality among African communities. Marital guidance from a Western perspective assumes a union between

one husband and one wife. The treatment approaches and models of intervention in Turner (1983 and 1986) do not even begin to relate to African cultural issues. Hammond-Tooke (1993:55) has stated that "Southern Bantu were polygamous, that is a man could have more than one wife." Wives typically were ranked in order of marriage. Mazrui (1986) has pointed out that monogamy is found in all African societies, but polygyny, or the marriage of one man and two or more women are found in most. To date, to the researcher's knowledge, there is no theory that can empower caseworkers to intervene in situations of polygamy.

Thirdly, the stages of human development, both psychosocial and psychosexual, do not take African experiences into account. Some African tribes still make use of tribal schools where participants go through certain rites of passage. Hammond-Tooke (1993:131-148) gives a vivid explanation of how the different African tribal groups go about performing these rites of passage that mark the human developmental stages of an African person. People in some African communities will never confide in a person who has not been through the traditional rites of passage associated with becoming a man or a woman.

The role of clan names in the establishment of a client-worker relationship has not been acknowledged in Western casework literature either. For example, an African person feels that a caseworker understands him/her better when the worker refers to the client by the clan name. In the event of the caseworker not knowing the client's clan name, it is normal and acceptable for the worker to ask the client about it in the process of obtaining the client's demographic information. On the part of the caseworker, this shows awareness that there is another name other than a person's regular name that connects any person to their clan, a name that makes a person feel more accepted and respected. A person who, for example, belongs to the Pedi ethnic group and whose surname is Mphahlele will feel "culturally understood" if he or she is referred to in a conversation as Mogaga, which is the clan name of the Mphahleles. It should be noted that all Black people have clan names and totems. The proposed study will examine

African cultural dynamics with a view to improving the teaching and the practice of social casework in South Africa.

With this study, a contribution will hopefully be made towards evolving an understanding of casework located within the cultural life experiences of the African population in South Africa. The researcher acknowledges that culture is dynamic, and that African culture does not exist in its pure form but in a state of continuous interaction with other cultures. In this study the researcher will therefore identify those aspects of African culture that seem to be enduring among Africans and study such aspects in relation to the casework method of social work practice. It should be noted that the concepts African and Black will be used interchangeably in this study and that Coloureds, Indians and Whites will be excluded.

### **1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to present an Afrocentric perspective of the casework method of social work practice that will provide guidelines for the practice of casework in African communities in South Africa. To achieve the aim of the study, the following objectives were formulated:

- To reflect on social casework within the context of the history of social work.
- To describe cultural elements that should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients.
- To determine from social caseworkers how social work training has equipped them to be culturally sensitive.
- To investigate the extent to which social caseworkers are culturally competent to render casework services to African clients.

### **1.4 DEMARCATION OF THE RESEARCH FIELD**

The population selected for this study consisted of practising social workers who render social services to African/Black clientele populations in the Limpopo Province. State and private welfare agencies that mainly provide social casework services to African clients were selected. The study attempted to determine from caseworkers whether their training equipped them to be culture competent in working with African clients. This

study also investigated knowledge or conceptual gaps in the caseworkers' conceptual framework of social casework practice. In the study, the researcher sought to identify African cultural dynamics that should be taken into account in practising casework with African clients. The casework method will be viewed from the perspective of those components that need to be indigenised. Because the aim of this study is to bring African cultural dynamics to bear on casework as a method of social work practice, the notion of African culture will be advanced from authors such as the following: Kamalu (1990), Lamb (1987), Mekada (2002), Midgley (1983), Mukenge (2002), Mungazi (1996), Swingoski (1996), Ruch and Anyanwu and Anyanwu (1981) and Tangenberg (2000).

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Literature study**

The literature study involved the use of social work literature and literature on African culture. The literature that was reviewed dealt with the relationship between culture and social work in general, with particular reference to African culture and casework practice in the South African context. Literature on the Afrocentric perspective provided the context within which to understand the power relations between cultures particularly the African and the Western culture. Literature on African culture provided insight into what constitutes the African world-view that caseworkers have to take into account when practising casework with African clients. Literature on Afrocentric and ethnic-sensitive social work provided insight into how social work as a discipline, and casework as a method of social work practice in particular, can be linked to the world-views of clients, in order to be relevant to their needs. Literature on the history of social work showed that the Western forms of social work practice continue to dominate even in the developing countries, in spite of the glaring cultural differences between the Western world and the developing Third World nations.

### **1.5.2 Definition of concepts**

The following concepts are defined in the context in which they were used in this study:

**African:** Black people who are residents of South Africa. In this study, Black excludes the white, coloured and Indian population residing in South Africa

**African culture:** The customs, habits, skills, arts, values, ideology and religious behaviour of African people

**Afrocentric social work:** A social work orientation or world-view that uses cultural values, history and shared experiences of African people as framework to solve human problems (Barker, 1999:13)

**Black:** African as defined above. African and Black in this study are used interchangeably

**Culture:** The customs, habits, skills, arts, values, ideology and religious behaviour of a group of people (Barker, 1999:114)

**Cultural competence:** The ability of the caseworker to provide social work services to clients from cultural groups that are different to that of the social worker

**Culturally sensitive social work:** The process of professional intervention that is cognisant of the unique as well as common characteristics of clients who possess racial, ethnic, religious, gender, age, sexual orientation and socioeconomic differences (Barker, 1999:113)

**Indigenisation:** Appropriateness of professional social work roles to the needs of different indigenous clientele populations from different countries as opposed to the needs of the First World countries.

**White:** White people who are residents of South Africa

**Social casework:** A primary method of social work practice which is used by professional social workers to help individuals and families to solve intrapsychic, interpersonal, socioeconomic and environmental problems through direct face-to-face relationship (Barker, 1999:448)

**Social work:** An applied science of helping people achieve an effective level of psychosocial functioning (Barker, 1999:1455)

**Social work practice:** The use of social work knowledge and social work skills to provide social service in ways that are consistent with social work values, (Barker, 1999:457)

**African centred world-view or Afrocentric/Africentric world-view:** A world-view that is based on the African cultural values of people of African origin and African descent throughout the world. In this study the focus will be on the world-view of Black South Africans.

**World-view:** The way a person tends to understand his or her relationship with social institutions, nature, objects, other people and spirituality (Barker, 1999:522).

### **1.5.3 Empirical investigation**

For the purposes of this study, the type of research design that was applied was the exploratory design. The reason for this choice is that very little is known about African culture-based social casework practice. Most studies that have been conducted have to do with the relationship between social work and cultures other than the African culture in the South African context. Mouton and Marais (1990) state that exploratory studies may be conducted by means of a literature review and also by investigations involving people who have practical experience of the problem to be studied.

In this study, the researcher will follow a qualitative research process, because qualitative studies enable the researcher to develop insight into the experiences of the respondents regarding the phenomenon under investigation. The nature of data in qualitative studies is narrative and thematic rather than numerical/statistical (involving numbers). De Vos (2002) is of the opinion that qualitative studies enable the researcher to “enter” into the world of the study subjects through in-depth interviews concerning their experiences. The researcher interviewed practising social caseworkers who deal with the African clientele population.

In line with qualitative studies, the sample size of this study was relatively small, compared to sample sizes in quantitative studies. Ten respondents were interviewed for the purposes of data gathering. An instrument that the researcher used to collect data was the unstructured interviewing schedule. In addition to the unstructured interviewing schedule, the researcher also observed nonviable behaviours on the part of the respondents to try and monitor whether what the respondent were saying verbally was

consistent with what they were saying non-verbally. Data was analysed by means of thematic analysis also known as discourse analysis, where consistent themes were identified and analysed. After the analysis of data, a discussion of findings, conclusions and recommendations was arranged. The research design and methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

## **1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The limitations of the study will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **1.7 DIVISION INTO CHAPTERS**

This study is divided into seven chapters, as follows:

Chapter one consists of an introduction to the study. This comprises the motivation for the study, the aims and the objectives of the study.

Chapter Two covers the historical development of social work as a profession, showing its Western origins and its influence on the development of social work in developing countries, including South Africa.

Chapter Three covers Afrocentric social work and its implications for social work practice.

Chapter Four addresses African cultural competence areas.

Chapter Five contains an explanation of the research methodology.

Chapter six consists of the presentation and analysis of data.

Chapter seven contains conclusions and recommendations drawn from the theory, as well as from the empirical study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SOCIAL CASEWORK WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Developments in social work in Britain, America, Africa and South Africa have all contributed to the form and nature of social work practice in South Africa. Social casework, the earliest and the best-defined social work method, has a history similar to that of the social work profession (Roberts & Nee, 1970: xiii). One of the objectives of the study was to reflect on the nature and development of casework within the context of social work. The history of social work and social casework will be discussed with a view to tracing its Western Anglo-American origins and how it has spread and influenced social work practice in the developing world. Attention will be given to the emergence of social work in Britain, America, Africa and South Africa. The following historical factors will be discussed: the origins of social work and casework, social work in Africa and the Third World and social work in South Africa. The inclination of social work and social casework in South Africa and the Third World to mimic the West will be pointed out. As the aim of this study, amongst other things, is to suggest ways in which casework in South Africa can be culturally appropriate, the need for social work, casework in particular, to be sensitive to the African cultural contexts within which it is practised will be pointed out.

#### **2.2 THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL WORK**

The social work profession originated in Western Europe and North America at the beginning of the twentieth century; during the inter-war period, it was transplanted to countries such as Egypt and India. After the Second World War era, the profession was globalised. Schools of social work proliferated, being developed on cultural assumptions originating in the North. To correct the situation, some observers have advocated an indigenisation of social work theory, since social work and social casework in much of the developing world is seriously incompatible with most of the world's divergent cultural realities and practices. It has become necessary for social work theory and methods to be more consciously adapted to the culture in which they are practised. Scholars are now insisting on a profession that is variously specific to Africa or other regions of the

world. Indigenisation initiatives highlight localised approaches to practice for practice to be culturally appropriate. Indigenisation has to do with epistemology; it is an effort to acknowledge the diverse knowledge bases and world-views that provide the foundation for social work knowledge and practice, including casework worldwide (Graham & Al-Krenawi 2003:6).

The history of social work and social casework can also be traced in Western Europe, where it developed in response to serious social problems created by the Industrial Revolution. In England, the Elizabethan Poor Laws were enacted to deal with the problems of urban destitution (Woodroffe, 1971). In 1834 the poor laws were amended through the introduction of the principle of lesser eligibility, which sought to limit the numbers of poor who received relief by making poor relief unattractive. This led to the establishment of workhouses where destitute people were housed. Those who lived in workhouses lived under terrible conditions and some people, recognising this and motivated by religious and philanthropic considerations, began to render personal social service to the less fortunate. This marked the beginning of voluntary organisations geared towards providing social services to the poor and disadvantaged members of society. The proliferation of voluntary organisations led to the establishment of the Charity Organization Society, which co-ordinated the activities of voluntary organisations involved in providing personal social services (Midgely, 1981:34; Woodroffe, 1971:25).

The Charity Organization Society employed family visitors who visited the destitute to investigate their home circumstances and determine their eligibility for assistance (Woodroffe, 1971:27). It was later realised that it was not enough to give relief without taking concrete actions to deal with the causes of poverty. A deeper understanding of human behaviour and the relationship between people and their environment was called for. It is evident that social casework began as a by-product of the Charity Organization Society (Woodroffe, 1971:54), but the move towards the professionalisation of the activities of the friendly visitors in the USA led to the launching of the first training course for social workers at the New Seminar School in 1900. Specialised training for charity workers played a crucial role in the development of professional social work in Britain

and America. It prepared students for employment, enhanced the status of the profession and provided opportunities for academic reflection and research, which resulted in the formulation of theoretical ideas and principles. Thus, while the Charity Organization Society, the Settlements and Octavia Hill were the founders of social work education in Britain (Midgley, 1981:23), the United States took the lead in developing theories and methods of social work and in establishing schools of social work where theories and methods were taught (Muller, 1989:7).

### **2.3 SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA AND THE THIRD WORLD**

Internationally, social work education expanded rapidly after the Second World War when many professional schools of social work were established in developing countries. Social work training in these countries was based on Western approaches and American theories of social work and social casework have had a considerable influence on schools of social work in the Third World (Midgley, 1981:39). From its very beginning, social work practice in Africa therefore inherited a Eurocentric bias. Theories and models tended to be adopted wholesale from Western theorists and practitioners, reflecting Western analysis and the culture of individualism. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many practitioners continue to receive training in Western countries, which makes breaking from the Western orientation a formidable task. However, it is increasingly recognised that social work theory and practice in any given country must reflect local socioeconomic and cultural needs (Mupedziswa, 1992:21).

In the context of Africa, social work is a relatively young profession, which was imported from the Western world in the 1950s and 1960s. Individuals in Africa who wished to become social workers had little option but to go abroad, mostly to the West. They were therefore trained according to curricula that relied on the Western orientation. Later, training institutions were opened elsewhere; these included the school of social work in Ghana 1964, the Jan Hofmeyer School of Social Work in South Africa and the Oppenheimer College of Social Science in Zambia. These institutions were staffed with trainers who themselves had been trained in the West and this resulted in inappropriate orientation of the programmes offered (Mupedziswa, 1992:20).

At the beginning of social work training in South Africa, a few Black social workers were trained at the white universities of Cape Town, Natal and the Witwatersrand. With the founding of the Jan Hofmeyer School of Social work, the number of trainees increased. According to the Report of the National Conference on Post War Planning of Social Work in 1944, concern was expressed that social work training did not equip social workers with an understanding of the social problems of South Africans and that this would disqualify the profession from contributing to the solutions of these problems. A call was made against racism in social work by Muller (1989:16), who pleaded “let those who defend racialism in their lecture rooms search their consciences and ask themselves if they are satisfied that what they teach is social science and not political propaganda.”

The creation of apartheid and the homelands in South Africa also affected the training of black social workers. A planning committee was formed within the Department of Native Affairs in 1957 to formulate guidelines regarding the training of black social workers. In its report, it called for services and training to deviate from the existing Western paradigm wherever they did not conform to black traditions and customs of social care. The committee felt that training was too academic in nature and did not equip social workers to cope with the problems they would be facing. It was stated that training should prepare workers to address problems experienced by black people in urban and rural areas. But before the recommendations of this report could be implemented, the training of black social workers ceased to be the responsibility of this department (Muller, 1989:20).

The profession of social work was introduced to Africa as a found discipline and as an intact imported model. Though local variations have been introduced over the years, the core has remained more or less as it was first found. While the schools of social work have conferred degrees on many African social workers that have helped to maintain and spread the profession, the centres of social work, however, remain in the western European countries and the United States, because it was there that social work was

first established as a profession and casework as an intervention method was developed before schools of social work were established in other countries (Chan, 1991:46).

The social welfare policies, theories and methods used in the Third World countries therefore were almost carbon copies of those of the imperialist countries (Midgley, 1981). Social workers came from the imperialist countries and were brought to the Third World countries. Members of the indigenous population were sent overseas to attend schools of social work where they studied Western theories and methods of social work and social casework. After, in some cases before, independence, schools of social work were founded in developing countries, but curricula corresponded closely to the Western model of training, in spite of the economic, social and cultural differences that existed. Few questioned the relevance of these approaches to the Third World or attempted to provide courses that were suited to local needs or conditions (Midgley, 1981).

The history of social work practice and education focused on Third World clients has demonstrated that social theory and methods and techniques implemented without specific regard to race, ethnicity and culture have proven to be ineffective and inadequate. But Schools of Social work have been oblivious to the need for adapting methods of practice and social casework to Third World groups, although each Third World clientele group has its own problems and personality derived from long-existing cultural and moral values, ethnic background and many other factors. Social work and social casework practice with Third World clients show that, besides variations in the generic method that must be made to suit individuals, certain adaptations also need to be made in applying social work and casework methods to the specific group (Mwalimu, 1983).

Osei-Hwedie (1995) is of the opinion that the search for social work practice that can promote the kind of development that both practitioners and clients can understand and relate to has led to the emergence of concepts such as indigenisation, authentication and conscientisation. The search is for social work education and practice models that are based on local socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the clients. Indigenisation

will lead to practices that stem from indigenous development, based on the needs of the people, their culture and economic landscape.

As the social work profession in the Third World has become suspect, seemingly being part of the effort to change the peoples of Africa and Asia to fit in with the ideals that the West has had for them (Midgley, 1981), the Third World started exploring new possibilities in an effort to make social work more relevant to the welfare needs of the developing nations. Indigenisation became a key word. This led to diversification of social work in Third World countries like Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Sierra Leone, where social work practice to suit their unique situations was adopted (Muller, 1989). Indigenisation in the African context now aims to bridge the gap between the First World practice models and models suited to the developing world.

The lack of fit between social work theories and the Third World countries is as old as the advent of social work in the developing countries. Courses for professional education focused upon traditional social work and casework methodologies suitable for developed, industrialised societies and were of limited relevance to the problems of disadvantaged urban people and underdeveloped rural communities. South African social work including casework education and practice had developed a trend of relying on the West for direction. The challenge for South African social workers is to discern the location of their profession in the light of the changing nature of their country's social structures and to rectify their past heavy reliance on interpretations of the nature of social work which have not emerged from Africa (Drower, 2002:8-10).

## **2.4 SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA**

During the first and second quarters of this century, social work became an important export item from First World countries to the developing world (McKendrick, 1990). Assistance to the needy or the destitute forms part of human society; it therefore is not strange that social welfare and the existence of organisations aimed at providing social services have always been evident in countries all over the world, even before specific governments intervened constructively. The indigenous communities in South Africa,

who lived here before white settlement, were no exception. The members of these communities lived in close contact with each other and depended on each other in the search for food, shelter and clothing (Van Eeden, Ryke & De Necker, 2000). The expansion of white “trekkers” into the interior of South Africa led to a reduction of the effectiveness of African tribal life as a system caring for its members.

In South Africa social work is a relatively new profession. Its history is related to the development of social welfare, which received formal institutional sanction with the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare in 1937. This development was an outcome of the 1929 Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the poverty of white people in South Africa. Prior to the entry of government into social welfare provision there was a proliferation of private or voluntary welfare organisations that were providing services to the needy. The structure and functions of these voluntary organisations were modelled on the Charity Organization Societies which arose in Britain in the 1860s and which later spread to the United States of America. The early history of social work, social casework and social welfare in South Africa paralleled developments in Britain and the United States (Gray, 1998).

#### **2.4.1 The effect of state activity on social welfare in South Africa**

The development of social welfare and social work as a profession and the nature of its professional activity in South Africa were driven by the state concern for white poverty and a wish to address this issue through the training of practitioners in an approach that had emerged from the values and ideologies of the United States of America (Drower, 2002:8). Poverty, both African and White, and the different ways in which the poverty of these two groups was viewed have been significant factors in shaping South Africa’s social welfare system (McKendrick, 1990:10).

The Carnegie Commission of 1929 investigated the plight of the poor Whites and suggested that legislation for pensions be enacted. By 1937 the Department of Social Welfare had been formed (Gray, 1998). The plight of the poor Whites elicited an immediate response from the white communities and church. Afrikaans women’s

organisations were formed to aid poor Whites at the local community level, and the Dutch Reformed Church in particular organised successive conferences to find ways of addressing white poverty. The state also became seriously concerned about white destitution. After the Union of the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1910, provisional schemes for social relief were used to address the situation of poor Whites. It was only in 1924 that concerted efforts were made to create work opportunities for them. Employment opportunities for indigent Whites were established by the State Department of Labour; those opportunities were mainly in the armed forces, railways, municipalities, and the agricultural settlements. Despite remedial measures on the part of the white community, solutions to white destitution were elusive and poverty increased (McKendrick, 1990:11).

While African, Coloured and Indian people's problems remained relatively neglected; concern about white poverty grew even further with the depression of the late 1920s. In 1928 the Dutch Reformed Church instigated the Carnegie Commission of New York to find a new approach to white poverty. A scientific investigation into the causes of white poverty, its extent and the means by which it could be reduced was undertaken. The report of the Carnegie Commission of inquiry numbered South Africa's poor Whites at 300 000 persons, and pin-pointed the major causes as being South Africa's changing economic and social structure, rather than personal inadequacies of poor people. Two of the major recommendations of the commission were for the establishment of a state bureau to be responsible for people's welfare and for the preparation of skilled, university-trained social workers well versed in the social sciences. These recommendations were seminal to the creation of a state department of Social Welfare in 1937, the rapid development of courses of social work training at South African Universities and the growth of a social work profession (McKendrick, 1990:12).

The services of the Department of Social Welfare were primarily directed towards Whites, who received more services and a better standard of service than any other population group. McKendrick (1990:13) refers to Rheinalt and Jones who reported in 1943 that a total of £9, 750 000 was spent in South Africa on social assistance and

social insurance, of which £8 300 000 went to Whites, £800 000 to Coloured and Indian persons, and £600 000 to African people. By way of comparisons, these groups formed the following proportions of the total population at the time: Whites 20.9 percent; Coloured and Indian persons 10, 3 percent; and Africans 68, 3 percent. The rates of social security were in the ratio of 3:2:1 for Whites, Coloureds and Africans respectively (McKendrick, 1990:13).

The second Carnegie Report, which dealt with the poverty of Blacks and ways of enhancing development, was published in 1984. The government could no longer ignore the shocking findings that were made. The Carnegie Commission recommended that steps be taken to start a pension scheme for black pensioners as soon as possible (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000). Parallel to white indigence was the growth of poverty among Africans on white-owned farms, in the cities and towns and in the reserves set aside for African people. The overcrowded reserves offered no opportunity for paid employment; African people had to seek employment elsewhere. Some Africans were attracted by lowly paid work on white farms. Other Africans, together with Coloured and Indian people migrated to towns and cities in search of work, but their lack of industrial skills, coupled with restrictive practices, condemned them to poorly paid jobs (McKendrick, 1990).

The discoveries of diamonds (1870) and gold (1885) caused a rush to the mining towns and earmarked the start of the process of industrialisation and related socioeconomic problems, with poverty as one of its most outstanding consequences. This also created a need for the training of people who would be able to deal with the emerging social problems from a professional perspective.

#### **2.4.2 The effect of World War II on the development of social welfare in South Africa**

Because South Africa was a combatant in World War II (1939-1945), the war had an effect on the development of social welfare in South Africa. During World War II, the migration of people into cities continued. Droughts, pestilence and poverty made people

pour into cities where they had to deal with the fact they were ill equipped for life in an industrial society (McKendrick, 1990:14). There was therefore a plethora of social problems that needed professional social work interventions. The majority of training schools in South Africa supported a broader generic base and tried to train generalists who would be in a position to work with systems of all sizes. In practice the focus unfortunately remained on casework for many years and this was reinforced by a subsidy system that favoured work with individuals rather than focusing on the system that most needed change (McKendrick, 1990). Because casework was the method of choice in the United States and Britain, it also became a method of choice in South Africa. This further demonstrates the influence of both America and Britain on the development of social work in South Africa and the developing countries.

### **2.4.3 The influence of the coming to power of the Nationalist Party**

One of the significant events for social welfare in South Africa during the period 1938 – 1950 was the coming to power in 1948 of the white National Party government who propagated the slogan of separate development of different racial groups popularly known as “apartheid”. Their policy was to implement the creed of separate development in all areas of the country’s life, including that of social welfare. The significance of the Nationalist Party government was that it accelerated the implementation of structures and practices to promote separate development by using the force of law (McKendrick, 1990:14).

All processes of welfare services rendered by the government were informed by the political ideology of Afrikaner Nationalists. The thought, amongst other things, was conveyed that the white community was superior and that the black communities were inferior. The government did provide welfare services to all other cultural groups, but the services were not equal and evenly distributed among all racial groups. The South African government initially ordered the Department of Social Welfare to render services to Whites, Coloured and Indian communities, whilst the Department of Native Affairs ran the affairs of the black community. In 1951 the section for Coloured Affairs was established within the Department of Interior Affairs. In 1953 a department for Indian

Affairs followed. According to the Nationalist Party government, each black ethnic group would be afforded the opportunity to develop its own homeland and to develop to a fully-fledged nation shortly after 1948. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 made provision for this. With the permeation of the apartheid dogma in the social welfare system, its development was reflected in the fragmentation of state welfare services according to race (McKendrick, 1990:15).

#### **2.4.4 The role of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd in the development of social welfare**

Apart from his central role in South African politics and the development of apartheid after the 1948 electoral victory of the National Party, Verwoerd played a leading role in the Afrikaner-led attempt to reduce white poverty through the development of social welfare policies and programmes in South Africa. Verwoerd established the first Department of Sociology and Social work in South Africa at the University of Stellenbosch. Coulter (1930), who was an advisor on the sociological aspects of the Poor White commission, argued at Stellenbosch that “scientifically trained technicians” were needed for social welfare work and that untrained welfare workers were “like [laymen] in a chemical laboratory, hoping to assemble in an exact manner the ingredients of a high explosive with disastrous results” (Coulter, 1930:9). Verwoerd emphasised the need for ameliorating white indigence through changes in individual behaviour and through the upliftment of the poor. Both as an academic sociologist and as a welfare activist, he stressed the need for individual rather than collective solutions to the problem of poverty. In his teachings, he argued that the causes of white poverty differed from family to family and that social workers should treat each individual case separately (Miller, 1989). One might regard this as the beginning of social casework in South Africa.

During his five-year tenure in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Stellenbosch, Dr Verwoerd was active in a number of social welfare organisations in Cape Town. In 1934 he played a role in the Kimberley Volkskongres or National Conference convened to discuss the growing problem of poverty among South Africa’s white population. Verwoerd served as the chairman of the socioeconomic committee of the conference. In this capacity he lobbied successfully to persuade the

government to establish a National Department of Social Welfare. Verwoerd became a central figure in the early South African Social Welfare movement, the movement that launched his political career (Miller, 1989).

In fact, as the country's first Professor of Sociology and Social Work, Verwoerd had the opportunity to play a central role in the fight against white poverty, a topic that attracted national attention with the publication of the report of the Carnegie Poor White Commission in December 1932. Even more influential in establishing the Department of Social Work in Stellenbosch was the Carnegie Commission's recommendations that a department of social studies be created in a South African university to train social workers and conduct scientific studies on how to reduce poverty. As mentioned, Verwoerd believed that the problem of poverty could only be alleviated through dealing with the poor individually on a case-by-case basis, with a sociologically trained social worker providing a scientific assessment of each case (Miller, 1989).

Verwoerd was indebted to American social science for his examples and for many of his views on sociology and social welfare practice. According to Coulter (1930), the Department of Social Work at the Stellenbosch University then was known as a place where one could learn about American social welfare. During his tenure at Stellenbosch, Verwoerd was largely influenced by the scientific rationale for professional social work training as used by the American sociologist Coulter (Coulter, 1930:9). When Verwoerd testified before the Carnegie Commission, he based his comments on American examples of social welfare. Verwoerd's testimony was well received. Coulter (1930) stressed that social work, according to Verwoerd, should be conducted scientifically, which meant that it should be based on social science investigations of the causes of poverty and should employ scientifically trained social workers.

#### **2.4.5 The apartheid government and welfare services**

The white voters mandated the new National Party government in 1948. This government, as shown above, established welfare services on a racial basis, within the framework of overseas welfare paradigms. The political ideology that was followed was closely related to racism, the thinking that accompanied it conveying, amongst other

things, that the white community was superior and that black communities were inferior. Though the government did provide welfare services to all other cultural/racial groups, each of these groups was placed under the management of its own government department. The South African government initially ordered its department of social welfare to render services to whites, coloured and Indian communities whilst the Department of Native Affairs handled the affairs of the black community. The separation of welfare services according to race was based on the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, which made provision for each black group to develop its own homeland (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000). Gray (1988:10) has emphasised that the "Social Welfare Department Circular No. 29 of 1966 stipulated that welfare services should be administered and delivered to persons by persons of the same ethnic group".

Gray (1988:10) held the view that the Department of Social Welfare had no racial discrimination written into its rules; in her view it was one government department primarily involved with welfare for all. Gray has further maintained that it was only in the 1960s that the policy of separate development began to have an effect on welfare legislation. The researcher's view is that Gray (1988) has contradicted herself: social welfare in South Africa had a racial bias from inception; hence there were two Carnegie commission reports, one focusing on the poor White problem and the other on poverty as it affected Blacks. The services of the Department of Social Welfare were directed towards Whites and were therefore discriminatory.

#### **2.4.6 The Democratic Government and the provision of welfare services**

The democratic elections of April 1994 and the take-over by the African National Congress saw the creation of a Department of Welfare in which the needs of all communities could be served on an equal basis for the first time. The new government of South Africa, in contrast with the previous apartheid government, has chosen to pursue a democratic socialist ideology of social welfare. Since the new government came into power, one independent national department of welfare has been established, though in many of the provinces health and welfare are still in the same department, a

situation that is viewed as not ideal because of the unequal status allotted to welfare as compared to health (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000).

Van Eeden *et al.* (2000) explain that steps towards the democratisation of social welfare in South Africa involves redressing the imbalances of facilities for previously disadvantaged groups. With the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the new government planned to adapt the existing social welfare policy programmes and support services to assist historically disadvantaged communities. In the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994) objectives were set with regards to the establishment of basic welfare services to all South Africans. Specific attention was given to the extension of welfare services to children, the aged, and the disabled and to offenders in the disadvantaged groups.

Changes in the country politically and ideologically and the paradigm shift at government level have also affected the social work profession. Certain universities adopted the Africanisation of syllabi in social work by 1995. Analysis of the White Paper on Welfare (1994) leads one to the tentative conclusion that the government is in the process of de-professionalising social work. It would seem that the central role of social work in the welfare field is being eroded. Although this is not overtly stated, academics are already reacting to this (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000:15).

## **2.5 SOCIAL WELFARE DURING AND AFTER APARTHEID: A COMPARISON**

This comparison between the previous and the current governments is done according to the following criteria: Ideological paradigm, underlying values, the primary focus of social welfare and the approach to social welfare. The idea here is to see whether the new government's ideological paradigm and values shift the focus of social work practice and education towards recognising and embracing African culture, which will have an impact on the practice of social casework.

### **2.5.1 Ideological paradigm**

During the apartheid era, the provision of social services was premised on the paradigm of Afrikaner nationalism. In terms of this approach, the upliftment of poor Whites was seen as a priority. When the new government took over, the principle of equality was entrenched in the Bill of Human Rights contained in the Constitution of South Africa. This meant that race was no longer an issue in the provision of social services. As a consequence of racial equality or non-racialism, a united department of welfare was established in 1994. But the racial principle somehow continues to affect the provision of social services. In essence the current government vision of upliftment focuses on historically disadvantaged communities. It can therefore be argued that Afrikaner nationalism in the provision of welfare services has been replaced by Black Nationalism (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000:20). Unfortunately the Black Nationalism which has replaced apartheid has not done anything to bring social training and practice closer to the African world-view. The new government's contribution to the social work profession was to denigrate it and to threaten to de-professionalise it by making it possible for non-professional personnel to enter the welfare arena in the form of community development workers and other groupings of the same nature who lack the required professional training.

The researcher is of the view that, if white racism was wrong in the apartheid era, replacing it with black racism in the post-apartheid era is equally wrong. If South Africa is really democratic, and the equality of people is paramount, the present government should render welfare services according to need and not according to race and ethnicity. In the spirit of reconciliation and nation building, South Africans must be treated equally in all spheres of life. Black and white service providers should strive to see human beings in clients and not allow race to determine the quality of service that clients receive.

### **2.5.2 Residual versus social developmental approach to welfare**

Both the previous government and the current African National Congress government have rejected institutional approaches to welfare in favour of the residual and the

developmental approaches. The apartheid government was always of the view that South Africa was not and would not be a welfare state. Though it could be argued that aspects of the welfare state were present for the white population, the overall approach to welfare was clearly residual. The focus of service rendering was largely on a person's ability to uplift himself or herself. The state only intervened when a person failed to do this.

The emphasis of the current government is on the developmental approach, which refers to the rendering of social services in partnership between the government, the voluntary private sector and the community (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000:21).

The researcher's view is that both governments have made the error of separating the approaches to welfare, instead of combining them according to the needs of the country. There are vulnerable groups in society who will need state grants for the rest of their lives; there are also groups who can benefit from the developmental approach to welfare.

### **2.5.3 Professionalism and de-professionalism**

The apartheid government viewed and developed the rendering of social services as a professional task; the current government takes the position of de-professionalism. Where the provision of social services was previously seen as a scientific/professional and specialised task, it is currently offered by a wide variety of welfare personnel, such as child and youth care and community development workers who have limited training (Van Eeden *et al.*, 2000:22). In reality, with the exception of child and youth care workers; none of these groups have any national professional organisation or professional status. If one were to apply Greenwood's (1957) criteria of professionalism, only social work would qualify for professional status.

Furthermore, the increasing number of non-social workers occupying leadership positions within the welfare Ministry has accelerated the challenge to social work. Social work is said to be irrelevant because it by its very nature is reactive, recognising existing problems and designing specific programmes to solve them. In a nutshell, social work has been said to be irrelevant because its theory is based on Western models, relies on

the overuse of American textbooks at South African Universities and is too casework-oriented (Gray, 2000:101).

Clearly the process by which social service professions in South Africa gain legitimacy is not based on the objective criteria of professionalism such as those propounded by Flexner and Greenwood (1957). The process by which social service professions are gaining their standing is political. How else does one explain it when occupations without any professional organisation or accredited educational programmes are elevated to professional status by merely being labelled social service professions (Gray, 2000:104).

The researcher's view is that it is unfortunate that the present government seems to be taking the social work profession back to the time of the friendly visitor who did not have professional training to help clients professionally. The view that social work can be undertaken by anyone who is community spirited is unfortunate, particularly now that problems affecting people have become even more complex than those that the friendly visitors were called upon to handle in the 1800s.

## **2.6 CASEWORK AS METHOD OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

Since social casework was the first method of social work practice to evolve before group work and community work methods were practised, the history of social work is closely linked to the development of the casework method. In a sense, the history of casework seems to represent the history of social work per se.

The early practice of social work prior to 1920 can generally be seen as pre-theoretical: workers saw needs and responded without being guided by any theoretical or conceptual framework of intervention. The first major statement of professional social work practice theory was Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis* in which she developed a framework for assessment. The process of careful, thorough, systematic enquiry into the evidence surrounding those in need of service and the putting together of the evidence so that the worker gained an accurate picture of the situation were the essence of the social work process. This was scientific philanthropy, the study of the social situation,

and Mary Richmond was instrumental in moving social work to its professional standing (Johnson, 1998).

From 1921 onwards, there was a rapid development of theories and models of intervention in social work practice. Much has been written about the adoption of the Freudian psychoanalytic view of the person by social workers at the time. The Freudian influence on social work practice was enduring and long lasting. There were other theorists such as Gordon Hamilton who came up with the diagnostic approach to the practice. Another approach to social work practice was based on the work of Otto Rank; it was called the functional approach. For some time social workers relied on the Freudian and the diagnostic approaches to social casework practice. Casework was important because emphasis at the time was on individual behaviour and how it contributed to the problems that people experienced (Johnson, 1998). The researcher notes here that, when theories of intervention were developed at various times during the evolution of the social work profession, developing nations were not developing their own social work body of knowledge in tandem with their views of reality, but instead were ready to adopt models and theories of social work practice that were foreign to their cultural environments. This represented the beginning of the lack of fit in the social work practice of developing countries.

The end of World War II provided an opportunity for social caseworkers to prove their skills in dealing with poverty in the population. Social work's prestige was raised through work in war-related activities, such as the Red Cross's Home Service. Caseworkers in the home service, led by Mary Richmond, applied their skills to the problems faced by servicemen and their families. Physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists working with emotionally disturbed soldiers saw the social worker as a natural ally. They used caseworkers as specialists in social adjustment. When the United Nations was established on October 24 1945, many agencies for dealing with world social welfare problems, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the World Health Organization (WHO); the United Nation's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) also

came into being. These represent some of the situations that provided social workers with an opportunity to demonstrate the value of the profession ([http://www.socialworkers.org/profession/centennial/milestones\\_3ht](http://www.socialworkers.org/profession/centennial/milestones_3ht)).

Another event that marked social casework ascendancy within social work was the publication of Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis* (1917). This book represented an attempt to provide the practical techniques and skills commonly known as casework with a more systematic approach. For this, the first definitive text on casework, Richmond had perfected her ideas through workshops, lectures and articles (Richmond, 1917). *Social Diagnosis* anchored the social work quest for professionalism. Through *Social Diagnosis* (1917), Richmond gave social work what Flexner said was lacking, and propelled casework from one of a number of approaches used by charity workers into a major form of practice.

Although social work's historical development was dominated by the story of settlements, the practice of social casework also made significant advances. During the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social casework diversified; moving out of the confines of charity organisations and into a variety of fields such as medical social work, psychiatric social work and juvenile courts. But casework as a method of social work intervention has been criticised in many countries, particularly in South Africa. Caseworkers were criticised for focusing too heavily on individuals and for ignoring wider solutions. The researcher's view is that there will always be cases that need one-on-one forms of intervention such as casework and what constitutes the problem for casework in South Africa is that casework continues to rely on foreign forms of intervention that disregard the cultural nuances of African clients. This has already been indicated as the problem that this study intends to address.

The future of casework in South Africa needs to be seen against the background of the dominant culture (Gray, 1998:27). Discussions involving the future of casework in South Africa must examine the concept of an indigenous model for the country. South Africa,

as part of the Third World countries, needs to develop casework models that are in tandem with the cultural background of the dominant populations.

### **2.6.1 Principles of social casework and the Third World**

Third World has come to be defined as any developing country in the world. In contemporary language, Third World has become synonymous with “underdeveloped” countries such as those in Africa and Asia. The focus of this discussion is on the relationship between the principles of casework and the Third World world-view. The principles of the casework relationship as defined by Felix Biestek (1967) have come to be accepted and adopted by the social work profession as definitive statements to govern the casework relationship. There may also be an assumption that the principles of the casework relationship transcend both race and ethnicity, and that the generic nature of the principles should be applicable to all individuals, regardless of race ethnicity and culture (Mwalimu & Burgest, 1983).

One of the pitfalls of the generic application of social theory, methods and practice in social work has been the use of the “colour-blind” approach by social caseworkers working with clients from different racial groups. The colour-blind approach is a simple disregard of colour, race and ethnicity as relevant in the worker/client relationship (Mwalimu & Burgest, 1983). This is unacceptable for reasons such as the following:

- Individualisation in the worker/client relationship with Third World clientele requires that factors of race, culture and ethnicity be recognised as very important. The unique ethnic and cultural qualities of the particular human being should be recognised.
- It may be difficult for the caseworker to perceive Third World individuals as having any constructive and positive attitudes and behaviours. This may lead to problems with regard to the worker meeting the mandate of acceptance, which is to “see the client as he really is”, and may be crucial when all the qualities of acceptance and other attributes are contaminated by the worker’s negative vision of the Third World.

- It is a challenge for the social casework profession to implement the non-judgmental attitude, given the negative definitions and assumptions regarding colour and race. All Third World individuals are people of colour and there is an accompanying negative definition of their culture by the Western World. It is impossible for any caseworker to be completely free from the contamination of the negative judgements that are inherent in the depiction of Third World people. These negative judgements interfere with the worker/client relationship.
- In line with the principle of self-determination, the caseworker must recognise and accept the right of the human being to make decisions for him- or herself and accept the consequences of those decisions. The caseworker must also recognise the basic right of a human being to fail, if he/she so chooses. The only limitation placed on the right to self-determination is when the client's right interferes with moral and civil law. In many cases it may be difficult for the worker to stimulate self-determination, because the values of social work may be in opposition to the very foundation of the Third World culture. The prevailing assumption in the Western World is that Third World clients are incapable of making effective decisions regarding their lives. The role of the social caseworker dealing with Third World clients may be to recognise and accept the fact that self-determination is a God-given right and must be viewed against the cultural context (Mwalimu & Burgest, 1983).

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

The origins of social work, including casework, have been traced from the First World countries, Europe and America, to the Third World countries, particularly Africa and South Africa. The social work profession came into being as a means of helping people in various countries deal with problems of human suffering resulting from poverty, unemployment and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Theories of professional helping were developed in the First World countries and when social work as a profession came to be practised globally, such theories and models of intervention were transplanted to the Third World countries without due regard to the cultural differences existing between the developed and the developing countries. The developing countries, including South Africa, have not been able to develop theoretical frameworks for social work and

casework practice that are consistent with the cultural background of their populations. In South Africa, casework practice still utilises theories and models that are not African culture sensitive. First World models of casework practice need to be adapted to suit the different cultural situations in which they are practised. One of the most urgent tasks facing the profession in South Africa is to develop a conceptualisation of social work that is appropriate and culturally congruent. The social work profession in South Africa is striving after seemingly elusive relevance within the multicultural South African milieu. South Africa has to evolve a brand of social work theory and practice suited to its own unique socio-cultural environment. Social work and social casework theory and practice in South Africa should be informed by the world-view of the South African population.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **AFROCENTRISM AND SOCIAL CASEWORK PRACTICE**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

To meet the requirements of social relevance, social work, like other social sciences such as African Psychology, African Anthropology, African Theology and African Philosophy that are mentioned by Karenga (1993), must realise the importance of a perspective based on African culture in its theoretical content and practice. The above-mentioned disciplines have realised the need to incorporate the previously marginalised African culture-based epistemologies in their content and praxis. The inclusion of an African perspective in social casework and social work practice in South Africa will address the issue of the relevance of the social work profession to the African population, which forms the majority of welfare recipients.

In this chapter, the issues that will be discussed include: definitions of African culture derived from various authors; the definition of an African; and the definition of Afrocentrism and its implications for the social work profession. The role of culture in social work practice will also be discussed. Reactions of Africans to Western cultural influence, together with implications for social work practice and social work as a culture-specific discipline will be discussed. In conclusion, the researcher will point out the need for South African social casework practitioners, academics and researchers to jointly design an approach to social work training and practice that is relevant and responsive to the world-view and epistemology of previously marginalised people of African descent.

#### **3.2 DEFINITIONS**

The purpose of this section is to clarify the meaning of concepts such as African culture, an African and Afrocentrism.

### **3.2.1 African culture**

Graham and Al-Krenawi (2003:9-10) define culture as “the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, and a way of life of a group of people who share a certain historical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic or social background”. Barker (1999:114) defines culture as “the customs, habits, skills, technology, arts, values, ideology, science, religious and political behaviour of a group of people in a specific time period”.

Within the context of the above-mentioned definitions, African culture can be regarded as the sum total of African philosophy, cosmology, behaviour, epistemology, ontology, axiology, religion, customs, habits, values and artefacts. In short, culture represents the total way of life of the African people. It is enduring and indestructible. As long as there are people, they will always have a way of life (Mazama, 2003:121). In this study, the focus will be on African culture as it relates to African people on the African continent generally and South Africa particularly. The cultural way of life of the following cultural groups in South Africa will be discussed generally and their implications for the social work profession will be highlighted: Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, Tsonga, and Venda.

### **3.2.2 An African**

At this point the word African as used in this study needs to be explained. Reve (1995:1) states that “the word African has been debatable due to the fact that many people, Afrikaners in particular, also claim to be Africans. This has created real confusion as to what an African is. Asante (1987) has cleared the confusion by defining an African or African race as a gene pool defined by the whole of the African continent, including people in all geographical areas of the land from Egypt to the south and from Senegal to Kenya ... the African race stems from a continental gene pool and incorporates anyone whose ancestors originated there and who possesses linguistic and cultural qualities and traits associated with the gene pool.”

For the purposes of this study, the word African will refer to the following cultural groups in South Africa: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tsonga and Venda. For the purposes of this study, the word African will exclude the following racial and cultural groups in South Africa:

Indians, Whites and Coloureds. In this study Afrocentrism has to be understood within the context of Africans and their culture in South Africa.

### **3.3 AFROCENTRISM**

The development of the term “Afrocentricity” must be attributed to Molefi Kete Asante (1987). He introduced the concept in 1980, in his book titled “Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change” (Gray, 2001:19). Asante (1987:6) defines Afrocentricity to “mean literally, placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour”. Afrocentricity is a perspective that allows Africans to be subjects of historical experiences rather than objects on the fringes of Europe. This implies that Afrocentrists are concerned with discovering the centred place of the African in every case (Asante, 1999:111).

There is considerable misunderstanding in the academic world about what exactly Afrocentrism entails. Definitions are multiple, most scholars giving their own working versions of the original one given by Molefi Asante, choosing to emphasise particular aspects of the paradigm to suit their own purposes. In this instance the researcher will pay particular attention to Afrocentrism as it relates to the culture of the Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga cultural groups in South Africa.

According to Schiele (2000:2), many scholars have argued that the knowledge base of the social sciences and social work is characterised by a European-American cultural hegemony that validates the existential experiences, paradigms and theories that have emerged from Western intellectual history and thought. This has created problems, the main problem being the Africans’ usually unconscious adoption of the Western world-view, perspective and conceptual framework to the total exclusion of their own view of the world. The challenge is to displace Western ways of thinking, being and feeling, and to replace them with ways that are germane to African cultural experiences (Mazama, 2003:4-5). In this study, the researcher will locate Afrocentrism within the South African context of the marginalisation of African culture and the African world-view as the basis upon which to base the practice of casework among African clients.

Hill (in Mekada, 1999:110) states that "Afrocentric, Africentric, or African centered are interchangeable terms referring to the quality of thought and practice which is rooted in the cultural image and interest of African people and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of African people as the center of analyses...the term African-centered worldview or Afrocentric/Africentric worldview have been used to describe the cultural values of people of African origin and African descent throughout the world."

The term Afrocentric, according to Gray (2001:3), refers to "an idea and a perspective which holds that African people can and should see, study, interpret and interact with people, life, and reality from the vantage point of African people rather than from the vantage point of European people, or Asian, or other non-African people, or from the vantage point of African people who are alienated from Africanness." This means that Africans should view phenomena from the vantage point of an African world-view, which, in turn, is informed by African culture.

Swigonski (1996:4) stated that the "...Africentric perspective shows how developing knowledge of another culture from the perspective of that culture can transform social work practice. Knowledge developed in this way enables the profession to work more profoundly for the empowerment of clients". This means that an Africentric perspective starts with the question, "Does this place Africans in the center? Is it in the best interest of African peoples?" An Africentric perspective further describes the ethos and the values of Africans. Africentric work reorganises the African frame of reference so that African history, culture, and world-view become the context for understanding Africans. Understanding African clients within their context begins to challenge the privileged status of the European world-view and places them in the centre of their conception of reality.

According to Gray (2001:4), using an Afrocentric perspective in social work implies the following:

- Having substantive understanding and knowledge of the best, yet also knowing the worst aspects of classical African history and culture, in this study, knowing and understanding the culture and history of the Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga in South Africa.
- A thoughtful application of African-centred information, meeting the empirical and immediate needs of grass-roots people and improving the quality of their lives.
- Placing African (Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga) culture and world-view at the centre of our approach to problem solving through the casework method of social work practice.

Afrocentricity acknowledges cultural pluralism without seeking recognition and hegemony over other methods. Afrocentrism is committed to centring the study of African phenomena and events in a particular cultural voice of the composite African people. This does not mean that it rejects other perspectives or sees itself as the best perspective; instead it is open to all other perspectives and encourages freedom of thought. Afrocentrism completely rejects the notion that any one perspective has all the tools needed to analyse phenomena.

In contrast to a Eurocentric perspective, an Afrocentric perspective insists that any researcher must be familiar with the history, language, philosophy, and myths of the people under study. Without cultural immersion, the researcher loses all sense of ethical values and ends up becoming a researcher for the sake of research. Afrocentric scholars do not believe that scientific study is conducted in absolute detachment between the knower and the known. Eurocentrism is not the only perspective that determines terms, forms and conditions of discourse (Asante, 1990).

Diop (cited in Reve, 1995:8) describes an Afrocentric perspective as a view that aims to restore the collective national African personality that was distorted by colonialism. It is a perspective that is interested in explaining the African peoples' history. In the process of restoring the collective national African personality, an Afrocentric perspective attempts to correct wrong ideas that were engrafted into the African peoples' minds by Western

people. It disproves such Western ideas as that the history and culture of blacks are insignificant; it restores the historical consciousness of the African societies. This, in the researcher's view, is necessary because some people still find it difficult to break away from the idea that blacks do not have a valuable cultural and historical heritage.

For the purposes of this study, the above descriptions, in the researcher's view, suggest that the Afrocentric perspective entails the following:

- The need for social work and the related social sciences in South Africa to create space for the subjugated, marginalised African culture-based epistemologies, such as the Afrocentric-based theory of social work knowledge
- The need for the social work profession in South Africa to acknowledge the significance of African culture in social work practice among the African people
- The need to accept that phenomena can be viewed from the point of view of the Africans themselves. Afrocentrism affirms the validity of the African world-view and epistemology as an alternative perspective to understanding phenomena
- The need to accommodate the Afrocentric part of the social work knowledge base and practice alongside current Eurocentric theories and practices
- The need to predicate the theory and practice of social casework in South Africa on African culture, so that social work will reflect the world-view and cultural values of those who mostly are recipients of social work interventions in South Africa
- The need to acknowledge that African cultural knowledge is important in addressing the psychological, intellectual, spiritual and emotional needs of African people
- The need to move away from foreign frameworks and notions used to analyse Africans' psychological, social and psychosocial problems
- The need to develop a multicultural social work curriculum, with emphasis on African culture.

Since the knowledge base of social caseworkers is dependent upon social science theory and research, social casework paradigms also suffer from the Eurocentric cultural universalism in which the cultural values of Africans have not been used sufficiently as a theoretical base to formulate new human service practice paradigms and problem-

solving methods (Schiele, 2000:5). The Afrocentric perspective to social casework practice is confronted with the problem of establishing its own unique order of knowledge based on African culture and premised on the African world-view. This culture-based indigenous knowledge will mitigate the crisis of relevance that social casework practice is facing in developing multicultural countries like South Africa. The cultural base of social casework knowledge that the researcher has in mind in this study is that of the Nguni, Sotho, Tsonga and Venda peoples of South Africa.

### **3.4 REACTIONS OF AFRICANS TO WESTERN CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

It is important for caseworkers to be aware of how Africans have reacted to the influence of Western culture so that they can be better able to handle the range of reactions. All Africans have not reacted to Western cultural influences in the same way; their reactions range from acceptance of Western culture to its total rejection. There are Africans who believe and subscribe to African culture in a manner that is fundamentalist, there are Africans who have embraced both African and Western culture and there are Africans who are more Western than African. Social workers must be aware of these reactions so that they can effectively begin working where the client finds him- or herself culturally.

#### **3.4.1 Acceptance and assimilation**

Some Africans have accepted their inferiority without changing their culture; others have wanted to overcome their inferiority. Some Blacks attempt to abandon their culture and to acquire Western qualities and virtues. The qualities and values are reflected in their attempts to walk, talk, laugh and think like Whites. Black Englishmen arose from British colonial rule; Black Frenchmen arising from the French colonies were referred to as *e'volve's* and the *assimilados* arose in the Portuguese colonies (Van der Walt, 1997). The Portuguese in Lusophone Africa divided the Africans into socioeconomic and political groups, *assimilados* and *indigenas*. The *assimilados* were expected to discard their cultural background and heritage, including language and lifestyles, and adopt those of the Portuguese. The *indigenas* were those uneducated Africans who had no rights at all; they formed the bulk of the labour force (Mungazi, 1996:63). The situation of the *assimilados* and the *indigenas* is roughly comparable to the situation of all the

Africans who have a history of colonisation. They invariably find themselves in the situation of being torn between their own indigenous cultures and the dominant cultures of the colonising nations. In South Africa, for instance, there are some Africans who have assimilated Western culture; some who have adhered to the indigenous African culture and some who are in between cultures.

Practitioners maintain that interventions are effective only when clients are encouraged to become responsible in ways that are culturally relevant and when their behaviours are culturally congruent. Social workers need to educate themselves concerning the historical traditions, beliefs and behavioural norms of the community they serve and to determine the client's degree of assimilation into the dominant culture. Social work intervention must be harmonious with the client's environment and the degree of acculturation (Williams & Ellison, 1996:1 and 5).

Traditional multicultural social work practice acknowledges the unique culture of the client; the clinical implications of cultural differences and the role of culture and cultural techniques in psychotherapy (Goldberger & Veroff, 1995). As representatives of a dominant culture, social workers often work to help clients to adapt their lives to fit with the dominant culture. The outcome of that kind of work is to encourage acculturation and assimilation. It serves to support existing social patterns and structures. This might ensure the perpetuation of the feelings of cultural inferiority and the development of a double consciousness among the African clients, some form of cultural schizophrenia. Social workers need to work more effectively to transform the social structures that promote racism, ethnocentrism, sexism and all other forms of oppression (Swigonski, 1996:7-8).

To honour the profession's commitment to social change and social justice, social workers need to take up the challenge to ensure that clients are not counselled away from their cultural roots, and therefore away from themselves. Social workers working with this category of Africans must be sensitive in diagnosing this condition of cultural

alienation, and in handling the psycho-emotional consequences of an attempt to break away from one's cultural background.

### **3.4.2 Rehabilitation**

This is the second type of reaction to cultural imperialism by the West. This reaction is an attempt to acknowledge the notion that a black man must have made some contribution to the history of mankind and that such a contribution must be exposed to the world. Europe may have contributed logic, science and rationality, but Africa has contributed emotion and rhythm. Emotion and rhythm are important qualities in man (Van der Walt, 1997).

Rehabilitation aims to negate or gainsay notions about Africans that were propagated by the group of thinkers such as S.T. von Sommering of Prussia and Charles White of Britain. Both men and their disciples promoted the belief, based on hereditary traits, that some people possessed more intellectual potential than others. They believed that intellectual ability was determined by race. Both Von Sommering and White argued that, of the four major human races, white, yellow, brown and black, the white race possessed the most intellectual ability and the black race the least. According to Von Sommering and White, the black race was perpetually condemned, as descendants of the son of Ham, by its heredity and the best that the black race could do was to accept its destiny and live in a position inferior to that of other races. Although this controversy about race and human potential was articulated over two hundred years ago, it still remains an emotionally charged subject that is debated among researchers to this very day (Mungazi, 1996:xxii-xxiii).

Discrimination in the delivery of social services has been suggested to be one of the main reasons for a reluctance to seek formal care, and as being the cause of an unresponsive social services system. Berkowitz *et al.*, cited in Pacheo, Plaza, Ramirez and Andres (2003), for example discovered that Red Cross transportation services were not used by a sample of elderly African Americans because of the reputation for

discrimination of this organisation in the African American community. During the Second World War, the Red Cross kept separate blood supplies for African Americans and Whites, and refused to mix the two. This discrimination, still present in the memory of older African Americans, led to this group not using the Red Cross transport services, and to their avoidance of other programmes and services offered by this organisation (Pacheo *et al.*, 2003:55).

The implications for social service practice here are that social workers and social service agencies may have to evaluate their own privately held beliefs about the different races from which their clientele population come. Issues of race and ethnicity in South Africa are a reality from which social work practice cannot hide. Social workers must review their own ability to render a professional service without looking down on the race of clients, particularly black clients. Black social workers must also be able to provide a professional service to white clients without being racist. Racism is antithetical to the values, mission and vision of social work as a profession, regardless of whom it is directed at. The professional values of social work, when effectively internalised, will go a long way towards assisting professional social workers to deal equitably with race and ethnicity issues that impinge on their practice. In South Africa, there are opportunities for social workers to learn from each other about how to relate to racial issues in practice, but there is a need for the profession to be united and to speak with one voice for itself and the clientele population that it purports to serve. Drower (1996:1) states that a spectrum of social work associations in South Africa has in the past and in the present continued to mirror the different value positions observable in the wider South African society. They acknowledge, however, that a united profession would serve as a firm base from which to fight for a just, equitable, non-discriminatory welfare system.

### **3.4.3 Exclusivism**

Exclusivism has represented the cultural consciousness of an uncompromising anti-white Black Nationalism. All the positive aspects of Western civilisation were denounced and no compromise with white culture was thought possible. The Black world, it was

thought, should close ranks and fight to regain its historic "gloriana", own culture and political independence (Van der Walt, 1997).

Whilst one would like to argue for the recognition of the African world-view as one of the valid ways of relating to reality, Black or African exclusivism would, in my view, relegate Afrocentrism to the same level that it accuses Eurocentrism to occupy. One would like to see Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism complementing and according each other mutual respect, instead of denigrating and opposing each other. Social caseworkers must be open to the fact that some of their clients might show extreme racist attitudes in the process of their clinical interactions with them.

#### **3.4.4 Multicultural consciousness**

The multicultural viewpoint attempts to transcend all the above reactions. It advocates the nullification of the imperialistic tendencies in both Western and African cultures (Van der Walt, 1997). This approach argues for cultural competence that allows people to function effectively both within and outside their cultural confines; it encourages multicultural understanding and tolerance.

Graham and Al-Krenawi (2003) describe multiculturalism as acceptance and tolerance of many diverse cultures. It encourages cultural groups to maintain their cultural heritage whilst recognising and respecting other cultures.

Social caseworkers must consciously seek knowledge and understanding of their clients' cultures so that they are able to respond appropriately to their needs. Social Work Departments in South African Universities should focus on cultural competence-based education and training of social workers to fit with the demographics of the clientele population in South Africa. As South Africa claims to be a non-racial country, social workers of all races and cultures should be able to render professional social work services cross-culturally.

### **3.5 SOCIAL WORK AS A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC PROFESSION**

The relationship between culture and social work will be discussed here with the view to pointing out the influence and the role of culture on social work and social casework practice and the need to rid social work theory and practice in South Africa of its continued reliance on the Western cultural basis to the total exclusion of African culture.

In discussing Western Scholarship and African Realities, Prah (1999) states that there is overwhelming evidence that Western scholarship has laid the foundation for the systematic knowledge of African society. It could even be added that there is still more to be learned from Western sources about Africa. But Western sources must not remain the centre of gravity for knowledge about Africa. Africans cannot study themselves through other peoples' assumptions. Reve (1995) maintains that Europeans have studied African people from a Eurocentric perspective for a long period; their method neglected the wider picture of the world and insisted that the only way of studying anything is by approaching it from a Eurocentric perspective. Europeans dismissed all possible new interpretations, new criticism and new knowledge that emerged. Their attitude was informed by the belief that the world is universal and that there therefore was no need for different perspectives to interpret it.

Mudimbe, a Zairean philosopher and novelist cited in Higgs and Smith (2002:101) has stated, "Africa is an invention of Europe. By this [is meant] that most of the discourse in Africa has been an extension of Western epistemology and has always been a victim of European epistemological ethnocentrism." He continues to say this manifests itself in the failure of Africans to understand or know themselves because of a crippling immersion, conscious or unconscious, in a European order of knowledge (Higgs & Smith, 2002:101).

Higgs and Smith (2002:101) argue that a crucial issue in contemporary African intellectual practice is the issue of how Africans can break away from an order of knowledge which, apart from failing to take into account their history, culture and experience, is imperialistic in the sense that it seeks to understand pressing human

problems exclusively from its own perspective, while at the same time claiming that this perspective is universal.

There is a need to recognise the fact that people live in different societies with different cultures and perceptions of reality. Due to their belief that the Eurocentric perspective is the perfect perspective, which does not need to be supplemented by any other perspective, Eurocentrists have employed this perspective in whatever they were studying. Even when studying African societies, they looked at them from a Eurocentric perspective (Reve, 1995). The researcher holds the view that social work and casework in particular, in South Africa with its Western epistemological orientation, need to acknowledge that its Eurocentric paradigm is not universally applicable, and particularly not in Third World countries.

According to McPhatter (1997:6), social work is also burdened with the Eurocentric bias that generally forms the foundation of formal and informal education. The very nature of the education process, particularly social work education, determines that it is selected and presented in ways that make it extremely tedious to dissect to be able to dismantle the Eurocentric stronghold. The formal education process begins with the highly questionable, if not false, notion that science is neutral and lacks bias. But history, mythology, values, culture, scientific methodology all shape the basic essence of knowledge building. The bias is so deeply entrenched, though, that it is often difficult for the most adept among social scientists and social work academics to engage the misinformation in a productive way. A grounded knowledge base begins with the premise that everything must be exposed to a process of critical analysis. This is emphatically true because the selection of content to which scholars, particularly in social work, are introduced, has so thoroughly excluded perspectives that both challenge and broaden the Eurocentric world-view. The theory and practice of the wisdom that forms the basis of social work and social casework practice demand considerable and ongoing critique and require that future social workers be taught how to develop this mode of inquiry.

Social work in South Africa and other parts of the Third World has the unenviable challenge of developing social work and social casework practice models that are culturally free from Western domination and relevant to its own populations, instead of surrendering to the well established theories and models of practice that might make sense in the West but may be irrelevant to the local populations. The history of Eurocentric domination of social work theory and practice in Third World countries is long and far-reaching, but this is no valid excuse for South Africa and other Third World countries to give in to this domination.

Siegel (1994:87) states that values emanating from cultural orientations have an impact on the way individuals view the world. Different cultures have distinct patterns of family structure, child rearing and help-seeking behaviour. Cultural differences between worker and client in these areas interfere with effective delivery of services. Ow (1991) states that one of the reasons for the dichotomy of world-views between the client and the professional helper is the difference in their stock of knowledge. Lay knowledge and professional knowledge can be further complicated by cultural differences between clients and professional helpers. The researcher's observation is that, in South Africa, there are situations where the social workers and their clients differ culturally and also with regard to their stock of knowledge. There are instances where white social workers work with African clients and there also are situations where African social workers work with white clients. If not handled properly, these instances of diversity may result in poor service delivery by both black and white social workers.

In the view of the researcher, social work in South Africa has benefited much from the West in terms of concepts, theories and models. Some of the Western ideas in social work, like those dealing with values, and some of the principles underpinning the profession, do have universal applicability. The challenge for social workers in this country is to identify those aspects of the profession that are culturally appropriate and those that are culturally inappropriate. For social work to be locally relevant, it must acknowledge the existence of alternative ways of looking at reality, such as the African centred view of reality.

In the United States, Afrocentrism has helped to provide cultural and intellectual signposts for the African American minority who has felt historically and culturally besieged by the dominant Euro-cultural majority of the population. In South Africa, where the majority of the population speaks an African language, African culture should serve as the basis of mass education and innovation. This does not mean that the cultural space of the minority groups should be suppressed and curtailed. Afrocentrism basically makes the point that African cultural and historical grids should provide the basis for social, cultural and economic transformation and development for African people and African societies and communities.

Social workers educated in the West have long been involved in the development of social work education programmes in Third World countries (Taylor, 1999:309). The kind of social work education that was designed by these Western educated social workers is inappropriate for addressing Third World social problems. Thus many educators have argued for the indigenisation of the social work knowledge base and practice. Indigenisation refers to the adaptation of imported ideas to fit local needs in order to be useful. "The term indigenization is used to reflect the process whereby a Western social work framework and or Western practice technology is transplanted into another environment and applied in a different context by making modifications" (Nimmagadda & Cowger, 1999:263).

The rationale for indigenising social work in the developing countries is based on the following premises:

- Social work is a contextual profession; it takes place within a cultural context.
- Models of social work in developing countries have been imported and reflect Western social work practice, values and culture.
- Cultural incongruities and issues occur in the day-to-day transactions between the worker and the clients when practice models developed in another culture are utilised.

- American urban models have been adopted, although the developing countries are predominantly rural.
- The profession's value orientation of self-determination and self-reliance has been influenced by American liberal values that are not suitable for other countries.
- Efforts towards indigenisation have been particularly slow in developing countries.
- Practice cannot be a-cultural and a-historical.
- In a multicultural society, there must be a multicultural social work curriculum (Nimmagadda & Cowger, 1999: 262-3).

In this study, to indigenise social work and casework practice means to align social work and casework practice to the African cultural nuances of the African clientele population. The researcher's view is that caseworkers who render casework services to African clients are somehow forced to apply practice theories and models that are foreign to the African clients' life experiences or have to resort to the social work practice mode that Johnson (1995:21) refers to as pretheoretical. In this mode, social workers just do what they think they have to do, without being guided by theory.

Siegel (1994:87) opines that the single most important challenge facing social service delivery involves the inability of the therapist to provide culturally responsive forms of treatment. Although social workers are taught to recognise and respect ethnic and racial diversity in social work education and practice, they often fail to integrate the knowledge of cultural differences when dealing with clients. The researcher's view is that, in South Africa, some social workers tend to be racially, ethnically and culturally blind in their approach to social work practice.

La Belle and Ward (1996) hold the view that a social work curriculum needs to reflect the demographic variations in the society. Therefore courses on diversity must be a requirement in order to prepare students for a diverse future. In the researcher's view, South African universities that train social workers must take cognisance of the cultural context and the world-views of the population that constitutes the majority of the social work service consumers. A social work curriculum focusing on diversity issues will

contribute to the development of a social work profession in South Africa that will be relevant to the aspirations of the people it purports to serve. Even in the Western countries where the profession originated, there is an increasing awareness of the fact that minority cultural idiosyncrasies need to be taken into account when practising social work with minority groups, such as Afro-Americans, Hispanics and American Indians.

In this regard, Hammond-Tooke (1972:10) has stated that it is clear from cross-cultural studies that different cultures impose different ways of looking at the world, different ways of structuring the chaos of sense impressions that impinge on human consciousness on their members. In the thirties, Margaret Mead, cited in Hammond-Tooke (1972), demonstrated that even such apparently inborn characteristics as psychological masculinity and femininity are culturally determined: Among the three New Guinea tribes, the Arapesh, Mundugumor and the Tchambuli, Mead observed that males exhibited feminine behaviour patterns while females showed masculine behaviour patterns. Very little in the human personality seemed to be genetically derived; the mind was indeed a blank tablet inscribed by culture. In the nature versus nurture controversy, nurture is obviously dominant (Hammond-Tooke, 1972:2-3).

Mekada (1999:104) states that research evidence suggests that the lack of appropriate support services and a lack of understanding of the cultural orientation of African families often result in social work operating against the interests of African clients. Mekada (1999) further argues that the theoretical foundations of established social work practice models do not reflect the diversity of world-views and cultural values found among African clients. Social work has often prescribed Eurocentric intervention models universally in concepts and methods designed for all families. In short, the world-view of Black people is placed within the world-views of others who have developed their own theories and models of practice as the basis for solving people's problems. It is somehow presumed that these will provide solutions for problems within Black families and communities. The concern here is that the core principles of social work, such as social justice, equality and self-determination cannot be actualised when the social work knowledge base continues to be dominated by a Eurocentric world-view.

The African-centred world-view challenges social work to broaden its philosophical and intellectual base to embrace humanity, and to release the domination of the Eurocentric world-view over the psyche of African peoples. It is important to note here that the African-centred world-view is not asking social work to abandon its philosophical base, but only to broaden it. The Eurocentric nature of the underlying knowledge base of social work continues to assume that this knowledge is universally applicable; that one theory, world-view, or paradigm can be used to explain human behaviour among all people and in every culture (Mekada, 1999:106). Mekada (1999:107-108) raises fundamental questions when he asks, "Why are the social work theories and methods of intervention, developed mainly by the dominant culture, seen as the only legitimate social work designs for African people? Are theory and practice devoid of culture and philosophical dimensions? Why does the dominant world-view, the existing social work knowledge base, insist that this is the only way, the only world-view upon which social work can be based?"

Speicher (2000:443) emphasises the importance of cultural awareness when she asks, "Is it too hard for us truly to step out of our worldview and enter another person's worldview without value judgment when the values are different, without pathologizing that which is different simply because it is different? These are questions that will occupy us for some time to come."

Turner (1991:36) argues that "... all theories, models and paradigms of human behavior are inherently culturally biased or ethnocentric; they are bound by [the] culture, historical time, life experiences and knowledge base of their proponents." Lam and Yan (2000:483) state, "Our culture determines our worldview. Our worldview in turn gives meaning to our situation." Peoples of the world, Africans in particular, should face the challenge and take responsibility to evolve a social work practice that is consistent with their world-view. Social work, in line with its core principles and values of equity, social justice and self-determination, should take the lead in creating space for what Figuera-McDonough, Netting and Nichols-Casebolt (2001) and Tangenberg (2000) call

“subjugated knowledge” or “marginalized epistemologies”. Examples of marginalised epistemologies, in the researcher’s view, include the infusion of African culture and feminist epistemology, as some of the approaches to social work practice.

Certain pitfalls should be avoided in attempts to make cultural concepts an integral part of our professional frame of reference. It would be unfortunate to focus attention exclusively on cultural differences to the total exclusion of cultural similarities, which are equally significant. In ascribing certain characteristics and value systems to given groups of people, social workers should guard against stereotyping the individual members of a group and not end up blinding themselves to individual differences that may exist amongst individuals within a cultural group (Council on Social Work Education, 1965).

Social work and social casework practice should be based on the cultural milieu of the society in which it is practised, and should use the model or conceptualisation of human beings of that society. In this sense, the principles and ethics must embody the values of the locality. For this reason, it is important for social workers to understand institutionalised cultural values. This means that a comprehensive understanding of people and their worldview is needed, as economic, social, religious, psychological and political factors are all critical for the social worker (Midgley, 1981).

To tap into the use of African cultural processes effectively, social workers need to identify cultural factors that should be taken cognisance of when they interact clinically with African clients. In addition to this, social workers should be able to construct a conceptualisation of these helping relations and processes; identify problems associated with them; assess the effectiveness of different helping modalities; and explore how indigenous and professional helpers can collaborate for maximum benefit to the African client population (Collins & Pancoast, 1976).

The contention is that an ideal and genuine social work and casework practice is one that starts with the community as its base. This enables practice to emerge from the

cultural surroundings and circumstances of the people (Osei-Hwedie, 1995). Hamilton (1958) states, "Social work, like any of the humanistic professions, is culturally moulded in goal and method. Each client selectively incorporates and exemplifies the cultural environment. Every treatment objective is a value judgment, culturally shaped." The researcher's view in this regard is that caseworkers must embrace the idea that casework clients embody their culture and therefore need to be understood, diagnosed and treated within the context of their culture.

Resnick and Stickney (1974:v-vi) state that, "...since social work almost more than any other discipline, is rooted in the social and cultural context of the country in which it is practiced, there are differences in content and emphasis, which need to be recognized in any determination of equivalence. Thus, a person with a postgraduate degree and highly specialized preparation in individual counseling might be just as out of place in a new nation of Africa as it is assumed that a community development worker, technically trained at the post secondary level of education, would be in a specialized child guidance clinic in the United States." Social work in South Africa does not seem to be rooted in the cultural context of its African population, which partly explains why social workers who have been trained in South Africa easily find employment in England and other First World countries; their conceptual framework of social work practice fits the First World practice environment.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

Social casework in South Africa faces a crisis of relevance. Although some academics teach, conduct research and train at African universities and are expected to contribute to the development of the social work profession, it would seem that all they succeed in doing is to imbibe social casework ideas, concepts, philosophies and theories that can hardly be claimed as their own. Social casework is not universal in character in that no social casework philosophy is applicable to all cultures. In other words, the practice of social work, and casework in particular, is culture specific. This emphasises the need for different countries, especially Third World countries, to fashion, design and shape their own type of social casework training and practice consistent with their own cultural environment and the world-view of their populations.

## CHAPTER 4

### AFRICAN CULTURAL COMPETENCE AREAS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the African cultural issues that social caseworkers should take into account when dealing with African clients will be presented from the perspective of various authors. These will be contrasted with aspects of Western culture, encompassing the following issues: clothes, orphans and problem children, youthfulness and age, meetings, personal space, schedules and punctuality, marriage, belief systems (God and Ancestors), rites of passage, African thought and the unity of African culture. The aim here is to point out some of the specific cultural issues that both educators and practitioners should be aware of when dealing with African clients. These issues form part of what constitutes the world-view of African people in general, which the social work profession and practitioners practising casework must take into account in their quest to be relevant and responsive to the psycho-emotional needs of the African clientele population that its caseworkers serve.

#### 4.2 NOTIONS

##### 4.2.1 Notion of a person

This section deals with what constitutes a person in African thought and with the person's relations with other people in society. Gyekye (1995:86) asks, "What is a person? Is a person just the bag of flesh and bones that we see with our eyes, or is there something additional to the body that we do not see?" Another pertinent issue here is the position of an individual in African culture.

According to Zulu belief, human beings have a body (*umzimba*) and a spirit or soul (*idlozi*). In addition, there is the *nhliziyo* (heart or feelings) the *mqondo* (brain, mind, understanding) and the *isithunzi* (shadow, personality). The Zulu believe that the soul/*isithunzi/ idlozi/ ithongo* becomes the ancestral spirit after death, but only after the *ukubuyisa* ceremony has been performed, during which the spirit is brought back home

(Magubane, 1998:62). The Basotho believe that man (*motho*) has two elements: the corporal body or flesh and the incorporeal spirit. The body is temporal and subject to death and decay, but the spirit is indestructible and immortal. The spirit can be either malevolent or benevolent. It is in this spiritual benevolence that the practice of ancestor worship is based. The Venda think that the soul is a combination of the breath and the shadow; it is amazing among them how fixed the idea is that a corpse throws no shadow. The Pedi believe in a tripartite conception of the body, soul and spirit. The Tsonga believe that a human being has a physical body (*mmiri*) and a spiritual body. The spirit enters the body at birth and upon death joins the spirit world of the ancestors (Magubane, 1998; Hammond-Tooke, 1974).

The Akan people of Ghana, according to Gyekye (1995:85-98), consider a person to be constituted of three elements: *okra*, *sunsum* and *honam*. The *okra* is thought to be the innermost self, the essence of the individual person. The *okra* is thought to be the spark of the Supreme Being in man. It is seen as divine and as having an antemundane existence with God. Due to the presence of the divine essence in a human being, the Akans believe that all men are children of God and that the *okra* (soul) does not lose its individuality after death. The *okra* becomes an ancestor after the death of an individual.

Mukenge (2002:35) points out that the Congolese believe in the existence of a supernatural power within each human being, the result of divine creation. This innate power, called vital force, animates the body and sustains life. It is also called the principle of life. At death, the vital force leaves the body, becomes a pure spirit and joins the spirit of the departed relatives to become an ancestor. Tempels (1959) and Mbiti (1990: 10) also allude to the idea of the vital force, which Tempels regards as the essence of being; for Tempels, force is being and being is force. The African notion of person acknowledges that a human being is essentially a spiritual being, and that the vital force constitutes his/her essence.

Mekada (1999:113) states that spirituality constitutes the cornerstone of the African-centred world-view and is the essence of human beings; people are spiritual, nonmaterial beings who are connected with each other through the spirit of the Creator. The spiritual dimension of human beings transcends the spheres of time and space. Mekada describes spirituality as the invisible substance that connects all human beings, those not yet born and those who have died, to each other and to the Creator, across time and space.

In the researcher's view, the above conception of a person in African thought provides some indication of what social work students should be learning in psychology, if psychology is to be Afrocentric, relevant and sensitive to the African notion of reality. Social work needs to be informed by an Afrocentric psychology for it to understand clients in context.

In as far as the relationship of the person to society in African culture is concerned, the researcher would like to provide the following argument, supported by the various authors. Whereas in the Western societies the origin and nature of a person is "Adamistic", autonomous, and the "I" is paramount, non-western societies are inclined to use "we" to encapsulate the notion of person.

Daniels (2001:304) states, "Social work on the African continent emphasises community development because the concept of individuality is not appropriate in the African culture". The individual does not exist without his or her family or community. It is therefore important to understand that, when an appointment is made with an individual, the client may arrive with the members of his/her family. Social workers need to be prepared to meet with family members and forgo the traditional understanding of privacy and confidentiality. Social work in Western societies is focused on the individual client and his or her problems and needs. This individual orientation might be appropriate for Western societies where individualist values are predominant, but not for the collectivist

cultures, where whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group (Pacheo *et al.*, 2003:54).

Contrary to Western therapeutic emphasis on the individual, most interventions with non-western clients need to be couched in the context of family, extended family, community or tribal background (Graham & Al-Krenawi 2003:31). Donald (1960) states that the Navajo, whose lives are culture bound, have interpersonal relationships that are patterned according to kin and clan relations. The family is intimately involved in what happens to any individual member of the family. When a Navajo is ill, it is the family who decides whether he will go to the hospital or whether a given treatment is acceptable. The fact that the entire family accompanies the patient on his clinic visit is often disconcerting to a physician who is unaccustomed to this custom. This is a further demonstration that, in certain cultures, an individual is inseparable from his/her family and clan.

According to Mbiti (1990:106), "... in traditional life, an individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his contemporaries. He is part of the whole. The community therefore creates or produces an individual, for the individual depends on the community. Physical birth is not enough; the child must go through the rites of passage so that it becomes fully integrated into the entire society. These rites continue throughout the physical life of the person. The final stage is reached when he/she dies and even then he is ritually incorporated into the wider family of both the living and the dead."

Mbiti (1990:106) states "When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the group, when he rejoices, he rejoices with his kinsmen, his neighbors and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone ... whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group". This further demonstrates that in African culture,

individuals are not separable from the family and the community into which they are born.

This understanding of the notion of a person is necessary for social workers so that, when they practice casework and the principle of individualisation, they should practice it within the cultural context. Daniels (2001:304) states, "In the African setting, the concept of group collective action, utilizing resourceful people such as witchdoctors, social workers, traditional leaders, clergy and tribal elders from the community is used. Confidentiality and self-determination are not viable concepts to use in the African culture". The individual can only say: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man" (Mbiti, 1990:106). Oduaran (1996:31) also mentions that, consistent with African culture, Africans believe that the welfare of each human person is connected inextricably with that of each family or kinship group and of each local community and of the broader national community.

It is important for social workers to be aware of this perspective in their understanding of the concept of a person. It may not provide the best framework within which to understand human nature in the social environment, but it is a framework that contributes to an African's understanding of his own nature and cultural environment. The awareness of how Africans define themselves could be of great assistance to social workers attempting to begin where the client is. In a cross-cultural situation, it would be prudent for social workers to view theories of personality and models of intervention from both the Eurocentric and the Afrocentric vantage points. The researcher is of the opinion that a lot of research still needs to be undertaken by African scholars to develop theories of personality that are based on African culture. The existing theories of personality are not universal, and they are not broad enough to accommodate personalities that are shaped by African cultural experiences.

Clothes are important in the Western world. It would be improper to be naked, and Westerners wear clothes even in bed. Traditional African tribes, like the Zulus and Vendas, believe that one covers the body only if one has something to hide, therefore remain naked and prove yourself! According to the Higi people of the Gava tribe in Nigeria, clothes are merely a means of ornamentation and should be worn only on special occasions (Van der Walt, 1997: 2).

It is important for social workers to be familiar with cultural clothing as most of the African clients, particularly women, mostly wear traditional attire and some of the items of clothing may reveal body parts, such as breasts, which may be offensive to someone from another culture and who is not familiar with African cultural clothing. It is common in the rural areas to see women waiting outside the social workers' offices suckling babies in full view. Social workers who are not familiar with this practice may be non-verbally judgmental and thus relate to the client inappropriately.

#### **4.2.2 The notion of personal space**

Personal space is the space immediately around you that you claim as your own. When someone enters this space, even if it is a friend, you may feel uncomfortable. The size of one's personal space can change, depending on who one is with. For strangers that one meets in the hallway, it could be as much as one meter. For close friends, it could be a lot less. Personal space is also cultural; people in Japan have a larger personal space than North Americans. Canadians are generally used to maintaining a certain distance when speaking to each other; some call this a "bubble" or private space. When someone crosses the line, Canadians are inclined to be uncomfortable. People's proximity can generate feelings of uneasiness and can lead to misunderstandings. For example, when adults and children share the same sleeping quarters, outsiders may have suspicions of sexual impropriety. Personal space in some Western cultures is much greater than that of most African and Latin America cultures, where the interaction distance is relatively close. People from these cultures are unable to talk comfortably unless they are in close proximity to one another.

The result of such differences is that, during cross-cultural communication, an African may move closer to communicate better, but the Westerner may then withdraw, in order to feel more comfortable. The one is attempting to increase the distance in order to feel at ease while the other tries to decrease it for the same reason. Nationalities with large personal spaces can seem cold and distant compared to those that have small personal spaces. Nationalities that have relatively small personal spaces may seem pushy or aggressive. It is all subconscious, but definitely has an effect on how we react to others, especially those who are unfamiliar

(<http://www.geocities.com/thesciencefiles/personal/space.html>).

It is important for social workers to understand that notions of personal space may have an impact on the relationship with the client and that it may be necessary to reframe this notion within the cultural context (Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003). The notion of personal space is most relevant for social workers when they conduct interviews with African clients and clients from other cultures who may interpret personal space differently. Take note if a person to whom you are speaking backs away a little, do not try to close the gap, also try to avoid physical contact while you are speaking, since this may also lead to discomfort. In some cultures touching may be regarded as too intimate and one may have to avoid putting your arms around someone's shoulders. Shaking hands in initial contact may be acceptable (<http://www.edupass.org/culture/personalspace.phtml>). Caseworkers should be aware of what is acceptable in a given culture with regard to the notion of personal space.

#### **4.2.3 The notion of the family and the status of women**

Societies comprising more than one cultural group can be expected to have several conceptualisations of family. The divergence of family structures is a reflection of cultural pluralism and the different individuals that constitute society (Mberengwa, 2003:1). Definitions of the family in Western societies are restricted to immediate family members: parents/partners and children. For many African societies, definitions of family include extended family consisting of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and

members of the village or the community. The family may be organised according to the patriarchal structure, which includes a traditional division of labour and control over the expression of women's sexuality. In many societies, the role of women is still confined to their position as wife and mother. Unmarried women often may not leave the house without being accompanied by a male member of the family (Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003).

Most African families are patriarchal, that is, husbands are normally heads of households and responsible for major decisions within their families. Social work approaches that seek to promote equality between men and women may not be well received in societies where the status and roles of men and women are culturally defined. Social work approaches that view the family strictly as a nuclear unit may have to expand their definitions to include other possible permutations of family. In instances where the institutionalisation of a family member is considered, social workers have to exhaust all possibilities of placements within the extended family or the community before a client is placed in an institution such as a children's home, an old age home or a mental institution. Pacheco *et al.* (2003:52) state that, in many non-western cultures, family is the primary source of social support, providing information, material resources and emotional help to cope with problems. In fact, in some cultural groups the responsibility of providing support for problems rests mainly on the head of the family and the eldest members receive respect and honour and their advice is usually sought. Several studies have pointed out the significance for individuals in these cultures to be bound by family ties instead of making use of social services. That is, family ties, being stronger, are better than reliance on welfare agencies. Daniels (2001) states that the social worker must view the family, including the extended family, as a source of support when children, parents and spouses are having problems.

#### **4.2.4 The notion of time**

To many Westerners, the African's notion of time does not make sense at all, primarily because they apply Western values to it. Punctuality, for example, is an alien concept: noon can fall anywhere between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on the African clock. African airlines

publish schedules, but no one pays them much heed, including the airline companies themselves (Lamb, 1987: ix). When a person says that he will meet another at sunrise, it does not matter whether the meeting occurs at 5 a.m. or 7 a.m., so long as it is during the general period of sunrise. When Western foreigners come to Africa and see people sitting down somewhere without doing anything, they often remark "These Africans are always idling." Another common remark is "Oh, Africans are always late." It is easy to jump to conclusions, but these judgements are based on ignorance of what time means to African peoples (Mbiti, 1990:19).

In Western culture, schedules and punctuality are sacred and one is expected to be prompt and punctual. If one is five minutes late for an appointment one is expected to apologise, fifteen minutes will require an explanation and thirty minutes will be regarded as an insult. African time is totally different from European time, thirty minutes late requires no apology or explanation (Van der Walt, 1997). Diller (1999:53-4) points out that "Europeans and Americans view time as compartmentalized and incremental, and as such being on time and being efficient with one's time are positive values. Lateness is often misinterpreted as indifference, provocative or symptomatic of lack of basic work skills or work ethic".

Lateness can be irritating for social workers, who often work on tight schedules. When clients show up late for an appointment, or come the next day without an appointment, social workers should be aware that the client's notion of time might be different from the norm. Social workers would do well to clearly determine early on what the rules are regarding appointment times, lateness and missed sessions (Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003:30-1). Social workers whose notion of time is Euro-centric may lose their temper when clients do not keep time for appointments and/ or meetings and do not even bother to apologise.

## 4.3 BELIEFS

### 4.3.1 Belief in ancestors

Hammond-Tooke (1974:325) defines ancestors as the spirits of the dead members of the lineage or clan. The Zulus refer to ancestors as *amadlozi* or *amathono*; the Xhosa call them *izinyanya*, the Tsonga call them *shikwembu*, the Tswana, Pedi and Sotho call them *badimo*. It cannot be denied that the departed occupy an important place in African religiosity. The departed, whether parents, brothers, sisters or children, form part of the family and must be kept in touch with their surviving relatives. Africans do not worship their ancestors; they only remember them by performing certain rites and rituals, such as libation and the giving of food to the departed as tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect.

Throughout Zulu history, the ancestors have been looked upon as the source from which help and guidance can be derived after appropriate rituals and through sacrificial offerings. The ancestral spirits, commonly known as the *Amadlozi*, *Amakhosi*, or *Amathonga*, are of fundamental importance to the Zulu. They are the departed souls of the deceased. Though they are regarded as having gone to abide in the earth, they continue to have a relationship with those still living in the village. They are regarded as positive, constructive and creative presences. They are also capable of meting out punishment when they have been wronged or ignored. Veneration is their due, failure to show proper respect to them invites misfortune and proper veneration ensures benefit. The ancestors therefore are powers for good or ill (Earhart, 1993: 38-39).

The Xhosa refer to ancestors as *iminyanya* whereas the Mpondo call them *amathongo*. All old people who die become ancestral spirits and can influence the lives of their descendants, communicating with them through dreams and omens. A woman can be an ancestral spirit to her children and her sons' children. Ancestors continue to influence a woman after marriage and a married woman is thought to be influenced by the ancestors of her husband as well (Magubane, 1998).

The Basotho believe that the ancestors play an important role in curing a wide variety of diseases and ailments. Their assistance is invoked through divination by a *ngaka* (doctor) (Magubane, 1998). The Tsonga believe that every human being becomes an ancestor (*shikwembu*), but the fate of the children dying in infancy is one about which there is no very clear explanation (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:327).

Western missionaries, anthropologists, journalists and scholars who keep harping on ancestor worship should look at or consider cemeteries in their home countries and see how many flowers, candles and even photographs of the dead are put on the graves of relatives and friends. That is often more extreme than anything found in Africa and the researcher does not know what to call this form "worship" in the West. African peoples do not feel ashamed to remember the departed members of their family. Remembering them is not worshipping them (Mbiti, 1990:9). It is important to note that Mbiti (1990) and Magubane (1998) do not really agree on the role of ancestors in the African cosmology. Magubane's (1998) view is that the ancestors have a direct influence on the lives of the living, the ancestor cult being essentially the cult of the domestic unit and the extended family.

The Tsonga believe in a Supreme Being to whom the creation of man and the earth is attributed. The belief of the Tsonga lies in ancestor worship. They believe that man has a physical body (*mmiri*) and a spiritual body. The spirit enters the body at birth and on death is released to join the ancestors. Ancestor worship is still practised today. It requires the performance of rituals, particularly during crises, under the direction of a *nanga* (diviner). The family gathers at the *gandzelo* (a place set aside for rituals and sacrifices) to pay homage to their ancestral spirits. Intercession is made for help with specific problems and during times of crime. Belief in ancestor influence in daily life is common, particularly in sickness (Magubane, 1998).

#### **4.3.2 Belief in the Supreme Being**

Like people everywhere, the Africans ask questions about the origins of the earth: How and by whom was the earth created? What is man's place in creation? Is there life after death? And most of all, "What are the causes of evil? And how should one cope with misfortunes and exigencies of life?" They, too, have their own notions of a Supreme

Being who assists them to come to grips with the ultimate questions. Religion provides them with emotional support in times of distress, and explanatory theories about the origin of nature and the fate of the cosmos and human life (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:318).

Religions of Africa, Mesoamerica and the native religions of North America have sometimes been called “primitive religions”. Some authors have argued convincingly against this categorisation. The religions of Africans, Mesoamericans and Native North Americans should be considered together with all other religions. They, as other religions, constitute a distinctive set of beliefs, symbols, rituals, practices and doctrines that enable members of these groups to establish and maintain a meaningful world (Earhart, 1993:7).

African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, idioms, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on from one generation to another. Since there are no sacred writings as in other traditional societies, one should not expect to find long dissertations about the Supreme Being. God is no stranger to African people; in traditional life there are no atheists. This is captured in the Ashanti proverb, ‘No one shows a child the Supreme Being’. That means that everyone knows God’s existence almost by intuition, and even children know God (Mbiti, 1990:29). Among the Akan people of Ghana, there is a similar proverb which says: No man needs to teach a child the knowledge of God.” These proverbs indicate that God is so self-evident to an African that no formal religious instruction is necessary. Every tribe in Africa, before the arrival of Europeans, had knowledge of God and spiritual beings (Mbiti, 1990).

All African tribes had and still have an indigenous name for the Supreme Being. The indigenous names of the Supreme Being among the African tribes in South Africa are as follows: the Xhosa - *Dali* or *Qamatha*; the Zulu - *Nkulunkulu* or *Umvelinqangi* (the first to

emerge); the Venda - *Raluvhimba*; and the Sotho, *Modimo* (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:319). Elsewhere in Africa, God is called "the Watcher of everything"; "the Great Eye"; "He who bends down ... even the majesties"; and "He who roars so that all nations are struck with terror" (Mbiti, 1990:31).

In addition to the respect they show their ancestors, the Zulu also believe in a supernatural being, *uNkulunkulu*, who created all wild animals, cattle and game, snakes and birds, water and mountains, as well as the sun and the moon (Magubane, 1998:62). Earhart (1993:39) states that the Zulu have a religious relationship with the sky as well as the earth, the abode of ancestors. The god of the sky is male, father, the earth is female, mother.

There seems to be a connection between the creator god and the ancestral spirits; there is some evidence that the Sotho believe that *Modimo* can be approached through the medium of the ancestors. The Tsonga attribute the creation of the world to "Nature" (*Ntumbuluko*), they speak of an impersonal power called *Tilo*. The Venda deity, *Raluvhimba*, is also thought to be vaguely connected with the creation. Among the Sotho, *Modimo* was sometimes seen to manifest himself as lightning or as a thunderbolt and among the Pedi *Modimo* is closely associated with the elements of nature, wind, rain, hail and lightning. (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:318-320). All African tribes, ethnic groups and cultures thus believe in God and have various names that they use to refer to him.

It is important to note here that all the ethnic groups in this exposé have some enduring myths about the Supreme Being, the origins of the cosmos, tribal and human life. It is important to note that all the ethnic groups within the African culture believed in the supernatural being long before some of them became Christians. This belief forms an integral part of their world-view. The researcher is also aware of the fact some Africans have adopted the Christian faith by and large without forsaking their indigenous notions of the Supreme Being and belief in ancestors. Social workers have to be familiar with

the traditional religious beliefs of African clients, so that they are able to respond to the existential and spiritual aspects of the problems clients may be experiencing. It would be difficult for a social worker to assist clients in finding meaning in their lives if such a worker were not attuned to the beliefs that may lend meaning to the clients' lives.

#### **4.3.3 Belief in witchcraft**

Witches or sorcerers are persons who use their power and the forces of nature to harm other people. Anthropologists reserve the term “witch” for someone who harms others by means of a psychic force. This may be unconscious, as among the Venda and the Tsonga, or explicitly conscious, as among the Lobedu, Nguni and Sotho. Witchcraft is believed to be inherited. The Tsonga and the Venda believe that the witch is not aware of her power and is perfectly normal during the day, but at night her spirit leaves her sleeping body and goes out naked to harm her victims. Beliefs in witchcraft are generally similar in most South African Black societies (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:337).

There is nothing straightforward about the role of witchcraft in the African religious world. No one really knows who the witches are and their role is completely private and secret. It is important to note this secrecy because the headman/priest, the diviner and the herbalist are open, and play traditionally prescribed and public roles. The witch is an unknown individual, almost always considered to be a woman who misuses valid and good power for invalid and evil ends (Earhart, 1993:37-8). It is important to note that both Hammond-Tooke (1974) and Earhart (1993) allude to the fact that women are usually associated with witchcraft. In the Limpopo Province (South Africa) there have been a number of instances in certain villages where aged women were burnt to death because they were suspected of practising witchcraft.

Witchcraft poses a serious threat to public order and an unbearable strain to social organisation. Witches derive their power from and base their operations in a shadowy world that is neither that of the ancestors nor that of God. Their aim is to destroy what is good, especially those processes that enhance life. Witches are specialists in evil, they

are regarded as having superhuman properties; they can fly at night; become invisible and act on others from a distance (Earhart, 1993:37-8).

It is important for social workers to acknowledge belief in witchcraft when dealing with African clients. Some clients strongly believe that they have problems because someone is bewitching them. As witchcraft is not logical and scientific, social workers who do not share the client's culture might find it a challenge to discuss a client's problems involving witchcraft and traditional healing. It is also important for social workers to realise that attributing problems to witchcraft may occasionally be used to hide the client's personal character weaknesses. In African societies, deaths, divorces, accidents, and psychological/psychiatric problems are often attributed to witchcraft. However, whether witchcraft is real or a figment of the client's imagination, the point here is that witchcraft is an issue that plays a significant role in the lives of Africans. For African clients to tell a social worker that they believe in witchcraft may need very strong client-worker relationships. The client must really feel that his or her secrets are safe with the social worker. The point to be made here is that most Africans believe in witchcraft and that this belief is an important dimension of the African world-view.

#### **4.4 DEVELOPMENTAL LIFE TASKS**

##### **4.4.1 Rites of passage**

Initiation rites have many symbolic meanings. Through the rites of passage rituals, the youth are introduced to the art of living. The rites of passage are performed when initiates withdraw from other people to live in seclusion in the forest or in specifically prepared traditional huts away from the villages. During this process they receive secret instructions on how to execute the responsibilities of adult life. This is a symbolic experience of the process of dying, living in the spirit world and being reborn with new personalities, having lost their childhood. In some societies initiates even receive new names (Mbiti, 1990; Hammond-Tooke, 1974).

The Xhosa chiefdom denoted circumcision as the principal form of male initiation some 150 years or so ago. Circumcision had militaristic significance as a worthy ordeal for

young men who were to serve as warriors before being eligible to marry. Traditionally, at the coming out ceremony held to incorporate the initiates back into society when they returned from the bush where they had been secluded, the chief's father presented every Xhosa initiate with a spear and war clubs. Circumcision continues to be practised in attenuated form by Xhosa speakers, both in towns and rural areas. The initiation ceremony for the Xhosa marks the end of boyhood and ushers in the beginning of manhood/adulthood (Hammond-Tooke, 1974; Magubane, 1998).

In Zulu tradition, the first stage of the transition from childhood was marked by the ear piercing ceremony (*qhumbuza*), which every child had to undergo before reaching puberty. The next stage was the attainment of physical maturity or puberty called the *thomba*, which applied equally to boys and girls of the same age and was marked by a period of seclusion during which instructors taught them the requirements and duties of adulthood. After the male *thomba* ceremony, the young boy was called *insizwa*, and was free to court girls of his age, but not to marry. Two other rites of passage had to be performed before marriage was possible. The first was his incorporation into the regiment or *ibutho*. The second was the sewing of a headring (*isicoco*), which signified the attainment of adulthood (Magubane, 1998).

As with other Southern Africa people, Venda initiation played an important educational role. The development of an individual was seen as a series of phases, puberty and marriage marking important stages. Transition from one stage to the next was made possible by external forces (ancestors, good and evil spirits, witches), which could exert good or bad influences on people. Tribal initiation schools taught initiates about what to expect and how to behave in the next stage. Venda girls attend three major initiation schools: *vhusha* at puberty, *tshikanda* to reinforce the *vhusha*, and *dombani*, a premarital school. In the past, no Venda man would marry a woman who had not been through *dombani*. If he married a woman from another group, such as Tsonga or Sotho, she would also have to go through *dombani* (Magubane, 1998).

Amongst the Basotho, before missionaries introduced schools, education took place during initiation, which marked the passage into adulthood. Boys considered initiation as an important, exciting part of their upbringing, without which they could not participate in some social activities or affairs. Great mystery surrounded the initiation school, which took place in a lodge hut at a secluded place in the mountains and boys did not know what to expect. During initiation, initiates were instructed in song, dance, history and social etiquette including behaviour and morality (Hammond-Tooke, 1974; Magubane, 1998). Chastity, honesty, reality, courage, humility and respect for parents, elders and the chief were emphasised. Sexual education took the form of exhortation not to commit adultery. Physical endurance was taught through strenuous hikes across the mountains and emotional strength by being woken at all hours to rehearse songs and answer questions. Girls between 15 and 20 years were also initiated, but the process was less gruelling than that of the boys, though its purpose was the same, which was to perform a ceremony that would bring adolescents into the adult world (Magubane, 1998).

In the Ndebele society, initiation is still practised among males and females, to mark the passage from childhood to adult status. At the conclusion of the rites, the initiate is allowed to become sexually active and to begin the process of engagement and marriage. Through the process of initiation, males and females are inducted into traditional lore and the mysteries of the group. The knowledge is passed on from one generation of initiates to the next, ensuring that the transfer of knowledge is maintained and the cultural solidarity of the group reinforced. These initiates remain in the lodges, deep in the bush, for two months, being instructed on the lore of the group and the responsibilities, duties and rights as men. After their period of seclusion, feasts are prepared at the initiates' homes, to celebrate the attainment of manhood. Female initiation is less painful than male initiation as no mutilation of the body is involved. The process begins once a girl has reached puberty, starting the morning before full moon, with the girls being stripped naked and symbolically returned to nature by having all the hair on their bodies shaved off. Appointed guides, usually older women who have been initiated, attend the initiates. The main point of initiation is to instruct the initiate on the duties and practices of home making. As with male initiation, the changed status of the

initiate is celebrated with communal feasting. This is a time of joy, during which the newly initiated women are able to flirt and attract the attention of potential husbands (Magubane, 1998). The rites of passage in African cultures indicate the route to adulthood that an African has to follow.

In Western cultures the process of reaching adulthood is different and is characterised by different stages, as put forth by different theorists such as Freud, Erikson and Piaget, as cited in Craig (1983). McPhatter (1997:6) asserts that most social scientists who were introduced to mainstream developmental theories of Freud, Erikson and Kohlberg in human behaviour courses, completed this education exchange without knowing that these conceptualisations of normal life-course development describe women and culturally different people as deficient and abnormal. Theorists who describe normal adult development as career attainment, monogamous heterosexual marriage, childbearing, and managing a household exclude the developmental experiences of a substantial number of people. In this educational scenario, alternative theoretical perspectives unfortunately are either not available or are seldom presented in a positive light.

Craig (1983) explains that Freud lived in the Victorian era. In a number of ways his theory was a reaction to the Victorian notions of human nature and can therefore not be viewed as universally applicable to the understanding of human nature. According to Freud, personality develops through successive psychosexual stages. The stages are as follows: the oral stage, in which the mouth becomes the centre of sensual stimulation and pleasure; the anal and the phallic stages where the focus of pleasure moves from the mouth to the genital area. The genital stage focuses more on sexual and social activities directed towards others.

Sanville (2000:420) states that Freud himself was indifferent to that which existed outside the Western intellectual and artistic traditions. Non-western cultures were seen as at the neurotic end of the pathological, their shamans as outright psychotic. Freud's

followers were intent on developing and defending what they believed to be the universality of their findings and many of the early writers were intent on intellectually colonising the non-western cultures. They drew upon Freud's theories as if they were proven scientifically. In the opinion of the researcher, Freud raises issues with regards to his theory of human development that are not consistent with African cultures. It is unheard of in African cultures that boys and girls experience sexual feelings for their parents at some stage in their development, as Freud suggests in the Oedipal and Electra complexes.

Westen (1996) explains that Eriksson's theory of human development sees the development of an individual as several stages that encompass all the ages of human life. These are: basic trust versus mistrust; autonomy versus shame and doubt; initiative versus guilt; industry versus inferiority; identity versus identity confusion; intimacy versus isolation; generativity versus stagnation; integrity versus despair. Erikson's theory is not the only model of human development, but it is unique in the sense that it is culture sensitive, emerging not only from Erikson's experience as a psychoanalyst but also from his having lived among and observed several cultures, from Denmark and Germany to a Sioux reservation (Westen, 1996). Sanville (2000:425) states that developmental constants such as Erikson's might be found in different cultures, but their order and sequence are not as fixed as Erikson suggests, and they vary in length and intensity from culture to culture.

It is important to note here that, though Erikson may have lived with different cultural groups, African culture is not mentioned as one of the cultures to which he had been exposed. Therefore his theory of human development can only attempt to explain the development of people whom Erikson observed and had lived with. Considering the different paths that people from different cultural backgrounds take towards adulthood, it becomes clear that people who may be regarded as adolescents in some Eurocentric cultures, may be considered fully-fledged adults in some African cultures. What social workers have to realise is that the notion of human development is closely linked to

people's cultural background. Part of the education and training of social workers has to include an experience of deliberate cultural immersion in the various cultural settings where they might eventually hope to practice after graduation. This will help to improve their ability to provide social work services cross-culturally.

#### **4.4.2 Marriage**

Basic rules underlying marriage in African societies are firstly that, while a woman may only have one spouse, a man may have more than one wife at a time, if he so wishes. Secondly, marriage is virilocal, which means that a woman should join her husband after marriage; either at his own homestead or that of his father or brothers. Thirdly, only the transfer of bride wealth in the form of cattle from the group of the groom to that of the bride brings about marriage. Fourthly, among the major ethnic groups in South Africa, marriage is exogamous (i.e. marital partners are sought outside the kin groups) (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:179; Magubane, 1998).

According to Mberengwa (2003:3), there is no marriage without payment of *lobola* (bride wealth). *Lobola* may be paid in livestock (cattle, goats, or sheep) and varying sums of money. Though *lobola* is no longer legally required as a precondition for marriage, it is still central to African marriages, serving the following purposes:

- It cements the relationship between families.
- It gives security to the girl in the event of a divorce.
- It gives the girl respect in the eyes of all, especially the spouse. If *lobola* has been paid, even if there is no marriage in church, the bride is accorded all the respect due to a married woman. Church marriage comes after the customary procedures have been completed.

The sealing of the marriage alliance by the payment of the bride wealth by the groom's family to the bride's family is one of the enduring cultural practices among Africans. To this traditional alliance, colonisation has added the Christian marriage and marriage

registration in the official records of the state. The conjugal family that results from such an alliance can be monogamous or polygamous (Mukenge, 2002:117). Most African marriages are therefore either traditional, civil and/or both.

Marriage and procreation in African communities are inextricably bound; without procreation the marriage is considered incomplete. It is seen as a religious obligation through which a person contributes the seeds of life towards man's struggle against the loss of original immortality. It is in the birth of children that final fulfilment as adults, male and female, is achieved. It is recognised that it is marriage alone that makes this possible. Marriage must therefore be regarded as an important rite of passage, and it must be emphasised that, by the act of marriage, both the bride and the groom move towards maturity (Hammond-Tooke, 1974: 193). Mbiti (1990: 130) says that, "In some societies it is believed that the dead are reincarnated in part, so that aspects of personality or physical characteristics are 'reborn' in their descendants. A person who therefore has no descendants in effect quenches the fire of life." African marriages do not normally survive if the couple does not procreate. The husband's relatives will usually put pressure on him to look for another wife who will be able to give birth.

Another important characteristic of African marriage is polygamy, the state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives. Chiefs and wealthy men with large herds and cattle used to marry more than one wife and, in some instances, had as many as four or more wives. They were usually distinguished by rank according to different houses (Magubane, 1998). Polygamy is a custom found all over Africa and is seen to raise the social status of the family concerned. It is instilled in the minds of African peoples that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community. When a family is made up of several wives, it means that there will always be someone around to help in times of need. Polygamy helps to prevent or reduce unfaithfulness and prostitution, mainly on the part of the husband (Mbiti, 1990). Mungazi (1996:49) states that there is a higher rate of divorce among monogamous marriages than among polygamous marriages. According to the African understanding of the

meaning of marriage, both polygamous and monogamous families have the blessing of society and are accepted as forms of the concept of the family.

In Western marriage however, a marriage contract is between two individuals. The parents of both bride and bridegroom may, out of courtesy, be asked for their consent to the marriage, but it is not really of vital importance because marriage concerns only two people. In African culture, one does not simply get married as an individual to another individual. One marries into a family and even a clan. Many people, therefore, have to be consulted, negotiations conducted and the “bride price” paid before a couple can get married. In the West, a wedding is an exclusive and private affair, where attendance is by invitation. In Africa a wedding includes as many people as possible. On the wedding day, anyone who feels like attending will attend, even if uninvited (Van der Walt, 1997).

For social work practice, the importance of the marriage trends among African tribes exists in the fact that family therapy and marriage counselling often assume nuclear families and marriages involving one wife and one husband. Therefore marriage trends among African tribes challenge social work theory and practice to recognise and acknowledge all possible permutations of marriage and not only the Christianity-based Western type monogamous marriage. If a social worker looks at African polygamous marriages from the Western Christian perspective, he or she may be tempted to refer to them as classical cases of adultery, behaviour which is prohibited in the Ten Commandments of the Bible (1982: Exodus 20 verse 14) which state “You shall not commit adultery” and the generally accepted Western moral codes of behaviour. In this case, a social caseworker might regard as unacceptable what Africans may regard as an acceptable situation. Mukenge (2002:123) states that the African family is a multidimensional reality and that, as a rule, the conjugal family of a man and a woman, or a man and several women, is a subunit of a much larger extended family. This therefore has implications for social work intervention with African families.

#### **4.4.3 Divorce and separation**

A woman or man may be divorced on the grounds of adultery; continual refusal to render conjugal rights; wilful desertion, gross misconduct; impotence and barrenness (Krige, 1974: 157). There are African societies where divorce and separation is easy

and common, and there are others where divorce traditionally is either completely unknown or very rare. Most African societies fall between these two extremes. The causes of divorce include cruelty on the part of the husband; the practice and suspicion of magic and witchcraft on the part of the wife; desertion of one party by another; and sterility and barrenness, especially on the part of the wife. In some societies, the marriage breaks down completely if the bride is not a virgin at the time of the wedding. The greatest cause of divorce is sterility and barrenness, because the inability to bear children blocks the stream of life. In cases where the husband is impotent or sterile, his brother can perform the sexual duties and fertilise the wife for him and in this way save the marriage from breaking down. In cases where the wife is barren, the husband may take another wife and keep the barren one, which also saves the “first marriage” (Mbiti, 1990: 141-142).

Separations between husband and wife are more common than divorce. They are usually caused through a number of factors, such as a quarrel between spouses or between the wife and the relatives of the husband; jealousies between the “co-wives”; or the failure of the husband to pay the full amount of the marriage gift or “bride price”. In case of separation, the wife usually returns to her own people until there is reconciliation or the cause of the separation has been remedied. These separations may be prolonged, with the result that the partners concerned may find new partners and the first marriage ends in a divorce. In cases of separation and divorce in African societies, children normally go with their mother (Mbiti, 1990).

In the researcher’s view, the issues that social workers must recognise when dealing with separation and divorce in an African context are the following:

- It is only the woman’s marital status that changes from married to single if the divorce happens within the context of a polygamous marriage; the husband will remain married to the remaining wives.

- The divorce will not be between two individuals, but between families.
- The children of divorce will not only leave behind one of the parents, but may also have to deal with separation from half-brothers and half-sisters and the whole ramification of family relationships that exist in polygamous families.
- Both the legal and the traditional aspects of separation and divorce must guide social work interventions.
- In the event of a divorce, the woman may have to return to her family of origin, together with her children, or make alternative living arrangements.
- Social work may need to revisit its understanding of marriage, divorce, adultery and family in an African setting.
- There is no literature in social work that can guide a social worker on how to deal with polygamous marital problems or polygamous family therapy.

## **4.5 SOCIAL DEPARTMENT**

### **4.5.1 Communication**

Westerners tend to have a very direct way of approaching, greeting, and questioning people. This manner of approach may cause uneasiness among African clients because some questions asked at too early a stage may be considered too personal or impolite, or as showing lack of respect for privacy and culturally taboo subjects. Eye contact, personal distance and touching are examples of what may cause communication problems if the social worker is not culturally aware of the possible effects of the direct approach to communication (Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003:34).

Van der Walt (1997:2) states, "Western people expect from participants that they adhere to the agenda which should be dealt with item by item. Africans however may talk round and round the point. Westerners are inclined to be very direct even if it may result in conflict. Africans regard this as being insensitive and rude. They prefer an indirect way of communicating something. The person with whom the discussion takes place has to draw his/her own conclusion. If someone owes [an] African person money, for example, he/she may not ask for it directly instead he or she may say, "When are you going to

return my parcel?' Another example would be in situations where sexual matters are to be discussed; Africans find it very difficult to be direct about these matters. It is important for social workers to know what metaphors clients use when they have to say things that can only be said indirectly."

In instances where the social worker is not familiar with metaphors used to talk about sensitive issues within a particular culture, Graham and Al-Krenawi (2003: 12-13) suggest using a cultural broker or a cultural consultant. Cultural brokers are people who are acculturated in a particular culture as well as in the mainstream culture; they are able to straddle cultures and can function as language and cultural bridges. Whenever a cultural broker is involved in a professional interview situation, both the social worker and cultural broker must understand the requirement to abide by the principles of the casework relationship, in particular the principle of confidentiality.

In emphasising the importance of adequate communication in clinical situations, Drennan (1998) (<http://www.hst.org.za/research/conf98/sess5htm>) has stated that it is difficult, even in medicine where there are often physical signs and symptoms, to function effectively without adequate communication between doctor and patient. In instances where the professionals cannot talk to patients, the patient's condition can deteriorate. Without adequate communication, the patients do not know if they will be adequately assisted. "I think if you are treating a patient with whom you cannot communicate then you are violating them in a way," was the view of a doctor working at Valkenberg Hospital in Cape Town, after participating in a project to provide interpreters to under-resourced state services. Patients are no longer exposed to the abuses of an era when they would be interviewed with a cleaner interpreting, or even worse, a psychotic fellow patient.

Language differences between the social work professionals and clients are a strong barrier to the use of services and the effective provision of social care. The elimination of

the language barrier is necessary to increase the utilisation of social work services for the whole population on an equal basis. Literature recommends that professionals should share the language or language style of their clients. Segregation is a significant barrier to language learning, as it limits the opportunities for professionals to interact with the natives of the language. Clients mostly come from neighbourhoods different from those of professional people (Pacheo *et al.*, 2003:52). In the South African situation, social workers should endeavour to learn the languages that clients speak. One is aware of situations where students during fieldwork have difficulties communicating with clients who do not share the first language with the students. The language problems become even more serious when there are racial differences between the clients and students.

#### **4.5.2 Clothes**

Clothes, as mentioned earlier, are important in the Western world where it is improper to be naked and clothes are even worn in bed. But traditional African tribes, like the Zulus and Vendas, believe that covering the body indicates that one has something to hide! The Higi people in Nigeria see clothes merely a means of ornamentation for special occasions (Van der Walt, 1997: 2).

Therefore it is important for social workers to be familiar with cultural attitudes to clothing as most of their African clients, particularly women, may wear traditional attire and be unembarrassed about revealing body parts such as breasts, which maybe offensive to someone from another culture around. Social workers who are not familiar with the practice of suckling babies in full view of everybody while waiting outside the social worker's office, may be non-verbally judgmental and thus relate to the client inappropriately.

### **4.6 APPROACHES TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

#### **4.6.1 Attitudes to problems of living**

An important aspect of African culture is the mental attitude to problems presented by life in general. Whereas the Westerner tends to use a problem-solving approach

following various analyses, the African approach is that of living through and experiencing the situation. Dr Kaunda, cited in Biko (1978:44), illustrated this as follows: "The Westerner generally has an aggressive mentality. When he sees a problem he will not rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot live with contradictory ideas in his mind; he must settle for one or the other or else evolve a third idea in his mind that resonates the other two. And he is vigorously scientific in rejecting solutions for which there is no logical basis. He draws a sharp distinction between the natural and the supernatural and views the non-rational as superstition. Africans do not recognise any conceptual cleavage between the natural and supernatural. They experience a situation rather than face a problem. Africans allow both the rational and the non-rational elements to make an impact on them; any action they take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise."

Social workers should be aware of this attitude to life problems so that they may be able to select appropriate model combinations of intervention when dealing with African clients. Africans will seek solutions to the problems of life through rational cognitive processes together with ways that may seem irrational to the worker. This may be the case particularly when the worker and the client do not share a world-view. For example, clients may choose to go to both the traditional healer and marriage counsellor for a marital problem; they could approach both the church and the ancestors for the solution. Some clients are actually torn between the professional and the indigenous ways of dealing with life problems, particularly psychological and health-related problems. It might be helpful for the social worker to find out from the clients who the other members of the treatment team are, in order to assess possibilities of collaboration with them.

#### **4.6.2 Orphans and problem children**

In a traditional rural inclusive African setting, orphans and problem children are drawn into society and absorbed by other families. Everybody becomes a father, mother, sister or brother to such children. In this way, members of the society provide for these children's welfare and wellbeing. In the West, however, orphans and problem children

are isolated into orphanages and homes, where professionals take care of them. The Western method of caring for children in need separates such children from normal life and these children later are not easily integrated into society (Van der Walt, 1997). The contention in African culture is that social workers should try by all means to place orphans and other children in need of care within their extended family structure or community. Placement in an institution should only be considered as the last resort.

#### **4.6.3 Youthfulness and old age**

In Western cultures youth is seen as desirable and old age as undesirable. Old age is dreaded, elderly people are unwanted and are placed outside society, in institutions for the aged. In traditional Africa the opposite applies. One is expected to act his or her age and prove oneself to be mature. Age is desirable and the aged are revered as an important group in society because of their experience and wisdom (Van der Walt, 1997). According to Mberengwa (2003:7), respect is the core value displayed towards people, particularly the elderly and adults. Curtsyng, clapping of hands, saying “thank you”, kneeling (girls) or sitting (boys) in the presence of adults is done as a sign of respect.

The contention here is that social workers need to understand the cultural aspects involved in dealing with elderly African clients. Social workers need to know the appropriate ways of communicating with the elderly, as elderly people can be very sensitive to how they are treated by younger people. Showing respect in communicating with adults and the elderly goes a long way in establishing a client-worker relationship, which is the essence of the casework process. Attempts should also be made to as far as possible care for the elderly within their extended families and communities, in line with the communal nature of African families. Once again, placement in an institution should be considered as the last resort.

## 4.7 AFRICAN THOUGHT

The idea that African thought and Western thought are different is supported by several authors, such as Van der Walt (1997), Torrey (1972), Kamalu (1995) and (Gyekye 1995). According to Torrey (1972), people do not see things in the same way, and the way they see them is dependent on their culture. Ideas, values, conceptions of time and the notion of cause and effect are all culturally learned. The world is differently defined in different places.

According to Van der Walt (1997), African thought differs from Western thought in that Western thought generally ignores the spiritual dimension of phenomena and focuses on the visible, measurable physical reality. Possible supernatural causes are not considered to be plausible explanations for phenomena. However, in African thought, supernatural causes play an important role in explaining phenomena. Africa does not ignore the supernatural side of reality as the West does. African ontology is concerned with the spiritual world and the forces that play a role in it. Africans regard supernatural causes as the explanation for everything. Western thought is mainly intellectual, devoid of emotional content. African thought, on the contrary, is more involved, more personal, emotionally affective and expressive.

Du Preez, cited in Van der Walt (1997:89), says, "In contrast to modern man whose approach to life is objectively analytical and whose spirit is accordingly also divided into values, thought and feeling systems, Blacks have a different approach. They do not face the world objectively and at a distance but live in it. No objects exist outside reality. They touch and are attuned to things and the earth. They experience everything intensely and are part of everything."

To an African therefore, affective, irrational and scientific knowledge are all equally valid. Daniels (2001:303) states, "The Africentric worldview ... acknowledges affective reality as well as rationality." In terms of African thought, one is not faced with options of being rational or irrational, it is possible, rather, for one to relate to phenomena through all the modes or patterns of thought and being. Kamalu (1995:13) states that modern man/woman in a way, has been mentally straight jacketed by rational thinking. Opposed

to this pattern of thought is the vitalist mentality of ancient Egyptian science. This involved the use of intuition (feeling or emotional sensitivity) in addition to reason and it led to a more immediate attainment of the truth rather than through a logical step by step progression. The intellect alone could not lead one to the full knowledge of phenomena.

Gyekye (1995:201) alludes to the idea of paranormal cognition as an important mode of knowing in African thought. Western knowledge has acknowledged two main sources of knowledge: reason and sense experience, also known as rationalism and empiricism. Clairvoyance and telepathy, which are forms of extrasensory perception, are not formally accepted as ways of knowing in Western epistemology. An important aspect of African epistemology that differentiates it from Western epistemology is spirit mediumship, divination, and witchcraft. These modes of cognition are common in all African communities. It can be legitimately declared that paranormal cognition is recognised by and large as one of the modes of knowing in Africa.

Social workers need to be aware of African thought patterns so that they are able to choose appropriate intervention strategies that take into account the scientific, the irrational, the affective and the spiritual modes of knowing. Some of these interventions may be outside the purview of social work, which is when social workers may need to refer clients appropriately or work jointly with other service providers, such as faith healers, traditional healers and diviners.

#### **4.8 THE UNITY OF AFRICAN CULTURE**

Despite efforts of succeeding white governments in South Africa to stress differences between various groups such as the Nguni, Tsonga, Sotho and Venda, there is a sense in which all these peoples have a common culture, (Hammond-Tooke, 1993). Arguing that African people share a similar culture does not necessarily mean that there are no diverging experiences among Africans. Indeed there are differences, but they are not as great as the African's difference from Europeans or Asians. Some of the differences are due to extraneous cultural influences of non-Africans (Asante, 1985:11). In the researcher's view, Ngunis, Sothos, Vendas and Tsongas in South Africa, as Africans, though ethnically different, share common cultural practices, such as the belief in ancestors, witchcraft, and polygamy. Gyekye (1995) states that a comparative study of

African cultures shows that, despite the undoubted cultural diversity arising from ethnic pluralism in Africa, threads of underlying affinity do run through the beliefs, customs, value systems, sociopolitical institutions and practices of the various African societies. There is a very widespread corpus of ideas that persists in the rituals, myths and folktales of African peoples. In the researcher's view even continental Black Africa reveals common cultural trends among its peoples, such as the belief in the Supreme Being, polygamy and primacy of the collective/community as against that of the individual.

Mekada (1999) also points to a number of cultural values that are common throughout the continent of Africa. The main principles of the African-centred world-view are: the interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings; collective individual identity; the collective/inclusive nature of family structure; the oneness of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships. This world-view has important implications for social work practice with Africans and all people of African descent

For many years, Europeans who claim that Africans have diverse cultures have denied and still deny the unity of African culture, which is, however, confirmed by Africans. These Europeans have gone to the extent of identifying Africa south of the Sahara as "Black Africa" and what is north of the Sahara as the Middle East (Asante & Asante, 1985:4). According to these Europeans, it is impossible for Africa to have a united culture since there are too many ethnic groups in Africa. They further argue that Africa is too vast, that the peoples and cultures are different; and therefore nobody should make sweeping generalisations. Africa is vast; however Arabs of North Africa are not Africans but Asiatics, though they have their residence in a physical or geographic area called Africa. The white people of Zimbabwe or South Africa are not Africans but Europeans. Within each African country there are differences between ethnic groups. In the ultimate analysis, there are differences between all individuals. If the knowledge of African culture depends on the study of every African country, each ethnic group, each village, each household and each individual, then that kind of knowledge can never be attained (Ruch & Anyanwu, 1984:79).

Amazingly, these arguments do not apply to European culture or Asian culture, and are therefore one-sided. When it comes to Europe, irrespective of various ethnic groups that exist in Europe, European culture remains united, according to them; they call it Western civilisation (Reve, 1995:3). The researcher is of the view that when it comes to African culture, minor differences are used to divide Africans whilst the same differences in other groups are ignored in favour of unifying factors. A classical example of how African cultures were used to divide Africans occurred when South Africa was sliced up into different homelands based on cultural differences among Africans.

What is most amazing is that there are even Africans who deny cultural unity in Africa. Pobee, in Reve (1995), claims there is a plethora of “African cultures” and that this is partly due to geographical and physical conditions. He claims that there is a gulf between Africa north of the Sahara and Africa south of the Sahara, between East Africa and West Africa and that this results in differences in culture between these regions. He further argues that there are differences within Africa and these differences are remarkable even within one country, and they are due to tribal backgrounds. What is most striking is that, when Pobee, in Reve (1995), repeatedly talks of African cultures and religions, he never talks of Christianities. This makes one wonder if he does not see any remarkable differences within Christianity itself. Is his Christianity as an Anglican similar to that of a Methodist? If so, why do we have so many churches; if not, why not Christianities and not Christianity (Reve, 1995:3)?

Empirical researchers into African culture proclaim that the African people have changed, that their traditional beliefs have collapsed and that they have become modern. Ruch and Anyanwu (1984) state that the task here is to investigate what it is that subsists of the ancient beliefs beneath their apparent changes. He asks whether, in spite of the mutation of time, there is anything enduring by which people can be known? And he also mentions that we speak of biological inheritance, but do not mention cultural inheritance.

In the researcher’s view, all cultures of the world are dynamic. They change with time but there are elements within those cultures that have been there, are there and will continue to be there. Daniels (2001:303) states that Africentric writers agree that the

African community, regardless of divergent life experiences, has retained basic principles of the African value system to some degree, for example the ideas of the interconnectedness of all things; oneness of mind, body and spirit; collective identity as opposed to individual identity; consanguineous family structure; phenomenological time; and spirituality.

Nabwire (1968:25) states that foreign observers have often been misled into thinking that Africans have absorbed European and American cultures with no sense of selectivity. Even with the European acculturation and with a wholesale rejection of African folkways, there remains a continuing strong pulse of African life below the European clothes. Complete imitation of European or American or Chinese culture would be bound to fail, because Africa does not have binoculars viewing New York, London, or Peking to mimic what they do.

The following are some of the enduring common themes that characterise African culture: cosmology, belief systems, epistemological systems, rites of passage, forms of marriage, music, dance and the history of colonisation and domination by the European nations. Hammond-Tooke (1972) states that all African societies have some belief in the supernatural being; belief in ancestors; the custom of a bride living at the home of her husband's father; polygamous marriage; prohibitions on mating with close kin; the incest taboo; and the universal sense of dependence on superhuman aid.

It is important for social workers to be aware of the fact that, even though African culture, like all other cultures, is dynamic; there are core cultural traits that have endured through time and colonisation. Some Africans may have adopted Christianity, but there are times when they will do things in the African cultural way. They may go to church to worship and also go to the graveyard to speak to the deceased members of their family who have become ancestors. Occasionally one gets the feeling that Africans have a way of dealing in contradictions, incorporating things in their lives that seem to be contradictory, for example, taking a particular problem to church, to the ancestors, to the social worker and to traditional healers at the same time.

The point to be made here is that social workers need to be open to what may seem to be contradictory behaviours by African clients. If the client speaks to the social worker in

English, and also mentions prayer and God in the conversation, the worker must not assume that, just because the client is literate and Christian, he or she does not look at things from an African cultural perspective. Underneath or side by side with English, God and the Church, there will always be a cultural core in every African client.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that the African-centred world-view that the caseworkers should understand as the basis of casework intervention with African clients consists of the following enduring and core cultural elements: reverence for the elderly; a deep sense of communality between the individual, the family and the community; belief in the Supreme Being which predates the arrival of Christianity; belief in the ancestors; belief in the spiritual nature of a person; belief in witchcraft; polygamous marriage; indirect communication patterns; a generalised lack of punctuality identified as “African time”; extended family units; patriarchal family structures; culturally defined rites of passage; and openness to rational, irrational and spiritual categories of knowledge. Although this study focuses on the need to incorporate African culture in the training and practice of social casework, there is a parallel challenge to engage in further research studies that will investigate how the world-views of the Indian and the Coloured populations of South Africa can be aspects of the world-views that inform the training and practice of social work in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the plan/design of this study in terms of the following: research design, population and sample, data collection, data presentation and analysis, discussion of findings and the limitations of the study.

#### **5.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of a literature study is to provide a context for the research study. The researcher conducted an extensive literature review in order to establish and refine the research subject. The purpose of the literature review in this study was to establish how other scholars have investigated the research problem concerning African culture and social casework practice. The intention was to learn from other researchers how they have theorised and conceptualised the research issues, what they have found empirically and what instruments they have used (Mouton, 2001:6). The literature reviewed in this study focused on books and journal articles on the following issues: Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, African culture, Afrocentric social work, culture sensitive social work practice, the origins of social work and its spread to the developing countries. Most of the literature reviewed consisted of studies conducted in other countries and focused on the relevance of social work to their indigenous cultures. Through the literature review, the researcher was able to gain insight into the relevant concepts and theories investigated in previous studies and to apply them selectively to South African social work and casework practice situations, in accordance with the aims and objectives of this study.

#### **5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is discussed here with a view to indicating the research strategy adopted in the execution of this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a research design includes a plan, the structure and strategy of the research. Research design raises the following basic questions: who and what will be studied? What

strategies of enquiry will be used? What methods or research tools will be used for collecting and analysing empirical data? Leedy (1993:127-128) described research design as a strategy, the plan and the structure of conducting a research project. It provides the overall framework for collecting data and provides a format for the detailed steps in the study. The research design deals with the following questions with regard to the study: What are the data that are needed? Where is the data located? How will data be collected? How will data be analysed and interpreted? Cresswell (1998:2), cited in de Vos (2002), defines design to mean “the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing a narrative”.

This was a qualitative study; the methods of data collection were guided by the phenomenological approach. In phenomenology the researcher, according to De Vos (2002:273), should be able to enter the “subject’s life world” or “life setting” and view phenomena from the respondent’s vantagepoint. This is accomplished mainly through naturalistic methods of study, analysing the conversations that researchers have with subjects. Long and in-depth interviews (with up to ten people) are also utilised in phenomenological studies. Individuals who have experienced the particular phenomena are identified, data are systematically collected and meanings and themes are analysed (de Vos, 2002:273).

The design of this study was aimed at gathering information/data that would assist in providing clear answers to the following issues:

- Whether social work training in South Africa equipped caseworkers to be culturally competent
- Whether social caseworkers are culturally competent to render casework services to African clients
- Whether cultural issues should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients, if so, which ones.

Any fully scientific study in social work should have at least one of three primary objectives: to explore, to describe, or to explain (Morton & Arkava, 1983:11). Williams

and Williams and Grinnel (1990:304) describe exploratory studies as studies whose purpose is to just gather data or facts in instances where little is known about the field of study. Where more is known about the research topic, a study can be expected to provide a higher level of knowledge; the appropriate research design here would have to be descriptive. Mouton and Marais (1988) state that exploratory research may be conducted by means of a review of the related social science and other pertinent literature and also by an investigation involving people who have practical experience of the problem to be studied. In this study, social workers who have been trained in the Western models of practice and are practising social casework with African clients were the subject of investigation. The exploratory design was applied in this study and it was qualitative in nature.

The reason for applying the exploratory design in this study was that very little is known about African culture-based social work practice in the South African context. Most studies that have been conducted in the South African context have dealt with the relationship between social work and cultures other than the African culture.

#### **5.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

Population and sample are discussed here for the purposes of identifying the population of the study to which the findings will be applicable and to give an indication of the sampling procedures that were applied in this study. Goddard and Melville (1996:34) define a population as “any group that is the subject of research interest”. Neuman (2003:541) defines a population as “the large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample”. In this study, the population comprised social workers who practised casework in their line of duty, and were employed by the government and non-governmental organisations in the Limpopo Province.

A sample is a small representation of a whole. In research, the observation or study of a phenomenon in its entirety would be time-consuming and impossible to do. A substantial amount of theory has shown that researchers only need to observe or interview some of the people or phenomena involved, to obtain a usable idea of the characteristics of all the subjects or population (Arkava & Lane, 1983:157). A sample must be very similar to

the population from which it is drawn, on those variables that are relevant to the study (Mark, 1996:107). Morton (1983:157) suggests that the sample must also include phenomena that are representative of the whole. One of the challenges in sampling is to reduce the sampling error, an error that results when the research sample does not properly reflect the population from which it is drawn (Reamer, 1998). De Vos (2000:199) views a sample as consisting of the elements of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. A sample represents an effort to understand the population from which it is drawn. Samples therefore assist the researcher in explaining some aspect of the population. In this study, the sample was drawn from the population of social caseworkers in the Limpopo Province.

There are two major groups of sampling procedures, probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is based on randomisation, non-probability is not randomised. In probability sampling each person in the population stands an equal chance of being selected into the sample. The selection of the sample from the population is based on a random procedure (De Vos, 2002:203). Non-probability samples refer to a class of samples in which the choice in selecting the given individual is unknown; it contrasts with probability samples (Fortune & Reid, 1999:471). A non-probability sample does not use random sampling (but a probability sample does use random samples). Random sampling refers to sampling procedure for drawing a sample from a population in such a manner that every element in the population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample (Mark, 1996:402).

Qualitative researchers tend to use non-probability or non-random samples; they rarely determine the sample size in advance and have limited knowledge about the universe from which the sample is drawn. Qualitative researchers focus on how a small collection of cases, units or activities illuminates life. In qualitative studies, therefore, less focus is placed on representativeness (Neuman, 2003: 211).

A non-probability sampling procedure was applied in this study, with purposive sampling and snowballing techniques being used to select respondents for the study. Purposive

sampling was used because the researcher had predetermined criteria for the sources of data that would be appropriate for the study (De Vos, 2002:208). Through the purposive sampling technique, the researcher used his own judgement, guided by the selection criteria, to determine who among the available social caseworkers would be selected into the sample. The snowball technique came in handy when some elements of the sample referred the researcher to other potential respondents who were then approached by the researcher until the desired sample size of ten respondents was reached (De Vos, 2002:208). In line with the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study, ten social workers participated as respondents. The Limpopo Provincial Department of Social Development and a private welfare agency were approached for permission to interview those social workers in their employ who met the criteria for participation in the study: The following criteria were identified: Participants had to have practised casework with White and African clients in South Africa for at least five years and more and had to have studied social work at a South African University.

The researcher aimed, as far as possible, to achieve a balance of culture and race in the sample. It was not possible to achieve gender balance in the sample because the majority of caseworkers are females. The respondents' minimum level of education was a Bachelor's degree in social work. Only one respondent had a Master's degree in social work. As indicated earlier, the sampling procedure was based on non-probability and the sampling techniques were purposive and snowballing.

## **5.5 DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection is the "how" part or the procedures used to collect data. Social work researchers and practitioners obtain data by asking people questions, observing them or using materials such as case records and statistical data (Fortune & Reid, 1999: 250).

There are three methods of collecting data: using a questionnaire, using an interview and making use of available materials such as census data. A questionnaire is a set of questions in written form that is self-administered. An interview is a face-to-face situation in which an interviewer asks questions of one or more interviewees (Mark, 1996:241).

There are two types of interviews: the unstructured/unstandardised interview and the structured/standardised interview. In unstructured interviews the general nature of questions is specified in advance but the specific questions are not. This allows a naturalistic or an informal interview in which the interviewer is free to ask questions in a manner that follows the natural flow of the interaction (Mark, 1996:242).

The questionnaire was designed in a deductive manner, based on the literature review.

The primary instrument for collecting data was a semistructured face-to-face interview schedule (De Vos, 2002:303). Three social caseworkers participated in the pilot study to determine the nature and the relevance of the responses to the questions posed.

Sources of data for this study were face-to-face interviews, which were tape-recorded, and notes from the interviews. Tapes were subsequently transcribed into textual data to make it amenable to analysis. Ten respondents were interviewed over the period of three months from 17 November 2003 to 28 February 2004. All the interviews took place at the respondents' places of employment. Before each interview the researcher explained the aim of the study to respondents and also indicated their rights as respondents in the study, particularly their right to withdraw from the study at any point if they felt like doing this.

The interviews were semi-structured. The individual interview sessions lasted an hour to an hour-and-a-half. The interviews were all tape-recorded, after respondents had granted permission for the recording. In addition to interviews, hand-written notes were taken to assist the researcher to reflect on the themes as they emerged during interviews. The researcher's personal thoughts, impressions and evaluations were also captured in the notes. Face-to-face interviews were used because they have several advantages. In this regard, Van Vuuren and Maree (1999:281) point out the following advantages:

- In-depth information can be derived from semi-structured interviews and probing.

Respondents can ask for clarification if they do not understand any of the questions.

- Personal interviews are the only option in rural areas, where a lack of telephones and illiteracy are still prevalent.
- Interviews normally have high response rates.

## **5.6 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text. It is an ongoing process of reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing notes throughout the study. It is not sharply divided from other activities in the process, such as collecting data or formulating research questions. It involves using data, asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants. Phenomenological research identifies significant statements to generate meaning; it attempts re-storying the respondents' stories in such a way as to develop themes or trends on the subject of investigation (Cresswell, 2003:190-191). Qualitative data analysis involves reading descriptive data, making notes on the trends found in the data and developing some descriptive categories (Roberts & Greene, 2002:763). Unlike quantitative data, there are no exact formulas for analysing qualitative data. There are some widely accepted procedures, but no exacting formulas into which one can enter data. Instead, analysing qualitative data requires a lot of subjective judgement and interpretation (Reamer, 1998:354). In qualitative studies, social workers end up with lots of paper and with lots of words on them and this information must be sorted out, organised and analysed.

Data was analysed in this study with a view to addressing the objectives of the study. The objectives concerned the following: Whether social work training in South Africa equipped caseworkers to be culturally competent; Whether social caseworkers are culturally competent to render casework services to African clients; Whether cultural issues should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients, and, if so, which ones.

In this study the following procedures of data analysis, adapted from Creswell (2003:190-195); De Vos (2002:343); and Reamer (1998:355-356), were applied:

- Data gathered from the interviews were in the form of field notes and tapes, which were transcribed, and were read several times. The idea was to immerse the researcher into the details of the interviews and to get the sense of the interview as a whole. The exercise of transcribing, reading, rereading and editing the notes was done soon after each interview was completed.
- Reading the transcriptions several times enabled the researcher to be familiar with data in an intimate way.
- In the process of in-depth reading of the transcriptions and the field notes, noteworthy themes, patterns and central tendencies were identified. The aim here was to get the general feel and sense of the phenomena under study.
- The readings of the notes were done repeatedly until a summary of all the respondents' major points in relation to the phenomena under study and were arrived at.
- The results were then written up in narratives focusing on each of the themes identified and its relation to the phenomena under investigation.
- Findings were checked against literature to ensure trustworthiness.

## **5.7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Social workers use widely accepted formats to prepare research and evaluation reports. Their length and level of sophistication vary according to the intended audience and purpose (Reamer, 1998: 362). In this study, the following format is used for discussing the findings of the study:

- Introduction/problem statement: this section describes the subject or issues addressed in the study.
- Methodology: this section consists of an overview of the research methodology; it discusses the plan of the study and its execution.
- Results or findings: this section consists of a discussion of the study's major findings and recommendations.

## 5.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in research is discussed here with the view to indicating the ethical context within which the study was conducted. Ethics refer to standards of conduct to ensure moral behaviour. A fundamental question here is whether the study itself is ethical. In social work, issues to consider in assessing whether a study is ethical include harmful labelling of people causing serious psychological distress or withholding needed treatment (Fortune & Reid 1999: 30-31).

Guidelines to protect the subjects of research originated with the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War. The guidelines examined Nazi medical experiments conducted on involuntary prisoners. Nazi physicians for instance conducted harmful experiments designed to determine how long it was possible for human subjects to live in ice water (Royse, 1999).

The Nuremberg code established a basis for codes of ethics used today by social work researchers. The ethical guidelines for social work researchers are as follows:

- Research participants must be told the purpose of the research, the procedures that will be followed and the amount of time that will be required.
- Research participants must be told of any possible risks or discomforts that may be experienced.
- Consent of the participants in the study must be voluntary and informed.
- Research participants must be protected from unwarranted physical or mental discomfort.
- Data obtained about participants in a research study should be treated as confidential (Mark, 1999:4).

For this study, the researcher undertook to abide by all the guidelines for conducting an ethical social work study. The following is what the researcher did in an attempt to comply with the ethical requirements of social work research:

- The social workers who constituted the sample of this study were briefed about their rights as participants in this study, particularly the right to withdraw from the study at any point if they felt like withdrawing.
- The researcher explained the aim of the study to the respondents.
- The researcher assured the respondents that their identities, institutional affiliations and location would not be disclosed. To protect the identity of the respondents, participants would not be described in sufficient detail to enable readers to determine their identity from any written or oral report.
- Data would be treated confidentially and kept in a secure place during and after the completion of the study.
- Alphabets (codenames) would be used in any written or oral reports on the data.
- During the transcription process and the execution of the entire study the above security measures would be strictly observed.
- Tapes and transcripts would be kept separately at a secure place.

## **5.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The shortcomings of this study are discussed to highlight some of the issues that the researcher encountered which might have affected the quality of the study. One of the problems the researcher encountered was the limited availability of previous studies on the relationship between African culture and the practice of casework within South Africa. The result was that the bulk of the reviewed literature had to do with culture and social casework practice in other countries, such as Canada and the United States of America. Similar studies in Canada and North America had to do with how social work can be reconciled with the indigenous populations and cultures of those countries.

Another shortcoming, as pointed out earlier, had to do with where the interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted at the respondents' places of employment. The result was that there were intermittent interruptions of the interviews by the telephone and the respondents' colleagues. Some of the interviews were conducted in offices that were close to the main streets in towns; the traffic noises in some cases interfered with the quality of the tape-recording of the interviews.

There was no gender balance in the sample: males were underrepresented.

And finally, this being a qualitative study, the sample size was small, with only ten social workers being interviewed, so that findings cannot be generalised to a wider population.

## **5.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides details of how the research was actually carried out. The literature review and the empirical study broadened the researcher's understanding and insight into the practice of social casework and the need for an Afrocentric perspective of casework practice. The overall findings of the study are presented in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE OF SOCIAL WORKERS PRACTISING SOCIAL CASEWORK**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical research. The research design and methodology were discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5. This chapter describes the results of the study undertaken with ten respondents who were practising as social workers.

#### **6.2 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY WERE THE FOLLOWING**

- To determine from caseworkers whether training equipped them to be culturally competent.
- To assess the extent to which social caseworkers are culturally competent to render casework services to African clients.
- To identify cultural elements that should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients.

#### **6.3 DATA COLLECTION**

The data was collected with the use of a semistructured interview schedule consisting of the following sections:

- Respondent background information
- Cultural sensitivity content in the social work training programme
- Personal cultural competence (of the practitioner)
- Cultural issues in social work practice and the reaction of social workers (to these issues)
- African cultural elements to be taken into account when addressing the components of the casework situation

## **6.4 RESPONSES**

The responses were transcribed verbatim and analysed according to the steps provided by Cresswell (2003:191-195). They are as follows: transcribe interviews and arrange data into themes – these themes are the ones that appear as major findings in qualitative studies; obtain the general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning; get the general idea of what the respondents are saying; interconnect themes into story lines and develop them into a model; the final step in qualitative data analysis involves interpretation or making meaning of the data, or finding out which lessons could be learned from the respondents. According to Neuman (2003:440) it is important to note that qualitative data are derived in the form of words, which are relatively imprecise, context-based and can therefore have more than one meaning. The researcher's goal was to try to organise textual data into a coherent picture or model. This is briefly what guided the researcher in the analysis of data in this study.

There were divergent responses concerning the African cultural aspects of social casework practice. The responses were grouped according to the themes that were emerging in the course of the interviews. The themes that were identified were used to address the stated research objectives of this study and to provide answers to the stated research questions. What emerged from this analysis is the following: social work training did not have African cultural content; respondents did not demonstrate cultural competence in dealing with African clients; respondents encountered a number of cultural issues in dealing with clients and they were not prepared adequately to deal with these issues; respondents pointed out a number of cultural elements that should be taken into account in the casework situation.

## **6.5 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Table 6.1 shows the following information about the respondents: education, university where the respondents received their training, gender, race, language, practice experience, and the type of employing agency.

**Table 6.1 Respondents' background information**

Respondents	Education	University	Gender	Race	Language	Experience	Agency	Remarks
A	BASW	Venda	Female	Black	Northern Sotho	5 years	Private	
B	BASW	North	Female	Black	Tsonga	11 years	Public	
C	BASW	Venda	Female	Black	Tsonga	5 years	Public	
D	BASW	Venda	Male	Black	Venda	11 years	Public	
E	MASW	North	Female	Black	Venda	17 years	Public	
F	BASW	Potchefstroom	Female	White	Afrikaans	20 years	Public	
G	BASW	Potchefstroom	Female	White	Afrikaans	18 years	Public	
H	BASW	Pretoria	Female	White	Afrikaans	26 years	Private	
I	BASW	Potchefstroom	Female	White	Afrikaans	8 years	Public	
J	BASW	Free State	Female	White	Afrikaans	16 years	Public	

Table 6.1 presents the profile of the ten respondents in the study, nine (9) of whom were female. Five of the respondents (A–E) received their social work education (BA degree in social work) from historically black universities and the other five from historically white universities. Only one respondent (E) has a Master's degree in social work. The five black respondents speak the following African languages: Northern Sotho (1), Tsonga (2), and Tshivenda (2). The five white respondents spoke Afrikaans. All respondents spoke English as a second language. The respondents' employment experience in social work ranged from five to twenty years, the average being 13,7 years. Eight respondents were employed by the State Department of Social Development and the remaining two by private welfare organisations in Limpopo Province.

## 6.6 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY CONTENT IN SOCIAL WORK TRAINING

This section deals with questions that have to do with cultural sensitivity content in social work training. In this section the researcher wanted to determine whether or not the respondents were taught anything that has to do with being sensitive to the clients' cultural background. The following questions were asked of the respondents in this regard:

- In your social work training, were you exposed to race and ethnicity courses or modules?

- In your social work training, were you exposed to content relevant to clients who belong to cultures other than your own?
- In your social work training, were you exposed to clients from different cultural groups? Explain how you dealt with cultural differences.
- In your practical training, did you have clients from other racial groups? Explain how you dealt with racial differences.
- Did you have language differences with your clients? If yes, explain how you coped with language differences.
- Based on your practical experience, what contents would you include in the training programme of students to ensure cultural competence in social work trainees?

Tables 6.2 to Table 6.7 present data based on the above questions.

### 6.6.1 Exposure to race and ethnicity courses or modules during training

The responses of the respondents are presented in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2 Exposure to race and ethnicity course or module in training**

Respon- dents	YES	NO	REMARKS
A	In anthropology yes.	In social work, no. There was nothing about that in social work	Supporting courses like anthropology at times contain content on race and ethnicity.
B	We did that in anthropology, but not in depth.	It was not done in social work training.	Supporting courses might have content on race and ethnicity.
C	In sociology there was some part, not in social work.	Not that I can remember.	Social work to ensure this content in itself.
D		Nothing in depth really. By and large the answer would be no exposure to race and ethnicity.	
E	In sociology there was something on race and ethnicity but it was not referring to south Africans or Africans.	Training referred to cultures other than my own. Mainly it talked about the United States and Europe. I cannot remember African about the African context. Social work did not have the race and ethnicity content as it relates to our country.	This shows the need for the supporting modules to also include in their content an Afrocentric perspective.
F		Exposure to race and ethnicity, there was nothing like that. Even in the supporting modules like psychology and sociology, there was nothing like that.	Some supporting modules had a little bit and others did not have at all.
G		No, not at all. During that time the political process did not make it possible.	The political processes have changed; employers need to update social workers who were products of the past.
H		No we were not, this was many years. There was no content on race and ethnicity. Nobody said anything about it. It was not an issue.	Race and ethnic absence in training.
I		Nothing, not at all.	
J		Nothing like that. There was nothing.	

An analysis of data in Table 6.2, to determine if training equipped social caseworkers to work with different racial and ethnic groups, yielded the following: All the respondents (100%) indicated that they were not exposed to race and ethnicity courses or modules in their social work training. Respondents A, B, C and E had limited exposure only in the supporting courses, such as anthropology and sociology, despite the fact that their clients would come from different ethnic groups. This is what they had to say: Respondent A: *In social work, no. There was nothing about that in social work.* Respondent B stated that *“it was not done in social work training”*. Respondent C stated that *“not that I can remember”*. Respondents D, F, G, H, I and J were not exposed to any module or course on race and ethnicity in their training even in the supporting courses. This is what some respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent G stated that her education in social work did not include race and ethnicity issues because *“during that time the political process did not make it possible”*. Respondent F stated that *“even in supporting modules like psychology and sociology there was nothing like that”*. Table 6.2 further shows that social work content was devoid of race and ethnicity issues, while social workers in the field are expected to deal with clients of different racial and cultural groups upon completion of their studies.

Based on the given responses, the researcher concludes that, in South Africa, social work training did not prepare social workers to be ethnically and racially competent. Respondents said that their social work curriculum was silent on racial and ethnic issues pertaining to social work practice. Respondents pointed out that political processes then did not make it possible for them to be exposed to modules that covered race and ethnic issues in social work. With the 1994 democratic dispensation, it should be possible for training programmes to begin to incorporate these issues. Goodman (1973:310-311) suggests that the inclusion of race and ethnicity in the curriculum will enable students to do the following:

- Recognise racist policies and acts, individual and institutional, whenever they occur and know the facts about racial and ethnic injustice, its causes and consequences for human dignity and society.

- Bring racist practices to the attention of those who have the professional responsibility and the potential for stopping such practices.
- Commit resources they have at their administrative disposal to change or redesign policies, procedures and services that are racist in orientation or consequences, intentionally or not.
- Respond constructively and instrumentally to efforts that are intended to eliminate racism.

In a multiracial and multiethnic South Africa, social work students should have the above-mentioned abilities espoused by Goodman (1973) in order to serve clients of all racial and ethnic groups effectively. Exposure to race and ethnicity will enable social workers to be better able to deal with racial problems that practitioners encounter in the field as reported by respondents elsewhere in this study. Respondents have indicated (see Table 5.2) that caseloads that social workers carry consist of clients from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. As the responses above indicate, training does not prepare social workers to function effectively in a multiracial and multiethnic milieu.

Table 6.3 presents responses to the question whether or not the respondents were exposed to social work content in their training that was relevant to clients who belong to cultures other than their own (cross-cultural exposure).

### **6.6.2 Exposure to social work content relevant to clients who belong to other cultures**

The responses of the respondents are presented in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3 Exposure to social work content relevant to clients who belong to other cultures**

RESPONDENTS	YES	NO	GENERAL REMARKS
A		There was no content relevant to clients who belonged to other cultures other than my own.	Historically black and white universities did not have relevant cultural diversity in their social work content.
B		Not really, I cannot remember. I was only exposed to Sotho and Pedi but it was only in practicals. There was no module that addressed cultural issues.	Some students who get exposed to cultural issues in their training get this exposure per happenstance and not by design. Those who get this kind of exposure attend a university not linked to their race or ethnic group in South Africa.
C		No; not that I can remember. In sociology there was some part but not in social work.	Supporting courses sometimes have sections on cultural issues but not in the context of social work practice.
D		Nothing in depth really. I would say no.	
E	It was in sociology and it was talking about the USA and Europe. It was not in the African context.	In social work I do not remember if there was any course like that.	Again one sees a bit of cultural content in supporting courses and not for or in social work.
F		There was no exposure to content relevant to other cultures.	No content on cultural diversity.
G		No, no ways. the political process did not allow it then.	Impact of South African political history on social work training and practice.
H		My training was focusing on a white person. My work includes whites and other cultural groups.	Training has to reflect the real life practical situations found in practice. It must be outcomes based.
I		Work was given without any reference to culture. White culture was reflected more than other cultures.	Social workers operated within the context of their own culture.
J		We were just taught to work with clients. There was no attention to this.	Culture-blind approach to clients.

Analysis of data to determine if respondents were exposed to social work content relevant to clients who belong to cultures other than their own yielded the following (see Table 6.3): Nine out of ten respondents said that they were not exposed in their training to content relevant to clients who belong to cultures other than their own. The one

respondent (E) who had exposure to other cultures got the exposure when she was doing sociology as a supporting course, but the content was relevant to American and European experiences. Respondent E said, *"It was in sociology and it was talking about the USA and Europe. It was not in the African context."* The one student who got exposure to content relevant to clients who belong to other cultural groups got it through happenstance and not by design. These were mainly students who did not go to universities linked to their race or ethnic group. This is what some of the nine respondents who were not exposed to content relevant to clients who belong to cultures other than the respondents' culture said in this regard: Respondent A: *"[T]here was no content relevant to clients who belonged to cultures other than my own."* Respondent B: *"I was exposed to Sotho and Pedi, but it was only in practicals."* Respondent C: *"[I]n sociology there was some part, but not in social work."* Respondent G: *"[N]o, no ways the political process did not allow it then."* Respondent H: *"[M]y training was focusing on a white person; my work includes whites and other cultural groups."* Respondent I: *"[W]ork was given without reference to culture. White culture was reflected more than other cultures."* Respondent J: *"[W]e were just taught to work with clients; there was no attention to this."*

This means that most of the respondents (90%) were not trained for the culturally diverse clientele population that typifies South Africa. Pacheo *et al.* (2003:58) state that "despite a number of culturally oriented curriculum initiatives, forums and reports that have been developed since the late 1960's[,] cross cultural competence has not been institutionalized within the curricula of social intervention disciplines. Social work, psychology, psychiatry and psychiatric nursing curricula have not prepared practitioners for effective practice". Training has to reflect the real life practical situations found in practice.

Table 6.3 shows that respondents, when they were social work students, were not trained to be competent with clients who did not belong to their own cultural groups. Social work students then were trained in such a way that they anticipated working with their own racial, cultural and language groups. Respondent H says in this regard that *“My training was focusing on a white person but my work includes other cultural groups”*. Respondent I said in this regard that *“[w]ork was given without any reference to culture; White culture was reflected more than other cultures”*. This shows that these respondents’ training was not true to the practice situation into which the respondent graduated. Since caseloads have become multicultural, it is imperative for the training programmes to incorporate content on cross-cultural issues, so that social workers can begin to develop multicultural competence skills. Goodman (1973: 313) suggests that social work students should have an opportunity to become knowledgeable about the cultural symbols and patterns, community norms, traditions, family patterns, decision-making behaviour, sex and age roles of their own as well as other ethnic and racial and cultural groups. Pacheo *et al.* (2003:59) suggest that cross-cultural training courses must have the following major components: language, cultural identity symbols, folk art and ceremonies; interactional patterns within the family, peers, natural helpers and community; a system of norms, values and beliefs of the group, paying attention to those related to the particular problem under analysis. Gant (1996) uses the concept cultural sophistication to include the skill, knowledge and attitude that social workers should have to be culturally competent. Cultural sophistication in this context implies that students and social workers should have information about cultures; should know how people feel about culture and should be skilled to interact effectively with clients of other cultures. Advocates of cultural sophistication believe that exposure to cultural content results in more effective service delivery and a more comfortable agency climate.

The researcher’s view is that social work students should be exposed to cross-cultural content as part of their training. This will enable students to appreciate the fact that people in different cultures are guided by different views of the world and reality. World-views, according to Ow (1991), influence how people think, make decisions, behave and define events. World-views could be considered to be significant factors in directing the

helping process in casework. One of the reasons for the dichotomy of world-views between the client and the professional helper is the difference in their stock of knowledge. The researcher concedes that, though the professional helper cannot completely “enter” the different world-views of clients, it is important that the helper should have basic information about clients and the notion of world-views and their effect on clients. An understanding of world-views is an important guide to understanding the nature of the individual’s psychological outlook and problem-solving approach. The researcher’s view is that social work departments should consider incorporating the cross-cultural training approaches suggested by Gudykunst, Hammer and Wiseman (1977:99-102) as part of the social work curricula. Gudykunst *et al.* (1977) suggest the following: the intellectual approach which emphasises the cognitive understanding of different cultures; the simulation approach which attempts to create an environment that is as similar as possible to that of a target culture, using role-play as a method of instruction; the self-awareness approach which assumes that the student’s understanding of him-/herself will lead to an ability to adjust in another culture; the cultural awareness approach which provides students with general information about culture and exposure to people of other cultures; and the behavioural approach, which emphasises that students should learn the skills necessary to behave properly in another culture.

### 6.6.3 Exposure to clients from different cultural groups in social work

The responses of the respondents are presented in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4 Exposure to clients from different cultural groups in social work training**

RESPONDENTS	YES	NO	GENERAL REMARKS
A	I was exposed to the Venda and the Shangaan cultural groups. Dealt with differences through learning their languages and also through establishing rapport with clients.		Shows the importance of rapport and the language skills in the helping process
B	Yes, a mixture of different ethnic groups but all Black. These were Pedi and Sotho. Cultural differences between Africans are not big or significant.		Black social work students are more exposed to different cultures than whites. The issue is that it does not happen by design and consciously.
C	Yes, exposed to Venda, Sotho and Zulu clients. Venda clients are not open about their problems. I coped by learning Sotho and Venda languages on my own.		This points to the need for social workers to be willing to learn the languages that clients speak.
D	Yes, at Weskoppies I was exposed to different cultural groups, including whites. Language was a challenge. Could not speak Zulu and could not assist Zulu speaking clients. Colleagues assisted me with interpretation and I also referred clients to colleagues.		The significance of learning the languages that clients speak is again highlighted here.
E	Ja, Northern Sothos. I had problems with the language, I was still learning it. I could hear here and there. I could not deal with idioms and proverbs. You have to be fluent in the language of the person you are helping.		Language creates a barrier between you and the person you are helping. Idioms and proverbs complicate the language issue further. This issue comes up even when black people are helping each other.
F		Not really, I did see some colored clients at some point but by and large, I did not have exposure to different cultural groups.	Since 1994, the clients became multicultural ahead of social work training programmes. Social work training has to be aligned to the present client profile.
G		Never, I went to a white university and the clients I saw at that stage were white.	The impact of ethnically and racially divided educational system on the profession.
H		No, I only dealt with white clients. It was the spirit of the times.	Same as above.
I		No. exposure to African clients, I only had one Chinese client.	Same as above.
J		No exposure to other cultural groups.	Same comment as above.

The analysis of data to determine whether respondents were exposed to clients from different cultural groups in their training yielded the following (see Table 6.4). Five out of ten respondents (50%) were exposed to clients from different cultural groups; these were mainly black respondents (A to E). This is what some of the respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent A said, *"I was exposed to Venda and Shangaan cultural groups; I dealt with differences through learning their languages and also through establishing rapport with clients."* Respondent B said, *"Yes mixtures of different ethnic groups, but all black ... cultural differences between Africans are not big or significant."* Respondent D said, *"Yes at Weskoppies, ..., I could not speak Zulu and could not assist Zulu speaking clients, colleagues assisted me with interpretation and I also referred clients to colleagues."* Respondents A to E (black respondents) had cross-cultural exposure during their training, but they were exposed to different cultural groups within the Black racial/ethnic groups. Most of the respondents who had clients from different cultural groups coped by learning the clients' languages, getting support from colleagues and by making use of interpreters. The researcher wants to point out that even though black respondents were exposed to clients from different ethnic groups in their training, this exposure was not deliberate and intentional on the part of the training.

White respondents (F to J) were not exposed to clients from different cultural groups in their training. This is what some of the white respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent G said, *"Never, I went to a white university and the clients I saw at that stage were white."* Respondent H said, *"I only dealt with white clients; it was the spirit of the times."* Respondent I said, *"No exposure to African clients, I only had one Chinese client."* The challenges encountered by those respondents who were exposed to clients from different cultural groups were language and cultural differences. Respondents who did not have clients from different cultural groups did not have to deal with these challenges when they were students; they met and had to deal with them in the field of professional practice. This explains why white social workers struggle with African culture and African languages in practice – they were "protected" from these challenges when they were students. For example, respondent G indicated that *"...I went to a White University, and the clients I saw at that stage were White."* This also explains why black

social workers struggle when they have to interview a White or Coloured Afrikaans-speaking client: they were not exposed to the Afrikaans culture, clients and language.

What the responses indicate is that white social work students mostly were not exposed to situations where they handled clients from different cultural groups. Their training was therefore not true to the real practice situation into which they graduated. Black social work students did have some exposure to different ethnic and cultural groups within the black community. White social workers had problems working effectively with black clients because of the inadequate exposure they had as students; they mostly had same race and same culture clientele population during their training. Oliphant and Faull (1999) suggest that cultural understanding should be a very important part of training. Social work students should be exposed to people of different cultures, not only on a knowledge level but also on an understanding and insight level.

The researcher is aware of the attitude towards the language issue that is prevalent in some agencies that assist with the fieldwork of students; they prefer to have students who speak the same language as their clientele population for internships. This robs the students of the opportunity to learn the language spoken by clients and to appreciate the importance of learning the clients' languages. Agencies should be persuaded to assist students to overcome, among other things, the language and cultural barriers. The researcher's view, as indicated in the previous section, again is that social work departments should adjust social work curricula to incorporate the cross-cultural training approaches suggested by Gudykunst *et al.* (1977:99-102), namely the intellectual approach emphasising the cognitive understanding of different cultures; the simulation approach which attempts to create an environment that is as similar as possible to that of a target culture while using role-play as a method of instruction; the self-awareness approach through which the student's understanding of him/herself could lead to an ability to adjust in a different culture; the cultural awareness approach; and the behavioural approach to teach students the skills necessary to behave properly in another culture.

### 6.6.4 Exposure to clients of other racial groups

The findings on respondents' exposure to other racial groups are presented in Table 6.5.

**Table 6.5 Exposure to clients of other racial groups**

RESPONDENTS	YES	NO	GENERAL REMARKS
A	I had white Afrikaans speaking clients. I dealt with racial difference by accepting clients and also by learning their language Afrikaans from scratch.		This respondent learnt Afrikaans and Venda on her own in the process of being trained as a social worker when she realised that she would not be able to cope without language ability.
B		I did not have clients of other racial groups.	At the time, the respondent did not think it was an issue to worry about.
C		No. Even up this day in my professional practice, I have never worked with clients from other races.	Respondent regards this as a shortcoming in her training. Workshops can provide some of the skills for some of the social workers in this category.
D	Yes at Weskoppies most whites were negative. Colleagues were supportive; I had to be patient. There are times when I wanted to hit back at racism, but I contained myself. I did confront some of the racism by white clients. White clients are more open about their problems than black clients.		Some white clients are racist at first, but later they begin to cooperate with African social workers. This is one of the challenges African social workers have to deal with.
E		I only saw Black clients. I was not exposed to other racial groups.	This shows a need for continuing professional growth through workshops to address issues which were previously not attended to in training.
F		I always worked at institutions where they only handled white clients.	
G		No, it was all white clients.	
H		No.	
I	One Chinese client. Otherwise all my clients were white. With the Chinese client we both struggled with English	.	English does not necessarily cater for all clients in South Africa, though it is the language of business.
J		No. I only had white clients.	

The analysis of data in Table 6.5 to determine whether respondents, during their practicals, had clients of other racial groups yielded the following: Training did not prepare students to work with clients from racial groups other their own. Three (30%) out of ten respondents had clients from other racial groups. Respondents (A, D and I) who had clients form other racial had this to say: Respondent A said, *"I had White Afrikaans speaking clients; I dealt with racial differences by accepting clients and also by learning their language ... from scratch."* Respondent D said, *"Yes at a psychiatric hospital, most Whites clients were negative, colleagues were supportive. I had to be patient. There were times when I wanted to hit back at racism but I contained myself. I did confront some of the racism by white clients. White clients are more open about problems than black clients."* Of the five white social workers in this study; only respondent I had a client from another racial group (Chinese). Respondent I said, *"One Chinese client. Otherwise all my clients were White. With the Chinese client, we both struggled with English."* Respondents A, D and I had clients from different racial groups by happenstance: there was no intention on the part of their training programme to consciously place them in agencies that would let them have the cross-racial experience.

Of the five black social workers in this study, two (respondents A and D) had clients from other racial groups (white) during their practical work training. Black respondents B, C and E did not have clients from other racial groups. White respondents F to J did not have clients from other racial groups during their training. This is what some of the respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent C: *"No. Even up to this day in my professional practice, I have never worked with clients from other races."* Respondent F: *"I have worked at institutions where they only handled white clients."*

The lack of cross-racial exposure of social work students during their training robs students of the opportunity to deal with racial dynamics in social work practice in time. Students end up confronting racial dynamics, racial tensions and racial conflicts in the field as qualified professionals when they are supposed to have had these experiences

during training. Modisane (1999) points out that one of the challenges facing social work here in South Africa today is preparing social work students for practice in a diverse society where the struggle against discrimination, racism, and multiculturalism exists. Students are directly or indirectly threatened by the reality of race and bring into the classroom fears and anxieties associated with it. Though dealing with issues of race may be a painful process, an experiential approach may be necessary to assist students to confront their assumptions, beliefs and myths about racial differences. Most of the respondents only dealt with clients from other racial groups when they entered practice. It is only in practice that most of the social workers interviewed began to deal with racial attitude problems, in particular the negative attitudes that white clients are reported elsewhere in this study to have towards black social workers.

Pacheo *et al.* (2003:56) state that racism in social service provision might at times be unintentional and one way of reducing it is the development of multicultural competence training. Razack (1999), quoted by Pacheo *et al.* (2003) found that race was a central topic in the discussions of students participating in an anti-oppressive course for multicultural social work. This was a topic that created the highest level and intensity of feelings like guilt, fear, anxiety and anger in students' discussions, compared to other sensitive issues such as gender, disability and age. Due to the importance of eliminating racism and other forms of discrimination in social work practice, any training programme in social work must deal with these issues, to encourage future social workers to examine and change their biases and prejudice in order to avoid racism in social work practice.

Students need to be introduced to clients whose race is different from theirs to be made aware of differences and the most appropriate ways of dealing with racial differences without compromising professional standards. For training to be effective, it must endeavour to expose students to the languages of different cultures and races that mirror as closely as possible the realities of the profession in the field. Training programmes must show that social work practice in South Africa has become multiracial.

### 6.6.5 Language differences between clients and students

The findings on language differences between clients and students are presented in Table 6.6.

**Table 6.6: Language differences with clients in practice education**

RESPONDENTS	YES	NO	GENERAL REMARKS
A	I had to learn Venda and Afrikaans languages. I learned Venda when I was a student in my first year and Afrikaans during my placement at third and fourth year at the agency. I did not learn these languages formally, I did it on my own after realizing the need.		If students are mixed in terms of culture and languages, they can learn from each other. If they are placed for practicals within a particular language community they learn the language.
B	Yes, I had to learn Sotho when I was a student, I failed Sotho speaking clients when I was a student because I did not speak or understand their language. I did not use the interpreter though.		If the worker does not speak the language of the clients, services rendered to the client are compromised, particularly therapy and counselling services.
C	When I started with Venda clients, I had language problem. I had to learn Venda very fast. Now I am fluent and I no longer have problems with Venda clients.		It is imperative for workers to consciously undertake to learn at least the basics of the languages spoken by clients.
D	I had Sotho Zulu and Afrikaans speaking clients. I could speak a little bit of Zulu. I relied on colleagues and my supervisor who could speak these languages. I also referred clients to colleagues, until I could speak these languages.		Universities and agencies should encourage students and professionals to learn languages that clients speak.
E	Yes I had Sotho speaking clients, it is frustrating if one does not know the clients language and dialect. I had to learn Sotho when I was a student, informally through social interaction.		African languages should be part of the required courses for social work students. At least an introductory course.
F		When I was a student, no all my clients were Afrikaans speaking.	
G	Yes some clients were English speaking and I speak Afrikaans. All my education was in Afrikaans up to university. I learnt English when I started to work. At that stage English was a problem.		Black and White social workers experience language barriers with their clients. The language differences are both ethnic and race-based.
H		No because they were mostly white Afrikaans speaking they also understood English.	
I		No except with the one Chinese client. Otherwise clients spoke English and Afrikaans.	Cannot learn Chinese for rare clients.
J		No, I did not have language barrier at that stage.	Same race same language clients.

As shown in Table 6.6, six respondents out of ten (60%) experienced a language barrier with their clients when they were students during fieldwork placements. The language differences that African respondents (A to E) had were based on ethnic differences with their clients. To deal with these language differences, respondents learned the different languages, mostly informally through social interaction with fellow students. In some instances, supervisors and colleagues assisted them. Some of the respondents referred clients to colleagues until they could learn the language. This is what some of the respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent A: *"I had to learn Venda and Afrikaans languages. I learned Venda when I was a student in my first year of studies and Afrikaans during my placement at third and fourth year at the agency. I did not learn these languages formally, I did it on my own after realizing the need."* Respondent B: *"I had to learn Sotho when I was student; I failed Sotho speaking clients when I was a student because I did not speak or understand their language, ... I did not use the interpreter though."* Respondent E: *"[I]t is frustrating if one does not know the clients['] language and dialect. I had to learn Sotho when I was a student, informally through social interaction."*

Respondents F, H, I and J did not experience a language barrier with their clients during fieldwork placements, largely because they were placed with agencies that served clients who spoke the same language as the respondents. Respondent F, for example, stated that, *"When I was a student, all my clients were Afrikaans speaking."* Respondent G said, *"Yes some clients were English speaking and I speak Afrikaans. All my education was in Afrikaans up to university. At that stage English was a problem. I learned English when I started to work."* By only dealing with clients who spoke Afrikaans, this respondent delayed having to deal with what was going to be a problem in practice. Students are supposed to be exposed to languages at the time when they are being trained instead of being exposed at the time when they are expected to deliver a professional service to clients after graduating. Respondent G is the only white respondent who had language problems with white clients who spoke English when she only knew Afrikaans. Respondent I had a language difference with only one client, a

Chinese client. She said, *“One Chinese client, otherwise all my clients were white. With the Chinese client, we both struggled with English.”* White respondents (F, H, I and J) in this study did not have language differences with their clients during fieldwork placements.

Black respondents addressed the problems related to language differences while they were still undergoing training because they interacted with different language communities during training. All black respondents learned different African languages informally, mainly through social interaction with different African language speakers. The only language that black respondents did not get to know during training was Afrikaans, as they did not get the opportunity to interact with Afrikaans-speaking clients on a regular basis then. White respondents only encountered the reality of African language problems when they entered practice and found they had to provide professional services to other language groups, particularly to Africans. Black respondents encountered language problems for the first time when they had to interview Afrikaans-speaking clients in the field.

The researcher must point out that, though black respondents learned to speak the African languages spoken by clients from different ethnic groups, there was no conscious intention on the part of the training programmes to ensure that students learned to speak some of the different languages spoken by clients. The challenge for universities therefore is to consciously and intentionally make it a requirement that students should at least speak some of the languages spoken by clients, particularly African languages, before they graduate into practice. The challenge for white social work students is to learn African languages. The challenge for black social work students is to learn the Afrikaans language.

Social work departments at universities can facilitate cross-cultural exposure and language acquisition by students by diversifying their social work student intake, admitting students from various cultural and language groups so that students can learn to cope with cultural and language diversity during training. Social welfare agencies that

assist universities with students' internships should also be willing to accept students who are not conversant with the languages that their clients speak. Without the co-operation of agencies, social work students will not be able to get the necessary exposure to the languages and cultures of the clients.

Social work students cannot continue to refer clients to colleagues because of language issues during fieldwork placements, without making an effort to learn the major languages spoken by clients. Social work students cannot continue to use interpreters whenever they deal with clients with whom they do not share a language. It is possible to learn a language when one has to; there are examples of some of the respondents who learned languages for the first time during their social work training, such as respondent A whose first language is Pedi, but who learned the Afrikaans and Venda languages informally at the university. The problems that arise when interpreters are required are that the principle of confidentiality is compromised in the process and that the caseworker cannot accurately observe the non-verbal communication that accompanies the presentation of the presenting problem by the client. Respondent B in this regard said, *"...I failed Sotho speaking clients when I was a student because I did not speak or understand their language; I did not use an interpreter though."* In Table 6.6 respondent E is shown to have been aware of the importance of knowing the clients' languages in having said, *"...I could not deal with the idioms and proverbs. You have to be fluent in the language of the person you are helping"*. Language creates a barrier between the caseworker and the client. Idioms and proverbs complicate the language problems even further. There is a need for social work students to be willing to learn the languages that clients speak.

#### **6.6.6 Recommendation about content in training programmes**

The findings with regard to recommendations for content to be included in training programmes are presented in Table 6.7.

**Table 6.7: Content recommended for inclusion in the training programme of social work students to ensure cultural competence in social work trainees**

RESPONDENTS	PROGRAMME CONTENT	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Exposure to different cultures, different ethnic groups, and languages spoken by clients.	Need for on the job training for workers who are already in the field with regard to these issues. They did not have this exposure when they were students.
B	Cultural diversity, languages, placements should expose student to different cultural, racial and language groups.	Placements should be multicultural and multiracial, to promote cross-cultural social work practice.
C	Courses on race, ethnicity and African languages.	
D	Course on cultural sensitivity, black and white cultural patterns. Knowledge about cultures and races. Cross-cultural and cross racial competencies should be in the syllabi of social work students.	Cross-racial and cross-cultural competencies are important.
E	Course on race, culture and diversity is required. Training should be adapted to the African environment in general and South African environment in particular.	Need for indigenisation of social work to fit the local conditions.
F	Exposure to all races, cultures and ethnic groups.	There are differences among Black ethnic groups and also among Whites; people are not the same. Fieldwork in social work training has to be multicultural and multiracial.
G	Different cultures and aspects within cultures such as time, food, religion, eye contact.	Knowledge of specific issues within cultures is important, particularly issues that have to do with elements of the world-view of clients.
H	Culture of the people, African languages	
I	African culture and traditions, religion. A course on race and ethnicity.	
J	Cultural issues and language. Language is a big barrier between social workers and clients.	All respondents emphasised the importance of culture, race, ethnicity and language as crucial programme content for future social workers.

Table 6.7 reflects what some respondents had to say with regard to the training programme content: Respondent A: *“Students should be exposed to different cultures, different ethnic groups and languages spoken by clients.”* Respondent B: *“Cultural diversity modules, languages and placements should expose students to different cultural, racial and language groups.”* Respondent C: *“There should be courses on race, ethnicity and African languages.”* Respondent D: *“Courses on cultural sensitivity covering black and white cultural patterns. Cross-cultural and-cross racial competencies should be in the syllabi of social work students.”* Respondent E: *“Training should be adapted to the African environment in general and [S]outh African environment in particular.”* Respondent G: *“Different cultures should be taught and the aspects within cultures such as the sense of time, religion, food, the appropriate use [of] eye contact.”* Respondent J: *“A cultural issue such as language, language is a big barrier between social workers and clients.”* All respondents were unanimous about the importance of cultural issues and in believing that these issues should be incorporated in the training programme of social work students to ensure cultural competence for social work students.

The content of the training programme should be derived from the training needs perceived by practitioners who have the working experience. Professional social workers could be viewed as the key informants for curriculum development, as they know the skills and knowledge they need in order to provide quality service. The training programmes should include exposure to different cultures, ethnic groups and different languages spoken by clients. Social work students should be exposed to different racial groups. A course on race and ethnicity, cross-racial and cross-cultural competencies has to be taught.

Fieldwork programmes in social work training are ideal for exposing social work students to the notion of cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. Conscious efforts must be made by universities to place students in agencies that will give them experiences that will be true to professional practice scenarios after graduation when they do their internships. In short, social work students must be exposed both theoretically and practically to a

variety of clients, races, cultures and languages. This will ensure multicultural and multiracial competence for social work graduates. Pacheo *et al.* (2003:58) suggest the areas of knowledge to be incorporated into the core curriculum. They include the following: culture of the clients (history, traditions, values, beliefs, family systems, folklore and artistic expressions), impact of ethnicity on behaviour, attitudes, values; and the help-seeking behaviours and clients' definition of problems, so that the social worker can use labels, words and concepts that are familiar and acceptable. Other areas are: the role of language and communication styles; the impact of social service policies on cultural and ethnic groups, resources provided by natural networks, including the family, peers, friends, neighbours, and community groups; the possible conflict between professional values and interests and the needs of service users; and the power relations in the community, agencies or institutions and their impact on these populations. The cross-cultural competent practitioner must hone skills premised on these areas of knowledge.

Social work as a discipline should not rely on supporting courses to provide the modules mentioned above by the respondents and literature reviewed in this study. Efforts should be made for social work training programmes to provide courses on race, ethnicity and cultural diversity in-house, rather than relying on the supporting courses. In the researcher's view, the cognate departments that provide supporting courses to the social work training programme, though helpful, are not designed for social work *per se*. Their mission remains that of producing graduates in their respective fields of expertise. For example, the psychology department will always aim to produce a psychologist; a sociology department will always aim at producing a sociologist. These departments are not bound to tailor their offerings to suit the needs of social work training programmes. The idea of a school of social work is therefore more appealing, where supporting courses will be dedicated to fit social work training needs and will be offered by faculty within the school of social work.

Based on the analysis of data shown in Table 6.7 to determine cultural sensitivity content in social work training, the respondents pointed out that training was deficient in

that it did not expose them to content on race, ethnicity and culture. Social work training also did not expose respondents to clients from different language, racial, cultural and ethnic groups. Those respondents who had clients from different language, racial, ethnic and cultural groups had them per happenstance; otherwise there was not intention on the part of the training programme for this kind of exposure. During practicals, respondents mostly dealt with clients who shared culture, race and language with the respondent. This resulted in respondents experiencing problems when they entered casework practice and found that they had to demonstrate competence in dealing with cultural, racial, ethnic and language dynamics for service delivery. Training therefore did not equip respondents well for cross-cultural practice in the setting obtaining in South Africa at present. Respondents pointed out that social work training programmes should in future include content on different cultures, languages and races. They also pointed out that social work students should be exposed to clients from different cultural, ethnic, racial and language groups as part of their fieldwork training.

## **6.7 PERSONAL CULTURAL COMPETENCE**

This section deals with questions that are related to the respondents' personal cultural competence. It aims to assess knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner. African here refers to the contemporary classification of Black South African people as opposed to South Africans of European descent. The following questions were put to respondents in this regard:

- What knowledge should a helping professional bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner?
- What skills should a helping professional bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner?
- What attitudes should a helping professional bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner?
- What cultural issues have you encountered in working with African clients?
- What do you do to ensure that you are able to accommodate clients' cultural views in the helping process?
- How would you rate your knowledge of African culture? Explain.

Tables 6.8 to 6.13 present data based on the above questions.

### 6.7.1 Knowledge needed by a caseworker to be culturally competent

Findings regarding knowledge needed by a caseworker to be culturally competent are presented in Table 6.8.

**Table 6.8 Knowledge a caseworker should bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner**

RESPONDENTS		GENERAL REMARKS
A	Knowledge of cultural diversity, beliefs and norms.	Some social workers cannot differentiate between skills, knowledge and attitudes; their responses to these questions overlap.
B	Culture and the notion of diversity.	
C	Knowledge of African customs and traditions. A headman would not allow me to sit on a chair in one village. Someone brought me the mat to sit on as a sign of respect to the headman.	This knowledge is also pertinent in situations where one has to do a home visit. Workers must know how to show respect.
D	African culture, know about the culture rituals and beliefs of the people where you are working. You might assist people against their culture if you are not familiar with their way of doing things.	
E	Knowledge that decision making is not in the hands of an individual. Many people are involved, decisions are communal. Many people have to be listened to in the family, and the concept of family is that of an extended family.	
F	Knowledge and respect of the client's culture and beliefs even if these differ from your own beliefs. I cannot impose my beliefs on my clients.	The role of acceptance is pointed out here.
G	Knowledge of their situation, where they live. They cannot be clean if there is no running water where they live. Most white social workers were not exposed to rural conditions, they do not understand it. The rural focus is important because that is where our clients are.	Social workers have to understand both the urban and rural situations from where clients come. The tendency is to have an urban bias when it comes to understanding and the distribution of resources.
H	Know how clients live, how they see things. Some Blacks are more western nowadays and others are still culture bound. It is difficult for them because they do not know where they stand. Black students have more problems in training because textbooks are mostly from overseas. They have a bigger problem to apply the knowledge than us; for us it is almost as if the books are from home.	It is important to realise that not all Blacks adhere to African culture to the same degree; some uphold both African and Western culture at the same time. They are guided by both Africa and the West.
I	Knowledge of traditional issues, such as marriage relationships, addressing people, the body language that shows respect for the elders, burial issues and the role of family members.	This shows the importance of understanding the elements of the African world-view on the part of the caseworker.
J	Knowledge about the different cultures, beliefs and the languages that clients speak.	

The analysis of data shown in Table 6.8 to determine the knowledge that the caseworker should bring to working with clients yielded the following: On the whole,

respondents indicated that caseworkers should know the various aspects of African culture in order to work with African clients in a culturally competent manner. This is what some respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent A said that a caseworker should have “[k]nowledge of cultural diversity, beliefs and norms”. Respondent C said a caseworker must have “... knowledge about African customs and traditions. A headman would not allow me to sit on a chair in one village. Someone brought me the mat to sit on as sign of respect to the headman.” This knowledge is pertinent in situations where one has to do a home visit; one must know how to show respect. This also means that one's power in doing home visits is not the same as when one is in the office. In the office you determine or at least influence the sitting arrangement, in the home visit situation the client will show the worker where to sit. Respondent D said a caseworker should know “African culture, know about the rituals and beliefs of the people where you are working. You might assist people against their culture if you are not familiar with their way of doing things.”

According to Williams *et al.* (1996), practitioners maintain that interventions are effective only when clients are encouraged to become responsible in ways that are culturally relevant and when their behaviours are culturally congruent. Social workers need to educate themselves about the historical traditions, beliefs and behavioural norms of the community being served and to determine the client's degree of assimilation into the dominant culture. Social work and social casework intervention must be harmonious with the client's environment and the degree of acculturation. Siegel (1994) points out that different cultures have distinct patterns of family structure, child-rearing and help-seeking behaviour. Cultural differences that occur between worker and client in these areas interfere with effective delivery of services. In the researcher's view, there will always be social workers who will have cultural differences with clients, but it is professionally incumbent upon the social worker to understand the clients' cultural background, and its implications for practice. The challenge for social workers is to separate those aspects of the profession that are culturally appropriate from those that are culturally inappropriate. Social work in South Africa requires practitioners who can see clients with two eyes, so to speak, one Western and one African.

Respondent E said caseworkers must have “[k]nowledge that decision making is not in the hands of an individual, many people are involved since decisions are communal. Many people have to be listened to in the family, and the concept of a family is that of an extended family”. The view of the researcher is that social workers have to know the implications of communalism among Africans for the purposes of practice. The concepts of client self-determination and individualisation might be of limited use because African clients by their cultural nature are not individualistic and also believe strongly in the notion that a person is a person through others. The collective is more important than the individual self, therefore self-determination might be contrary to the way Africans view and live their lives. Daniels (2001: 304) states that, in the African setting, the concept of group collective action is used to find solutions to problems. According to Mbiti (1990), confidentiality and self-determination are not viable concepts to use. The individual can only say, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man” (Mbiti 1990:106). Oduaran (1996:31) states that, consistent with African culture, Africans believe that the welfare of each human person is connected inextricably with that of each family or kinship group and of each local community and of the broader national community. It is therefore not only decisions that are communal but a significant part of an African's life is communal.

Respondent G said that “[m]ost White social workers were not exposed to rural conditions, they do not understand it. The rural focus is important because that is where our clients come from”. The researcher's view in this regard is that even African social workers prefer to work in urban areas, where they can access other facilities for themselves and their families, such as improved educational and economic opportunities. There is a sense in which human resources in health and social services are biased in favour of urban centres. There is a need for social workers to be encouraged to serve rural populations, through the introduction of viable incentive schemes for social workers stationed in rural areas. The observation by respondent G, that most of the clients come from the rural areas, is supported by statistics that show

that the majority of Africans live in rural areas. There is therefore a need for the ruralisation of social service personnel, to curb the existing urban bias.

Respondent H said that “[s]ome blacks are more western nowadays and others are still culture bound. It is difficult for them to know where they stand”. Social workers should also realise that not all black clients uphold African culture to the same degree. Some practise both African and Western culture at the same time. Some black people are Christians but they still strongly pursue indigenous religious practices. They are simultaneously guided by African traditions and Western values. There are also Africans who are very culture bound. The behaviour of African clients that social workers have to be aware of is that it ranges from those who firmly uphold African traditions and customs to those that have adopted a Western way of life. In the middle of these extremities are those that are torn between Africa and the West. Mungazi (1996: 63) states that the Portuguese in Lusophone Africa have divided the Africans into socioeconomic and political groups, the *assimilados* and the *indigenas*. The *assimilados* were expected to discard their cultural background and heritage, including language and lifestyle, and adopt that of the Portuguese. The *indigenas* were those uneducated Africans who had no rights at all; they formed the bulk of the labour force.

In the researcher’s view, the situation of the *assimilados* and the *indigenas* is comparable to the situation of all the Africans who have a history of colonisation. These Africans invariably find themselves in the situation of being torn between their own indigenous cultures and the dominant cultures of the colonising nations. In South Africa, for instance, there are some Africans who have assimilated Western culture and some who have retained indigenous African culture. There are still others who are in between cultures. Social workers must respect this diversity within African culture. In the words of respondent F, caseworkers must have “*knowledge and respect for the clients’ culture, and beliefs even if it differs from [one’s] own beliefs... .*”

### **6.7.2 Skills needed by a caseworker for cultural competence**

The findings concerning skills for cultural competence in casework practice are presented in Table 6.9.

**Table 6.9 Skills that a professional caseworker should bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner**

RESPONDENTS	SKILLS	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Language skills, relationship skills, communication skills, listening skills, probing skills, i.e. skills to dig for information.	Probing skills are mentioned repeatedly by respondents, particularly the ones that work with black clients, since black clients are mostly not open about their problems.
B	Analytical skills to understand the client's environment. Observation of mannerisms is necessary, as some of the communication is non-verbal. Language skills are important, particularly because there are a lot of proverbs in African languages.	Verbal and non-verbal communication skills are important.
C	Interviewing skills, skills in probing with African clients are crucial, particularly Venda clients.	Probing skills and the secretive nature of African clients.
D	Understanding and empathy and diagnostic skills are important.	
E	The use of probes is important with African clients. You really have to dig deeper to find out what the problem is about. Skills in adjusting to the client's choice of words and terminologies that they are using. All this points to the importance of language skills that the worker should have.	Language skills and probes are mentioned consistently by respondents.
F	Acceptance is the skill that I bring to this situation.	Acceptance is not a skill, it is a principle. This shows lack of theoretical understanding on the part of some social workers.
G	There is no difference in skills, they are the same regardless of color and culture.	This is an example of those social workers who have a colour- and culture-blind approach to social work practice.
H	Language skills would be necessary, particularly skills to decipher indirect language. Africans use indirect language because some of the things are taboo to talk about directly. You must know that Africans will not just say yes or no, one must read in between the lines to find answers to questions.	Africans are not direct in their communication; the worker should realise this and find a way of reading between the lines when communicating with African clients. They must look for meanings of idioms, proverbs and dialects when interacting with African clients.
I	One needs language skills, older African[s] know Afrikaans but most of the clients do not know it. Sometimes I use [a] translator, it is difficult if things go through the third person. How do you explain emotions in another language? Clients are reluctant to see you because they cannot speak English or Afrikaans. Patience is very important in cases where one does not understand. One also needs listening skills to be competent.	Language problems, particularly in counselling, will occur if the worker and the clients do not share a language. Universities must find a way around this problem of language or individual social workers must take it upon themselves to learn the languages that are used by their clients. Some white workers have learned an African language while some black social workers have learned Afrikaans on their own.
J	Language skills are important. I use an interpreter or somebody else. It is difficult to get to the depth of a problem if you do not have language skills. I do not understand Venda and Sotho clients because we do not share a language. Probing skills particularly with African clients are important, they are not open and direct when they speak.	Social workers can begin where the client is effectively when they can communicate in the language of the client. They also need to understand the indirect manner in which Africans communicate; it needs a lot of probing on the part of the social worker.

Analysis of the data in Table 6.9 shows that six out of ten respondents singled out the importance of language and probing skills in working with African clients (see respondents A, B, E, H, I and J in Table 6.9). Other skills that were identified by respondents are relationship skills, communication skills, listening skills and probing skills. This is what was said: Respondent B said, *“Language skills are important particularly because there are a lot of proverbs in African languages.”* Respondent C said, *“Interviewing skills, skills in probing with African clients are crucial, particularly Venda clients.”* Respondent E said, *“Lack of language skills on the part of the worker creates situations where interpreters have to be used and also leads to a lot of referrals by workers who cannot speak the clients’ languages.”* Respondent E continued to say that *“... the use of probes is important with African clients, you really have to dig deeper to find out what the problem is about. Skills in adjusting to the clients’ choice of words and terminologies that they are using. All this indicates the importance of language skills that the worker should have”*.

In emphasising the importance of language and communication skills in a clinical situation, Drennan (1998) (<http://www.hst.org.za/research/conf98/sess5htm>), as mentioned previously, has mentioned the difficulty, even in medicine, despite physical signs and symptoms, of functioning effectively without adequate communication between the doctor and the patient. In instances where the professionals cannot talk to patients, the patients' condition deteriorates. Without adequate communication, patients cannot be assured that they will be adequately assisted. “If one is treating a patient with whom one cannot communicate ... one is violating the patient in a way... ,” is what a doctor working at Valkenberg Hospital in Cape Town has said after participating in a project to provide interpreters to under-resourced state services. His sense of relief about 'patients ... no longer [being] exposed to the abuses of an era when they would be interviewed with a cleaner interpreting or even worse, a psychotic fellow patient.' was evident. A language barrier between the social worker and clients is a strong barrier to the utilisation of social work services by the clientele population.

It is important for social workers to share a language with the clients that they are serving; in situations where an interpreter is used, the values of the profession must not be compromised, particularly confidentiality. Graham and Al-Krenawi (2003) suggest making use of cultural brokers or consultants who are acculturated in a particular culture, as well as in the mainstream culture and are able to straddle both cultures to function as language and cultural bridges. When an interpreter has to be involved in the professional interview situation, both the social worker and the interpreter must subscribe to the requirement to abide by the principles of the casework relationship. In the researcher's view the ideal situation is that the professional social worker should learn the clients' languages to avoid remaining reliant on an interpreter. The disadvantage of using an interpreter was articulated by respondent J, who said, *"Language skills are important. I use an interpreter or somebody else. It is difficult to get to the depth of a problem if you do not have language skills."* Respondent I also focused on this: *"One needs language skills, older Africans know Afrikaans, but most of the clients do not know it. Sometimes I use a translator; it is difficult if things go through the third person. How do you explain emotions in another language? Clients are reluctant to see you because they cannot speak English or Afrikaans."*

Other than language skills, respondents also mentioned the importance of probing skills in dealing with African clients. Respondent J said, *"Probing skills particularly with African clients are important; Africans are not open and direct when they speak."* The importance of probing skills was also alluded to by respondents A, B, and E. Respondent H indirectly alluded to the same notion when she indicated that *"[I]language skills would be necessary, particularly skills to decipher indirect language. Africans use indirect language because some of the things are taboo to talk about directly. You must know the Africans will not just say yes or no, one must read between the lines to find answers to questions"*. Van der Walt (1997:2) confirms this in pointing out that *"...Africans talk round and round the point. Westerners are very direct even if it may result in conflict. Africans regard this as being insensitive and rude."* The direct manner of approach may cause uneasiness among African clients.

As indicated by the respondents, probing apparently is not as important when one is dealing with white clients. Respondents have indicated that Whites are more open and direct about their problems, even personal problems, once the relationship between the client and the worker has been established. But probing skills are mentioned repeatedly by respondents, particularly those who serve African clients, since African clients are much less inclined to be open about their personal problems.

Respondent G represents the cadre of social workers who believe that one can practice social work without taking into account cultural nuances in the process. This is the culture-blind approach to social work practice, whereby some practitioners deny the influence of culture in social work practice. This is what respondent G had to say in this regard: *"There is no difference in skills; they are the same regardless of color and culture."* The view that clients are the same or that they have to be approached in similar ways should be challenged because it runs contrary to studies that have shown that culture does play a role in the lives of clients and that, for social workers to be effective, they need to be culture competent. Torrey (1972) opines that people do not see things in the same way, how things are viewed is dependent on culture. Ideas, values, conceptions of time and the notion of cause and effect are culturally learned. The world is differently defined in different places.

### **6.7.3 Attitudes needed by a caseworker for cultural competent practice**

Findings concerning attitudes needed for culturally competent casework practice are presented in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10: Attitudes that a professional caseworker should bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner**

RESPONDENTS	ATTITUDES	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Caseworker must have a positive attitude towards clients, in order to establish a good relationship. One must be positive towards other cultures, respect cultural diversity.	Cultural diversity must be respected. Maintain positive attitude unconditionally towards clients, even when clients do not have a positive attitude towards the caseworker, as is the case with some white clients and black social workers.
B	The worker should not be judgmental. Should be openminded.	Non-judgmental attitude as one of the values of social work has universal applicability.
C	They need to accept and respect people for what they are.	Acceptance and respect have universal applicability.
D	The attitude [of] white colleagues towards African languages must change. Respect clients regardless of their race, culture[,] ethnicity and religion. Check our prejudices about people and their cultures.	Race relations between black and white persons whether they are professionals or clients must be examined. Ethnic relations between different ethnic groups should also be looked at closely.
E	One needs have an open mind, an appreciation of the clients' difficulties in the African context and the willingness to learn from clients.	Workers must accept the fact that clients are experts on their problems/they understand best the dynamics of their problems and how they want to be assisted.
F	One must be respectful, non-judgmental, accepting and kind towards clients. One must reach out and show willingness to help clients.	The underlying values of social work are universally applicable; they seem to transcend race and culture.
G	The social worker should have the same attitude towards clients, regardless of their race, ethnicity and culture. In all clients one must see a person talking to another person who happens to be a social worker.	This one example of the race-, culture- and ethnicity-blind approach to clients. This approach denies the impact of race, culture and ethnicity on the behaviour of clients.
H	You must have an attitude of wanting to help and to understand, even if it is difficult I must do my best. I do not have a problem of race, for me I see a person in a client not race. There might be differences in how they see things, it also happens with other white people.	This is more in line with the human-centric perspective of clients; clients essentially are human beings and must be viewed as such by social workers.
I	You have to be positive and open to other cultures. You must be open to changing the way you used to look at things. It is fellow social workers that have some racial attitude more than clients, clients need assistance.	The spontaneous behaviour of social workers in meetings that show that social workers are conscious of their racial difference. Particularly during tea breaks and lunch in these professional meetings, it just happens.
J	I do not know how a black client perceives me. I do not have problems on my side. I think social workers must be accepting all cultures. They must not impose their culture as if it is the right culture.	For one to accept other cultures, it is important to be comfortable with one's own culture.

As shown in Table 6.10, responses to this question about the caseworkers' attitudes and cultural competence attracted a wide variety of responses which range from principles of the casework relationship, professional values and inter-racial relations to responses that suggest the same treatment of clients regardless of race, ethnicity and culture. Respondents who suggested the importance of relationship principles and social work values in working with African clients in a culturally competent manner are the following: Respondent B: *"The worker must be non-judgmental and open minded."* Respondent C said, *"Worker must accept and respect people for what they are."* Respondent D said,

*“Respect clients regardless of their race, culture, ethnicity and religion.”* Respondent F said, *“One must be respectful, nonjudgmental, and kind towards clients.”* These responses indicate that social work principles and values are important in working with African clients in a culturally competent manner.

On the issue of inter-racial attitudes, this is what some of the respondents had to say: Respondent D: *“The attitudes by white colleagues towards African languages must change... .”* According to this respondent, white colleagues are reluctant to learn African languages. In the researcher’s view, this complicates the language issue even further, bearing in mind that the white respondents, even while they were students, got no exposure to African languages. They mostly did practicals with clients who spoke the same languages as they did. If they were not exposed to languages during training and are not willing to learn languages in practice, it might compromise the quality of service rendering to African clients. It would be unthinkable for them to want to rely on interpreters for the duration of their professional lives.

On the issue of interracial attitudes, Respondent I stated that *“[y]ou have to be positive and open to other cultures. You must be open to changing the way you used to look at things. It is fellow social workers that have ... racial attitudes more than clients, clients need assistance”*. This respondent suggested that professional social workers have to deal with issues of race among themselves as professionals. The researcher’s view is that doing this will go a long way towards paving the way for black and white social workers to share professional experiences and to learn from each other. The social work profession needs to speak with one voice, for itself and the clientele population that it purports to serve. Drower (1996:1) states that a spectrum of social work associations in South Africa have in the past and in the present continued to mirror the different value positions observable in the wider South African society. They do, however, acknowledge that a united profession would serve as a strong base from which to fight for a just and equitable non-discriminatory welfare system.

Drower (1996:9) further states that a good place for South African social workers to start making reparations is from within their own ranks, through understanding and accepting ownership of the historical and sociopolitical conditions that led to the fragmentation of the profession. Clearly this responsibility cannot be handed over to professional bodies or associations, but remains a responsibility of the individual practitioner. Only in this way will the wounds of apartheid within South African social work be healed. What this means is that black and white social workers must find each other professionally and strive towards developing a non-racial professional body as part of the process of becoming cross-culturally competent. In the spirit of non-racialism, the South African Black Social Workers Association should cease to be a body for black social workers.

Respondents G and H suggested that social workers should be neutral when dealing with clients. This is a view that does not recognise the importance of race and culture in clients and instead sees a person as devoid of race and culture. Respondent G indicated that *"[t]he social worker should have the same attitude towards clients regardless of their race, ethnicity and culture. In all clients one must see a person talking to another person who happens to be social worker."* Respondent H said, *"I do not have a problem with race, for me I see a person in a client not race..."* The researcher's view is that this is a culture-blind approach to social work practice, which denies the role played by race, language and culture in social work practice, and also in shaping the behaviour of clients. Hammond-Tooke (1972:10) subscribes to the idea that different cultures impose different ways of looking at the world on their members, and have "different ways of structuring the chaos of sense impressions that impinge on human consciousness". He believes that very little of human behaviour seems to be genetically derived, that the mind is "indeed a blank tablet inscribed by culture." The researcher's view therefore is that, for a professional worker to see a person as person devoid of culture and race is not realistic, particularly in the South African society which is both multiracial and multicultural.

In as far as personal cultural competence is concerned, the respondents had to comment on the following: knowledge, skills and attitudes. On the issue of knowledge,

respondents pointed out that the caseworkers had to know the various aspects of African culture, in order to avoid assisting clients against their culture. Half of the respondents, African ones, seemed to know something about African culture, and the other half did not know much about African culture. Respondents who were familiar with African culture did not have problems relating to the African cultural issues that clients brought, but they did have problems when they had to provide services to clients who were not Africans. Though African respondents were familiar with cultural issues presented by African clients, they did not seem to appreciate the need to integrate their cultural understanding to their professional casework practice framework. White respondents in this study had problems relating to cultural issues that African clients presented to them. Some respondents who were not familiar with African cultural issues responded to these by informing themselves with the help of colleagues; others decided that they were going to ignore culture and concentrate on the person and the problem mainly, but knowledge of the languages spoken by African clients is very important. Probing skills were identified as crucial in interviewing an African client, since African clients mostly use indirect forms of communication. There is a need for the profession to foreground the significance of cultural knowledge for social workers to promote professional effectiveness in cross-cultural clinical situations.

#### **6.7.4 Cultural issues encountered in working with African clients**

The responses of the respondents regarding cultural issues encountered in working with African clients are shown in Table 6.11.

**Table 6.11 Cultural issues encountered in working with African clients**

RES-PONDENTS	ISSUES ENCOUNTERED	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Venda people believe in witchcraft and also in ancestors. They will not leave their traditional ways, like the way they dress. They do not undermine their traditions.	Belief in witchcraft, ancestors and the traditional ways of life are elements of an African world-view.
B	Clients use idioms and proverbs that I do not understand at times; idioms might be used to avoid saying certain things directly that might be taboo. In Venda culture a young person is addressed as "inwi" an older person as "vhone" to show respect.	Ways of showing respect are culturally defined; use of plurals to refer to a single person to show respect. It might be prudent to learn from clients the meaning of idioms and proverbs when such clients use them.
C	Clients knock and come without me inviting them in. They come and sit down without me offering them a seat. They peep and you only see half the face. These things are annoying. Women clients lack decision making skills particularly in the absence of their husbands. Women are subservient to their husbands, headmen and other men in the community.	Culturally they have to sit down as a sign of respect before they can speak to the social worker. Worker uses western behavioural criteria to assess how Africans behave at the start of the worker-client encounter. The subservient role of women in decision making is indicated by this respondent
D	Patients would refuse necessary and urgent surgery believing that traditional doctors would cure their ailment. Doctors refer clients to me to convince them to agree to surgery, I always allow the patient to make the final decision.	Belief in witchcraft runs deep in the psyche of Africans. It is not the function of a social worker to counsel clients contrary to their beliefs. The worker can give clients information and allow them to make final decisions about their lives
E	When a child is born, there are rituals that have to be done; the marriage procedures that have to be followed such the payment of lobola; a significant number of African marriages are polygamous; the phenomenon of extra marital affairs in polygamous marriages; grief and bereavement; training did not prepare us adequately for some of these things.	Training did not prepare social workers to deal with some of these issues, especially polygamous families and marriage guidance. Polygamous marriages and family therapy. Polygamous marriage and extramarital affairs. Not the role of family support in instances of grief and bereavement.
F	Clients believe in witchcraft, one has to accept that in order to help clients. Some clients feel very strong about witchcraft; they attribute some problems in their lives to witchcraft or being bewitched by someone. Witchcraft is an issue.	Black people in this country generally believe in witchcraft.
G	Family has got a lot of input in the person's life and decisions. Decisions are mostly communal with African clients. White family notion is different from the black family notion; Caseworker needs to understand these differences.	The communal way of living of Africans delays decision-making processes through clients having to consult other family members. Whites live individualistic lives where they decide and act independently.

H	African languages, universities need to do something about African languages. Some African clients believe in witchcraft even if they are educated and professional. Social workers are must be nonjudgmental and accept clients' beliefs.	Belief in witchcraft among Africans is prevalent, regardless of their educational status and level. The issue of African languages and social work education and practice must be addressed.
I	Children born out of wedlock looking and asking their fathers who they have not seen or known for eighteen years to pay for their school fees when they do not have a relationship with them. How do you explain to this child that he does not know you? They only want money from him, they expect you to trace their father and make him pay for their fees and other things.	Children born out of wedlock look for their fathers not because they miss them as persons, but because they want money from them. The mothers tend to use these children to get at their ex boyfriends or ex-traditional husbands. These fathers may need to feel wanted more as persons than as financial sources or providers.
J	That Africans do not own themselves; they have to consult others all the time about their lives. Discussions with social workers are not final	Social workers must accept that decisions arrived at in the office with their clients are tentative most of the time.

Data in Table 6.11 show that the cultural issues encountered by respondents are the following: Belief in witchcraft, traditional healers, ancestors, traditional rituals, polygamy and the communal way of living. The following are some of the respondents' views regarding the above-mentioned customs: Respondent A said that *“Venda people believe in witchcraft and also in ancestors. They will not leave their traditional ways, like the way they dress. They do not undermine their traditions”*. Respondent D said, *“Patients refuse necessary and urgent surgery believing that traditional doctors would cure their ailments. Doctors refer clients to me to convince them to agree to surgery, I always allow the client to make a final decision.”* Respondent E said, *“When a child is born, there are rituals that have to be done.”* Respondent F said, *“Clients believe in witchcraft, one has to accept that in order to help clients. Some clients feel very strong about witchcraft; they attribute some problems in their lives to witchcraft or being bewitched by someone. Witchcraft is an issue.”* Respondent H pointed out that *“[s]ome African clients believe in witchcraft even if they are educated and professional. Social workers must be nonjudgmental and accept clients' beliefs.”*

Social workers working with African clients need to recognise and accept that belief in witchcraft runs deep in the psyche of Africans. Social workers need to guard against counselling African clients contrary to what they believe. Hammond-Tooke (1974:13) shows that belief in witchcraft is generally similar among most South African black

societies. Some clients strongly believe that they have problems because someone is bewitching them. Witchcraft is not logical and scientific; social workers who do not share the clients' culture might therefore find it a challenge to discuss problems relating to the area of belief.

Some of the cultural issues have to do with cultural misunderstanding. Respondent C, in the researcher's view, for example misunderstands and is annoyed by clients who come into her office and sit down without being offered a seat. In African culture, sitting down before you talk to a person is a sign of respect. Respondent C also does not understand why women clients lack decision-making skills, particularly when they have husbands. This is what respondent C had to say in this regard: *"Clients knock and come in without me inviting them in. They come and sit down without me offering them a seat. They peep and you only see half the face. These things are annoying. Women clients lack decision making skills particularly in the absence of their husbands. Women are subservient to their husbands, headmen and other men in the community."* If this respondent had cultural understanding of the behaviour of African women, she should understand the position of women in African culture. According to Graham *et al.* (2003), the role of women in many non-western societies is still confined to their position as wife and mother. Unmarried women often may not leave the house without being accompanied by a male member of the family. This respondent also needs to understand the role of women and of the individual within the context of African culture. Africans are mostly communal in the manner in which they live their lives, and married women culturally cannot take decisions without the participation of the husband. In this instance respondent C is using Western norms to assess African behavioural patterns.

Other marriage issues that respondents have encountered in addition to the above are polygamy and extramarital relations within polygamous marriages. Here are some of the views regarding marriage: Respondent E said, *"[T]here are marriage procedures that have to be followed, such as the payment of lobola. A significant number of African marriages are polygamous. There is the phenomenon of extramarital affairs in polygamous marriages ... training did not prepare us adequately for some of these*

*things.*" Social workers must accept that there are these aspects in African marriages, particularly the issue of polygamy, which are not in line with the western Christianity-based notion of marriage, which involves only two people, a husband and a wife. Magubane (1998) states that polygamy is an important characteristic of African marriage. It is the state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives. Mbiti (1990) has been quoted saying that polygamy as a custom is found all over Africa; it helps to prevent or reduce unfaithfulness and prostitution on the part of the husband. In the researcher's view, marriage trends among African tribes are challenging social work theory and practice to recognise and acknowledge all possible permutations of marriage and not only the Western type of monogamous marriage based on Christian principles. If a social worker looks at African polygamous marriages from the Western Christian perspective s/he may be tempted to refer to them as classical cases of adultery, a behaviour which is prohibited in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 verse 14 of the Holy Bible and by generally accepted Western moral codes of behaviour. In this case, the social worker might regard what Africans regard as culturally acceptable as an unacceptable situation. Respondent E further stated that "training did not prepare [them] adequately for some of these things". Further research is needed to provide ways and means of empowering social workers to deal with problems of living that are culture-based. There is a need, for example, for an approach that can be utilised in polygamous marriage counselling where there are more than two partners, and sets of mothers-in-law, and fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. In short, where there are multiple in-laws in polygamous marriage relationships, a practice-based theory needs to be evolved. At present, marriage guidance theories are couple-based and are silent on the issue of polygamy.

Another cultural issue encountered by respondents concerns the significance of the role of the family in a person's life. This shows itself when African clients consult family members whenever they have to take a decision. In this regard, respondents had this to say: Respondent G: *"Family has got a lot of input in the persons' life and decisions. Decisions are mostly communal with African clients..."* Respondent J said, *"Africans do not own themselves; they have to consult other family members all the time about their*

*own live[s].*" In this regard Pacheo *et al.* (2003:54) point out that an individual does not exist without his or her family or community. Graham *et al.* (2003:31) also mention that, contrary to the Western therapeutic emphasis on the individual, most interventions with non-western clients need to be couched in the context of family, extended family, community or tribal background. The respondents suggested that the individual in the African culture must be viewed within the context of the family, community and tribal collective – that "[d]iscussions with social workers are not final". With this in mind, a social worker must understand that the client will not easily take decisions based on the contents of the interview.

African clients have a tendency to utilise professional and non-professional forms of assistance at the same time; they also do the same with physical illnesses, they go to hospitals and to traditional doctors concurrently. With matters spiritual, the same tendency is noticeable: Africans go to mainline churches and indigenous churches side by side. This is somehow related to the duality of the African psyche, where one part is Western and the other is indigenous. What is also remarkable is that it is an open secret that Africans consult indigenous sources of help when they encounter personal problems. The indigenous ways of dealing with problems of whatever nature will always be part of the African psyche. For social work to be relevant to an African psyche, it must incorporate the indigenous dimension of looking at life in general.

Other cultural issues that were encountered are given in the words of the respondents: Respondent B: "*Clients use idioms and proverbs that I do not understand at times. Idioms might be used to avoid saying things directly that might be taboo.*" This is important for social workers to know because African clients rarely refer directly to sensitive things, such as sexual matters. There are words in African languages that refer indirectly to sensitivities. For example, if someone says: "*my spouse does not sleep with me anymore*", it does not mean that they do not sleep in the same room and bed; or if they refer to a spouse: "*...no longer giving her or him blankets*", it means that they no longer have sexual relations. African languages have a lot of metaphors to cater for situations in which things cannot be referred to in a literal sense. There also are

different culturally defined ways of showing respect. In the Venda culture a young person is addressed as “*inwi*”, an older person as “*vhone*”, to show respect; in Pedi culture an adult is referred to as “*lena*”; in Zulu an adult is referred to as “*nina*”. In these languages, respect is shown by referring to an adult in the plural form. The language-related issues raised by the respondents in this regard indicate the importance of one’s ability to use language in a clinical situation in ways that show respect to the clients. It is also important for the worker to know when the clients may need to use metaphors instead of being literal.

Responses shown in Table 6.11 suggest that: African clients believe in the practice of witchcraft; polygamous marriage; a communal way of life; use idioms and metaphors in their language; uphold traditional rituals and believe in ancestors. It is also important to note that Africans do not undermine their indigenous ways of doing things: their traditions are practised concurrently with the Western way of doing things. These are some of the issues that social workers must be aware of when dealing with African clients. If one does not understand African culture, it is possible to misinterpret certain behaviours.

#### **6.7.5 Accommodation of clients’ cultural views in the helping process**

Findings concerning the respondents’ views on accommodating clients’ cultural views in the helping process are presented in Table 6.12.

**Table 6.12: Accommodating the clients' cultural views in the helping process**

RESPONDENTS	TO ACCOMMODATE CLIENTS' VIEWS I...	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Do not argue with clients about their beliefs; accept and listen to the way they present their problems.	Professional values can give guidance to social workers in this situation.
B	Become as open minded as possible; patient and accommodating; move at their pace; direct the discussions.	Begin where the client is and move at his/her pace.
C	Acknowledge their culture. Accept that there are differences [between] your culture and the client's culture.	Avoid the culture-blind approach to social work practice, culture is real and people differ culturally.
D	I put myself in their position; one has to be genuinely empathic to their situation.	Empathy.
E	Do not have to believe in what the clients believe in, but I understand that I have to look at things from the client's perspective.	Acknowledge cultural difference with the client, and do not impose your cultural views.
F	I show them respect; I listen to what they are saying.	
G	Respect clients; do not stop them from doing things that are part of their culture. Ask clients to tell [me] more about things I do not understand.	Willingness to learn from clients about things that differ from one's own culture.
H	I do not differ from them, it is their culture; I accept them.	Acceptance and the non-judgmental attitude that the worker has to practice.
I	Ask colleagues and my supervisor how things are done culturally. I am the only white social worker in this office, sometimes I ask people in social security.	In the process of asking other people who might not be professional, confidentiality must always be maintained.
J	Try to understand and follow clients pace, even though I do not agree with some things.	Workers have to deal with the challenge of understanding things that they may not agree with.

According to Table 6.12, respondents suggested that, to accommodate the clients' cultural views in the helping process, social workers need to accept and respect the client and be empathic to the clients' situation. This is what respondents had to say: Respondent F: *"I show respect, I listen to what they are saying."* Respondent G said, *"I respect the client, I do not stop them from doing things that are part of their culture, and I ask clients to tell me more about things I do not understand."* Closely related to respecting and accepting clients is the issue of respondents being willing to listen and learn from clients and colleagues when they do not understand. Respondent A in this regard said, *"Do not argue with clients about their beliefs, accept and listen to the way they present their problems."* Respondent I said, *"I ask colleagues and my supervisor how things are done culturally. I am the only white social worker in this office, sometimes I ask people in social security."* Respondents C, D and E alluded to the idea of empathising with clients, looking at things from their perspective, This is what they said: Respondent C: *"Acknowledge their culture, accept that there are differences*

*between your culture and the clients' culture."* Respondent E said, *"I do not have to believe in what the client believes in, but I understand that I have to look at things from the clients' perspective."* Respondent D said, *"I put myself in their position; one has to be genuinely empathic to their situation."* Respondent J said, *"I try to understand and follow the clients' pace, even though I do not agree with some of the things."*

What the responses indicate here is that there is a need for social workers to accept and respect the client's cultural views in the helping process. Social workers need to be willing to learn about cultural views from clients and also to feel with the clients. Looking at things from the client's point of view requires social workers to free themselves from being subjective so as to "enter" the client's world-view. Social workers must accept that there will be cultural differences with clients but must avoid arguing with clients and imposing their will on clients. Professional values can provide guidance to social workers in this situation.

### 6.7.6 Knowledge of African culture

Respondents were requested to rate their knowledge of African culture. The findings are presented in Table 6.13.

**Table 6.13 Knowledge of African culture**

RESPONDENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE	GENERAL REMARKS
A	I am very clear about African culture.			All African respondents know about African culture.
B	I understand what is going on in African culture.			
C	I have some knowledge about African culture, I am an African myself.			
D	I think I am within the ballpark, I understand it.			
E	I know about African culture.			
F		It is improving with time.		Most white respondents have insufficient knowledge of African culture.
G			Do not know much, I ask because I am inquisitive.	
H			I know very little about African culture, but I try.	
I			My knowledge is not good. I have a lot to learn.	
J			Insufficient knowledge. I ask my colleagues.	

Table 6.13 shows that five respondents, A to E, who are Africans, have a good knowledge of African culture. This is what they had to say in this regard: Respondent A was "... *very clear about African culture*". Respondent B "... [*understood*] *what is going on in African culture*". Respondent C said, "*I have some knowledge about African culture, I am an African myself*" and respondent D said, "*I think I am within the ball park, I understand it.*" Respondent F's knowledge of African culture was average. Her own words were, "*It is improving with time.*" Respondents G to J's knowledge of African culture were below average. Their responses were as follows: Respondent G: "*I do not know much, I ask because I am inquisitive.*" Respondent H: "*I know very little about African culture, but I try.*" Respondent I: "*My knowledge is not good. I have a lot to learn.*" Respondent J: "*My knowledge is insufficient, I ask colleagues.*" All African respondents knew about African culture. Most white respondents indicated that they had insufficient knowledge of African culture. In the researcher's view, black respondents, if asked about their knowledge of Western culture/white culture, would not know much either. What this means is that, though Blacks and Whites in South Africa live in the same geographical spaces, they are far apart in terms of world-views and they do not understand each other's culture and view of the world. Social work as a profession must strive to bridge this world-view chasm, in order to promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and practice. The cultural chasm must be bridged, primarily for professional effectiveness rather than for political reasons.

Since social workers practise in a multiracial and multicultural context, there is a need for both black and white social workers to be both racially and culturally competent. According to Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999), a multicultural society must have a multicultural social work curriculum. In the researcher's view, the situation that obtains today, in which social workers in the field only know how to deal with clients of their own cultural, racial and language background, would not exist if South African universities followed a cross-cultural curriculum. Siegel (1994:87) states that the single challenge that faces social service delivery involves the inability of therapists to provide culturally responsive forms of treatment. Although social workers are taught to recognise and respect ethnic and racial diversity in social work education and practice, they usually fail

to integrate the knowledge of cultural differences when dealing with clients. The researcher's view is that social workers in South Africa tend to be racially, ethnically and culturally blind in their approach to social work practice. La Belle and Ward (1996) are of the view that social work needs to reflect the demographic variations in the society. Therefore courses on diversity must be a requirement in order to prepare students for the future. Mikada (1999) further argues that the theoretical foundations of established social work practice models do not reflect the diversity of world-views and cultural values found among African clients. The researcher's view is that South African universities that train social workers must take cognisance of the cultural context and the world-views of the population that constitutes the majority of social service consumers. Curricula in South Africa must reflect multiculturalism in theory and also in practice.

In as far as personal cultural competence is concerned; respondents realised that caseworkers should know African culture, which includes norms, beliefs and rituals. Respondents also realised that they need to have probing skills, language skills, relationship skills, and a positive attitude towards African clients. Despite this realisation, caseworkers do not know how to respond appropriately to cultural dynamics in the casework intervention. Training did not prepare caseworkers to deal with the cultural issues in clinical situations. Respondents who were not Africans reported that their knowledge of African culture was inadequate. African respondents did not seem to link whatever they knew about African culture to their practice of casework. Without adequate knowledge and training on how to address African cultural issues in casework practice, social workers cannot be said to be culturally competent.

Respondents who were not familiar with African cultural issues responded to these by finding out from colleagues. Others decided to ignore cultural issues and concentrate on the person and the problem mainly. There is a need for the social work profession to foreground the significance of African cultural knowledge for social workers, to promote cultural competence in cross-cultural clinical situations. Cultural issues encountered by respondents in this study indicate that there exists an African world-view which social caseworkers have to incorporate in their conceptual framework of casework practice

among African clients. This world-view consists of the belief in the practice of witchcraft, traditional healing, ancestors, rituals, polygamy and a communal way of living.

## **6.8 CULTURAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

This section has to do with cultural issues in social work practice. The aim was to identify cultural issues in social work practice, by asking respondents the following questions:

- What was the cultural profile of your clients over the last five years?
- What was your experience in dealing with culturally diverse clients?
- What was the racial profile of your clients?
- What was your experience in dealing with racially different clients in a cross-cultural situation?
- What, in your experience, were the common cultural trends that you found among African clients?
- What, in your experience, were the common cultural trends that you found among white clients?
- Did clients in the course of helping them, ever bring the following issues to your attention? Ancestors, witchcraft, polygamy, traditional healing, initiation school, husband as head of the family, subservient role of women and punctuality? What was your reaction?

Tables 6.14 to 6.20 present data based on the above questions.

### **6.8.1 Cultural profile of clients**

Findings on the cultural profile of the clients of the respondents are presented in Table 6.14.

**Table 6.14 Cultural profile of clients over the last five years**

RESPONDENTS	VENDA CLIENTS	SOTHO CLIENTS	TSONGA/SHANGAAN CLIENTS	WHITE CLIENTS	GENERAL REMARKS
A	None	Followed by Sotho	none	Majority white	Black social worker
B	Majority	None	none	Followed by whites	Black social worker
C	Venda only	None	none	None	Black social worker
D	Venda only	None	none	None	Black social worker
E	Venda majority	Third largest	Second largest	None	Black social worker
F	Venda majority	None	none	Followed by whites	White social worker
G	None	Majority Sotho	none	Followed by whites	White social worker
H	None	Followed by Sotho	none	Majority white	White social worker
I	None	Followed by Sotho	none	Majority white	White social worker
J	None	Majority Sotho	none	Little bit white	White social worker

The analysis of data in Table 6.14 to determine the cultural profile of the respondents' clients over the last five years yielded the following: Eight out of ten respondents practise social work with clients from different cultural groups. The cultural groups that respondents work with are Venda, Sotho, White and Shangaan. Only two respondents (C and D) work exclusively with Venda-speaking clients. Respondents A and B are black social workers who serve White, Sotho and Venda clients. Respondents A and B need to understand the world-view of white clients for them to be culturally competent in serving white clients; they also need to understand the African world-view to be able to serve the Sotho- and Venda-speaking segments of their clientele population. Respondent F is a white social worker who serves mainly Venda-speaking clients. Her challenge is to understand the Venda culture to be culturally competent. This table shows that social work practice in South Africa is becoming increasingly cross-racial and cross-cultural at an accelerated pace. Or rather, social workers in South Africa found themselves in both cross-cultural and cross-racial clinical situations for which they were not adequately prepared by their training. Respondents F to J are white social workers whose clients include people from other cultural groups like Sothos and Vendas. The question to ask here concerns how one deals with clients whose culture and language

one does not understand. Expressed differently, how does one help someone whom one does not understand? In the researcher's view, the main reason why African clients do not present psycho-emotional problems to social workers is that they do not feel understood culturally. With this realisation, African clients mainly go to social workers to present problems that have to do with material assistance. For psycho-emotional problems African clients go to traditional healers and witchdoctors, where they are culturally understood (see responses in Table 6.14). A significant number of African clients consult these people. Table 6.14 suggests that the profession must recognise the need to train social workers for the multicultural clientele population.

Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents in this study is involved with clients who belong to cultures other than the workers' own culture. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that all social workers in South Africa at present have, or in the very near future will have clients from all racial, language, ethnic and cultural groups. Cultures in South Africa are coming closer to one another without shedding their essential identities; this creates the need for social workers to know the different cultures that exist in South Africa in order to be competent in practice. The preceding table (Table 6.13) shows that half of the respondents interviewed did not know African culture. This means that they are dealing with clients that they do not understand. Table 6.14 shows that there are respondents who deal with clients without understanding them culturally.

### **6.8.2 Experiences in dealing with culturally diverse clients**

The findings on the respondents' experiences in dealing with culturally diverse clients are illustrated in Table 6.15.

**Table 6.15: Experiences in dealing with culturally diverse clients**

RESPONDENTS	EXPERIENCE	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Language differences between the worker and clients constitute a significant communication barrier. Africans have a lot [of] taboos. Africans believe in witchcraft and their customs. Whites are open and direct in their communication.	Knowledge of African languages must be encouraged among white social workers. Knowledge of Afrikaans must be encouraged among black social workers. The social work profession must acknowledge the existence of an African world-view.
B	A lot of proverbs in African languages. Some clients insist that the worker should speak the clients' language. Clients behave culturally even when they are in the office. African clients are not comfortable with direct eye contact with the social worker. Whites do not have a problem with eye contact. Some clients are accompanied to the workers by a senior family member.	Prominent issues are: language, behaviour, eye contact and respect. Training is silent on the significance of languages, particularly African languages and social work practice. Some practitioners make use of interpreters who are not bound by any code of ethics. Counselling clients through an interpreter would violate confidentiality.
C	Female African clients cannot make a decision in the absence of their husbands. Women are mostly submissive.	This by and large demonstrates the role of women in African culture, though this is changing with women who are economically independent and urban.
D	Knowledge of the clients' languages Zulu and Afrikaans were a challenge at first that I had to address. The attitude of white clients was another challenge. In [S]outh Africa social workers must be competent in transracial and transcultural practice dynamics.	The need for competence in dealing with both racial and cultural issues in practice is pointed out by this respondent.
E	People[']s reaction to issues is informed by their cultural background, some people go to doctors when they are sick others go to witchdoctors. People do not react the same way to pain and hunger these reactions are informed by culture and are individual.	Cultural differences inform the different ways in which people react to life issues.
F	I cannot say that there is a difference between clients; they are the same I deal with them the same way. The differences are not significant. I do not get into culture.	This is one instance of a culture-blind approach to clients. Cultural differences are not recognised by this respondent; clients are the same.
G	When clients do something cultural that I am not familiar with, I do not interfere, I let them do it, it is part of their culture I cannot interfere.	This respondent shows respect for cultural diversity.
H	Some do things such as polygamy and witchcraft that are against my religion, like having an affair with a married person. I struggle to be accepting and non judgmental at times.	In this situation, the worker must not impose his beliefs on clients. The worker has to make sure that he deals with subjectivity and biases most of the time.
I	African and Indian families help each other more compared to whites. Black people know more languages than whites because they are more exposed to different language groups than is the case with whites. I have got northern Sotho at grade 12 level; I can hear the language here and there.	An average black social worker and client will know at least three different African languages, compared to white social workers and clients. Whites are locked into English and Afrikaans mostly; an African language can be learned. Africans have stronger family ties than is the case with Whites.
J	My clients are basically the same; I treat all of them the same way. The process is longer with Sotho because I work through an interpreter. You do not get all the information directly. Interpretation is not always correct.	Culture-blind approach to practice. Pitfalls of using an interpreter in clinical work with clients. Language issue in practice presents problems that have to be addressed.

The respondents' experiences in working with culturally diverse clients are diverse, ranging from language difficulties to cultural nuances (see Table 6.15). This is what the respondents had to say about their experiences: Respondents A, B, D and J had the following language-related experiences: Respondent A mentioned language differences as a barrier with the clients. She said, "*Language differences between the worker and clients constitute a significant communication barrier... .*" Respondent B noted that some clients are difficult to understand because they use a lot of proverbs and idioms in their speech, and said, "*There are a lot of proverbs in African languages; some clients insist that the worker should speak the clients' language... .*" Respondent D had problems with knowing how to speak the clients' languages, e.g. Zulu and Afrikaans and said, "*Knowledge of the clients' languages Zulu and Afrikaans were a challenge to me at first that I had to address.*" Respondent I indicated that "*Black people know more African languages than Whites because they are more exposed to different language groups than is the case with Whites. I have got Northern Sotho at grade 12 level; I can hear the language here and there.*"

Responses here suggest the need for social workers to learn the languages that are spoken by clients. Respondent A stated that "*Language differences between the worker and clients constitute a significant communication barrier*". The language barrier complicates client-worker communication even further when one takes into account the fact that all African languages make use of a lot of proverbs and idioms. Respondent B also referred to this: "*There are a lot of proverbs in African languages; some clients insist that the worker should speak the clients' language.*" Social work departments must consider making knowledge of dominant African languages a requirement for social work students. White social workers have language problems when rendering services to African clients, while Black social workers face similar challenges with Afrikaans-speaking clients. English does not seem to present a major problem since English is a dominant language for both black and white social workers: most of them were taught in English at universities, or at least read social work books that are written in the medium of English. Language problems in social work practice mainly arise around languages spoken by African clients and, in some instances, with Afrikaans-speaking clients. The slight advantage that black social workers have over white social workers is that, in the

words of respondent I, “...black people know more languages than white because they are more exposed to different language groups than is the case with whites”.

Some respondents in this study recognised the importance of knowing the languages spoken by clients and took it upon themselves to find ways of learning these languages on their own. Respondent I, who was a white social worker, anticipated that at some point in her life she might have to deal with some African language. She responded “... I have got northern Sotho at grade 12 level; I can hear the language here and there.” Because of the language differences, the social workers who were interviewed tended to either refer clients to other social workers who could speak the language, use the interpreter or simply dealt with the case despite the language problem.

Some respondents dealt with the language problem by resorting to using an interpreter. Respondent J found that the process was longer in instances where the worker had to use an interpreter and that interpretation was not always accurate. Her response was that “...[t]he process [was] longer with Sotho because I work through an interpreter. You do not get all the information directly. Interpretation is not always correct”. Graham *et al.* (2003:12-13), as mentioned earlier, have suggested using a cultural broker or a cultural consultant to deal with the problems of interpretation, as cultural brokers are acculturated in a particular culture as well as in the mainstream culture and are therefore able to straddle cultures to function as language and cultural bridges. In such cases, both the social worker and the cultural broker must understand the requirement to adhere to the principles of the casework relationship, in particular the principle of confidentiality.

Culturally related experiences with diverse clients were as follows: Respondent A: “Africans have a lot of taboos; whites are open and direct in their communication; Africans believe in witchcraft and their customs.” Respondent B mentioned that “...clients behave culturally even when they are in the office. African clients are not comfortable with direct eye contact with the social worker. Whites do not have a problem with eye contact... .” With regard to communication, eye contact and taboo subjects, Graham *et al.* (2003) offer the opinion that Westerners tend to be very direct in approaching, greeting and questioning people. This manner of approach may cause uneasiness among African clients, because some questions are asked at a stage that is

too early, and may be considered too personal, impolite or as showing lack of respect for privacy and culturally taboo subjects. Eye contact, personal distance and touching are examples of what may cause communication problems. White social workers must realise that inappropriate eye contact, defined in terms of African culture, might easily result into some form of cultural misunderstanding. The role of women in African culture does not allow them to make decisions in the absence of their husbands or a male relative. Respondent C, reflecting on the position of women in African culture, stated that “female African clients cannot make decisions in the absence of their husbands... .” Some of the cultural experiences reported by respondents relate to issues of polygamy and witchcraft, as respondent H indicated that “*Some do things such as polygamy and witchcraft that are against my religion ...I struggle to be accepting and nonjudgmental at times*”. These are some of the cultural issue pointed out by respondents as part of their experiences in dealing with diverse clients.

There are respondents who do not see cultural diversity among clients, they view clients as the same; this is what they had to say: Respondent F said, “*I cannot say there is a difference between clients, they are the same and I deal with them the same way. The differences are not significant. I do not get into culture.*” Respondent J said, “*My clients are basically the same; I treat them the same way.*” These respondents are representative of social workers who deny the impact of diversity in their clientele populations.

Respondent D had to deal with attitude problems from white clients. He said, “*The attitude of white clients was another challenge, in South Africa social workers must be competent in cross racial and cross cultural practice dynamics.*” This response, read in conjunction with some responses in Table 6.15, clearly indicates that some white clients have problems with receiving assistance from black social workers, at least at the start of the helping process. This, in the researcher's view, is traceable to the history of race relations in South Africa. With the growth of democracy this will hopefully fade away in time. Black social workers working with White clients must expect this form of behaviour from some of their White clients and attempt to address it professionally rather than personally. It should also be noted here that it is the older generation of white clients who seem to have problems being attended to by black social workers.

### 6.8.3 Racial profile of the respondents' clients over the last five years

The racial profile of the respondents' clients over the last five years is presented in Table 6.16.

**Table 6.16: The racial profile of the respondents' clients over the last five years**

RESPONDENTS	BLACK	WHITE	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Minority is black	Majority is white.	The social worker is black. There are attitudes, racial and cultural issues that the worker needs to be sensitive to. (Refer to the interview with KK, Josephine and Madonna)
B	Majority of my clients are black.	Minority is white	The social worker is black, deals mostly with black clients of different ethnic groups. Cultural differences among black clients are not major.
C	Mainly my clients are black, predominantly Venda speaking.	No white clients for this respondent, from training to professional practice.	This respondent is black, did not have exposure to other racial groups other than her own since she was a student; she now practises within her racial group. Training and practice has to reflect both racial and cultural diversity that characterises South Africa.
D	70% of my clients are black	30% are white.	The respondent in this instances a black social worker. Must be able to show competence in dealing with both cultural and racial issues in practice.
E	It ... black exclusively.	No white clients for this respondent, even as a student her clients were black.	The respondent in this instance is black. She is a classical example of a social worker who mirrors the product of social work education that does not prepare students for multicultural practice.
F	My clients are mainly black, from different ethnic groups.	White clients mainly go to CFC (Christian Social Council) or the SAVF.	The respondent is a White whose knowledge of African culture is "improving with time"; she mainly has to deal with black clients and different ethnic groups. Here the clientele population would require a person whose knowledge of African culture is sound. White clients go to agencies that are related to their language because they feel understood there.
G	The majority is African clients.	Minority is white clients.	The respondent is white. She does not know much about African culture though the majority of her clients are Africans/black. She may be culturally competent with white clients and not with black clients. With blacks her services may be limited to material assistance only; she cannot do Hammond or therapy with Africans.
H	I have seen very few African clients.	It is mostly white.	The respondent is white. Might not have racial issues to deal with as she is practising mainly within her own racial group. But is this an ideal situation in multicultural and multiracial South Africa? Caseloads have to be mixed by race and culture to promote cultural competence among social workers of all races.
I	Few African clients.	I have more white clients than African	The respondent is white. Do different races look for each other when they have problems? White clients have problems when they run into a black social worker for the first time. This worker has no major racial issues to deal with.
J	Most of my clients are black, northern Sotho, about 85%.	15% of them are white clients.	Knowledge of Africans on the part of this respondent is insufficient; she relies on colleagues for cultural guidance. This respondent is white. She uses an interpreter when interviewing clients since she cannot communicate in an African language. Cannot do counselling with African clients because clients want to talk about problems in their own language. She also refers a lot of her clients to workers who speak the clients' language.

Table 6.16 indicates that caseloads for social workers consist of black and white clients and that social workers no longer have clients who are of the same race as the worker. Out of ten respondents, only two respondents (respondents C and E) have clients of the same race as the social worker exclusively. These respondents reflect the past social work practice scenario of a racially and ethnically divided South Africa in which social workers served clients of the same race and ethnic group as the worker. Eight respondents out of ten have black and white clients in their caseloads. This suggests that the racial profile of the social workers' caseloads is increasingly becoming multiracial. In some instances, there are black social workers whose clients are mostly white, such as respondent A, and there are white social workers whose clients are predominantly black, such as respondents F, G and J. This suggests that both black and white social workers have to know how to deal with racial dynamics in social work practice.

On account of the information from responses presented in Table 6.16, the researcher is of the view that the situation of social workers dealing with same race and same ethnic group clients will not be around for long. The researcher also wants to point out that respondents are dealing with a racial profile of clients that is different from the racial profile of clients whom they dealt with in training, when they were students. When respondents were students, most of them dealt with clients with whom they shared race and even language. Caseloads have since become dynamic in terms of their racial and ethnic composition. With the passage of time and the deepening of democracy and non-racialism in South Africa, black social workers must anticipate an increasing number of white clients in their caseloads. White social workers must also expect an increasing number of black clients in their caseloads. The challenge faced by the profession is to train social workers to be competent in dealing the racial dynamics that play themselves out in practice. Robinson (1995:53-54) states that social workers adopting a colour-blind approach adopt the perception that black people are like white people. They view race as unimportant; they emphasise knowing black people as people or as members of the human race with no colour or racial differences. These social workers might be reluctant to introduce race as a topic for discussion for fear of creating racial tensions. However, discussing racial issues creates the possibility of relieving racial tension.

One of the issues in this regard has to do with racial attitudes between black social workers and white clients on the one hand and the racial attitudes between white social workers and black clients on the other hand. According to Goodman (1973), the issues that need to be addressed, amongst others, are the following: Can a white therapist operating against the background of Western culture and education engage a poor black person in therapy? Are there specific techniques of engagement in treatment that are more likely to succeed, and where do traditional approaches fail? The same questions can also be asked in the South African situation; can a black therapist operating against the background of African culture engage a rich white person in therapy? Goodman (1973) continues to say that the answers cannot be absolute. Most people can be reached if the therapist can find the right road. The major barrier to finding the meeting ground lies in the attitude of the professional. In the researcher's view, the attitude of the professional can be informed by the therapist's education, race and cultural background.

Some authors, according to Pacheo *et al.* (2003), have identified the existence of racism in social work and have emphasised the need to develop anti-racist strategies to be incorporated into social work practice. The issue of race in the researcher's view must be treated as one of the major issues in social work practice in South Africa, in view of the long history of oppression and discrimination that has characterised the country. Pacheo *et al.* (2003) further state that racism in social service provision might at times be unintentional and training concerning the impact of racial dynamics in social work practice might reduce the prevalence of unintentional racism. In similar vein, Goodman (1973:128) states that "racism bites deeply into the psyche, it marks its victims blacks and whites with deep hurt, anger, fear, and guilt ... the exploration and examination of the impact of racism on our clinical behavior is essential if we are to minimize its effects".

The researcher observed that the respondents did not make mention of Coloured and Indian clients, in spite of the presence of these population groups in the geographical areas where the interviews were conducted. A rhetorical question to be asked is where do they go when they have to deal with problems of living? The researcher is of the view that social workers should be able to straddle races when rendering service, and that

the world-views of the different races that constitute the South African society should be incorporated into the social work curricula. For social workers that are already in the field, seminars and workshops should be arranged to plug the gap that may have been ignored by curricula when the present social workers were students.

#### 6.8.4 Experiences in dealing with clients in cross-cultural situations

The findings concerning the experiences of the respondents in dealing with clients in cross-cultural situations are presented in Table 6.17.

**Table 6.17: Experiences in dealing with racially different clients in a cross-cultural situation**

RESPONDENTS	EXPERIENCE	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Whites are generally reluctant to be served by a black social worker. They come to the office and ask "waar is die mense". Once you have rapport with them they cooperate and are very open with their problems. Africans are not open with their personal problems.	This respondent is black. Black social workers have to deal with initial reluctance and negative attitudes from white clients. Social workers have to deal with lack of openness about problems from black clients, they have to probe, dig out the problem from a typical African client.
B	White clients would come to my office and ask me where the social worker is. If I tell them I am, they want to know if there is a white social worker who can assist them.	The social worker in this instance is black and has to deal with racial attitudes held by clients. At first, white clients want to be assisted by white social workers. It takes them a while to trust that black social workers can also assist them.
C	I do not have the experience, since all my clients are black.	All her clients are black, and when she was a student on practicals, all her clients were black. Clearly she had no exposure, knowledge and experience in cross-cultural social work practice.
D	Most white clients were negative towards black social workers. They did not trust that they could get professional assistance from black social workers. I had to empathize with these clients most of them came from an older generation of whites.	Empathy coupled with the understanding of the history of different races in cross-racial situations is a key to understanding clients. Social workers who were too young to understand apartheid and its effects are at a loss when older clients of different races show racial attitudes towards them.
E	I do not have the experience since my clients are exclusively black.	No exposure to racially different clients in training and in practice.
F	Black people have cultural beliefs that I have to accept even when I do not agree with some. It is important to separate my culture from that of clients; I have to put my feelings aside.	The respondent is white. Social work values of acceptance and the non-judgmental attitude seem to be functional in multicultural social work practice. It is almost like, if everything else fails, remember the values of the social work profession.
G	Once you see a person as a person, culture does come in but it is really not an issue. Black and white clients are the same, it is only [colour] that is different, the way they think, they dream, everything is the same.	She does not know much about culture and therefore thinks it is not an issue. Even as a student she was not exposed to different cultures and races; she has always dealt with Afrikaans-speaking clients.
H	Extended family ties are stronger among African and Indian families, they assist each other. With white clients, extended family ties are not strong.	African and Indian families are communal and supportive of each other. White families are individualistic and self-reliant.
I	I do not have racial problems with my clients. I sense a little bit of racial issues with ... colleagues both black and white, in meetings and workshops it is almost spontaneous because people want to speak (small talk) in their languages.	There is a need for professional social workers to transcend the past and to begin to interact across racial and cultural lines in both formal and informal situations. It these kinds of interactions that may result in the profession having a single united professional association that is non-racial.
J	The interviewing process is longer when I have to use an interpreter with Sotho clients, because of the language barrier. Social work wise, I treat all clients the same, it does not matter if they are Sotho, English or Afrikaans.	Language issue and culture blindness on the part of the worker. There are differences amongst clients that are culture-based. Clients are not the same and therefore cannot be treated in the same way.

Table 6.17 shows that there is a range of responses to this issue. There are respondents who have no experience in dealing with racially different clients in a cross-cultural situation, such as respondents C and E. These respondents have only dealt with clients who were of the same race as the worker and are therefore not competent to handle clients from other racial groups. Even at the time when these respondents were students, they never worked with clients from other races than their own. This is what they said: Respondent C: *"I do not have the experience, since all my clients are black"*. Respondent E: *"I do not have the experience since my clients are exclusively black"*. In the researcher's view, South Africa has a lot of such practitioners, because the training institutions used to be divided along racial lines. Hopefully this will change now that the training institutions are no longer divided along racial lines.

Respondents A, B and D are black social workers who have had negative experiences with white clients. In this regard, respondent A said: *"Whites are generally reluctant to be served by a black social worker. They come to the office and ask waar is die mense. Once you have rapport with them they cooperate and are very open with their problems. Africans are not open with their personal problems."* Respondent B reported: *"White clients come to the office and ask me where the social worker is. If I tell them I am, they want to know if there is a white social worker who can assist them."* Respondent D said, *"Most White clients were negative towards black social workers. They did not trust that they could get professional assistance from black social workers. I had to empathize with these clients; most of them come from an older generation of white[s]."* Goodman (1973:103) states that very little research has been done on the problems of a Black social worker with a White client. Some observers have pointed out that the Black social workers' sense of inadequacy is challenged by the White clients' negative attitudes. Others recognise that White clients may feel prejudice and hostility towards a Black social worker. These reactions from White clients to a Black social worker should not be viewed as a deterrent to the client-worker relationship. It has also been noted that a black social worker may be unsympathetic or punitive toward a white client or may over-identify with the client's whiteness and be too permissive to be of help to him. The white client frequently has difficulty recognising and accepting the black social worker's

authority and professional ability. Emotional distance and the social distance between the white client and the black professional are powerful forces that must be acknowledged.

Unresolved racial issues between the White client and the Black professional may pose as a barrier to treatment. Black professionals must be trained to handle white clients in a manner that does not compromise either one's image and sense of competence. On the white professional-black client situation, Goodman (1973:102) remarks that white social workers tend to be paternalistic and dependency supporting. White professionals should realise that special treatment emanating from guilt and discomfort does not enhance the social functioning of the black client. Lack of knowledge and understanding of African cultural patterns and life in general is universally seen as a barrier to an effective helping relationship.

Respondent I, who was white, did not have problems with black clients, but she sensed some form of racism in the case of Black and White social workers. This is what she had to say: *"I do not have racial problems with my clients. I sense a little bit of racial issues with ... colleagues, both Black and White. In meetings and workshops it is almost spontaneous, people want to "small talk" in their languages."* White respondents had experiences with black clients that accentuate cultural differences between the two groups. This is what they had to say in this regard: Respondent F said, *"Black people have cultural beliefs that I have to accept even when I do not agree with some. It is important to separate my culture from that of clients; I have to put my feelings aside."* Respondent H said, *"Extended family ties are stronger among African and Indian families, they assist each other. With white clients, extended families are not strong."*

Some of the White respondents (G and J) do not recognise cultural differences among clients. They view clients as acultural. In other words, these respondents are culture blind. This is what they had to say in this regard: Respondent G: *"Once you see a person as a person, culture does come in but it is really not an issue. Black and white clients are the same, it is only color that is different, the way they think, and they dream*

*everything is the same.*” Respondent J: *“The interviewing process is longer when I have to use an interpreter with Sotho clients because of the language barrier. Social work wise, I treat all clients the same, it does not matter if they are Sotho, English or Afrikaans.”* The view that clients are the same regardless of their race and culture is not supported by literature. Goodman (1973), for example, points out dynamics that have to be taken into account if the worker and the client are from different racial groups. He alludes to issues of transference and counter-transference between the client and the professional. These, in the researcher’s opinion, emanate from the history of racial relations between black and white in America and also in South Africa.

#### **6.8.5 Common cultural trends presented by African clients in the course of receiving professional help**

Responses of respondents regarding common cultural trends found among African clients are presented in Table 6.18.

**Table 6.18: The common cultural trends found among African clients**

RESPONDENTS	COMMON CULTURAL TRENDS	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Black clients are not open about their problems, you need to probe and dig out problems from them. Blacks have a lot of taboo subjects that they cannot easily talk about directly. Black clients believe in ancestors, polygamy and witchcraft.	Dealing with black clients requires probing skills; it also requires a paradigm shift on the part of the worker to be able to see things from an African perspective. Particularly with regard to their cultural beliefs.
B	Most of them consult family members before and after they come to professionals. They will not readily tell you what the problem is, you have to probe. They are not open about personal things.	The social worker must always remember that black clients do not own themselves; whatever is discussed with them is always tentative and subject to further discussions with family members. Decision making might take longer with African clients; they have to consult before deciding.
C	African clients are more dependent on the welfare system. African women are submissive generally and do not take decisions independently of a man.	African culture socialises women to be submissive to men. Dependence on the welfare system may have to do with unemployment, which is currently rampant in South Africa.
D	Africans believe traditional healers and witchcraft. They believe in their traditions, for them their culture matters.	Most African clients uphold their culture and also put trust in some of the Western systems of healing. They practice Western things and African things side by side.
E	In religion they combine Christianity and indigenous religions. In healing they combine western healing with traditional healing. They are dualistic.	This duality pointed out here is typical of the African way of combining opposites as a way of living. It is a consequence of having been colonised by the West.
F	Africans tend to link their problems with witchcraft. They feel strong about witchcraft. I cannot tell them not to believe in this, I cannot impose my values on them.	Witchcraft is one of the things that characterise the world-view of most Africans. According to African thought, the world can be understood both rationally and irrationally. Witchcraft is one of the irrational ways in which Africans relate to the world. Social workers must accept this about their African clients.
G	All of them have problems. If they come to me, I do not see culture as a problem I focus on the problem that they have. I am not really into culture.	For this respondent, it seems possible to separate culture from the clients. For her, problems can be addressed without reference to culture. This respondent is totally culture blind (see what she says about Whites and culture in the next table).
H	Blacks are poor but they share whatever they have with family members, even with neighbors. The problem is when they feel sorry for everybody; they feel for their next of kin. Sometimes they are naïve when they over do it. Blacks and Indians have stronger family ties than whites. They walk into the office and sit down without you offering the chair, it used to annoy me. They have many children that they cannot support. Number of children means wealth to blacks.	In African culture, the idea of sharing and of mutual support is captured in the idea of <i>ubuntu</i> , which promotes a communal way of life in an African setting. Walking into an office and sitting down before talking indicates respect in African culture, in Western culture it shows lack of respect and good manners. In Western culture the owner of the office must invite you to sit or offer you a chair.
I	Strong extended family ties; inability to take decisions as an individual; traditional marriages which do not have clear rights;	In an African setting, the group is more important than an individual, no one can decide on their own without involving the group.
J	Issue of witchcraft is common, and the fact that Africans have to consult extended family each time they take decisions. Black families look after each other.	Social workers should explore ways in which the strong extended family ties among Africans can be used in clinical interventions with African clients. Particularly in dealing with the institutionalisation of orphans and the elderly.

Table 6.18 shows that the following issues constitute cultural trends among African clients: belief in witchcraft; lack of openness about problems and belief in traditions and culture. One respondent did not see cultural dynamics in her clientele population.

On witchcraft respondents had to say the following: Respondent A: *"Black clients believe in ancestors, polygamy and witchcraft"*. Respondent D said, *"Africans believe in traditional healers and witchcraft..."* Respondent F said, *"Africans tend to link their problems with witchcraft, they feel strong[ly] about witchcraft."* Respondent J said that the *"Issue of witchcraft is common ..."* The researcher's view is that it is important for social workers to acknowledge beliefs in witchcraft when dealing with African clients. Some clients believe that they have problems because someone is bewitching them. Witchcraft is not logical and scientific; social workers that do not share the clients' culture might find it a challenge to discuss problems involving witchcraft. Hammond-Tooke (1974) alludes to the fact that the Sotho, Venda, Tsonga, Lobedu and the Nguni believe in witchcraft. Hammond-Tooke (1974) further states that beliefs in witchcraft are generally similar in most South African black societies.

On the lack of openness about problems, respondents reported as follows: Respondent A: *"Black clients are not open about their problems; you need to probe and dig out problems from them. Blacks have a lot of taboo subjects that they cannot easily talk about directly..."* Respondent B said, *"Most of them consult family members before and after they come to the professionals. They will not readily tell you what the problem is, you have to probe. They are not open about personal things."* Van der Walt (1997:2) in this regard opines that, while Westerners are inclined to be very direct in their communication, even if it may result in conflict; Africans are not to the point. They prefer a non-direct way of communication and the person with whom the discussion takes place has to draw his/her own conclusion. The researcher, being an African, is aware of examples where Africans avoid being direct in their communication. One previously quoted example concerns someone owing an African some money. He/she may ask for it in an indirect manner such as *"When are you going to return my parcel?"* Africans are also very indirect when they have to discuss sexual matters. It is important for social workers to know what metaphors clients use when they have to say things that are taboo to talk about directly.

On the issue of traditions and culture, respondents had the following to say: Respondent D: *"They believe in their traditions, for them their culture matters."* In this regard Nabwire (1968:25) states that foreign observers have often been misled into thinking that Africans have simply absorbed European and American culture with no sense of selectivity. Even with European acculturation and with a wholesale rejection of African folkways, there remains a continuing strong pulse of African life below the European clothes. But Hammond-Tooke (1972) points out that there are enduring common themes that characterise African culture, such as: the belief in a supernatural being which is present among all African societies; the belief in ancestors; polygamous marriage; rites of passage; epistemological systems; prohibition of mating between close kin; and the incest taboo. The point that the researcher wants to make here is that social workers need to be open to the fact that a significant number of African clients have not deserted their culture; they still regard their culture as important.

This is what respondents had to say on the issue of family ties: Respondent H said, *"Blacks are poor but they share whatever they have with family members, even with neighbors. The problem is they feel sorry for everybody ... sometimes they are naïve when they over do it. Blacks and Indians have stronger family ties than whites... ."* Respondent I said that *"... they have strong family ties, [are] unable to take decisions as individuals ... ."* Pacheco *et al.* (2003:520) state that family is the primary source of social support, providing information, material resources and emotional help to cope with problems in many non-western cultures. In fact, in some cultures the responsibility of providing support for problems rests mainly on the head of the family. In the researcher's view, family ties among Africans are strong, in line with the African cultural concept of *ubuntu*, which also incorporates mutual assistance within African families. Daniels (2001) states that the social worker must view the family, including extended family, as a source of support when children, parents and spouses are having problems. The researcher wants to point out that social workers working with African clients must involve family members as much as possible, but when it comes to white clients they must realise that the family ties are not as strong and as binding as with African clients.

Respondent G, even on this issue, does not acknowledge culture or cultural dynamics in dealing with clients. Table 6.18 indicates that she is not aware of any cultural trends; she said, *“All of them have problems. If they come to me, I do not see culture as a problem, I focus on the problem that they have. I am not really into culture.”* The researcher’s view is that social workers in South Africa tend to be racially and ethnically blind in their approach to practice. Respondent G is a typical example of social workers who are not able to provide culturally responsive forms of intervention, because they do not recognise the impact of culture in social work practice. Siegel (1994) opines that the single most serious challenge facing social service delivery involves the inability of therapists to provide culturally responsive forms of treatment. Social workers usually fail to integrate knowledge of cultural differences in their dealings with clients. The researcher’s view is that culture does determine the behaviour of clients and social workers would be unrealistic if they were to wish culture away in their transactions with clients. Hammond-Tooke (1972) emphasises the importance of culture in stating that very little in the human personality is genetically derived; that the mind, indeed, is a blank tablet inscribed by culture.

#### **6.8.6 Common cultural trends presented by white clients in the course of receiving professional help**

Findings regarding common cultural trends as presented by white clients in the course of receiving professional help are presented in Table 6.19.

**Table 6.19: Common cultural trends presented by White clients in the course of receiving professional help**

RESPONDENTS	COMMON CULTURAL TRENDS	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Probing skills with whites are not important because once you have a rapport with them, they are open, honest and direct with their personal issues. Whites do not have as many taboos as black people have.	The openness, honesty and directness of White clients are reported by most of the respondents to this question.
B	They come to the office and get to the point; they are very open, and direct even with personal things. Counseling and therapy is easier with them compared to black clients. They are concerned with the quality of service they get.	In addition to the above, white respondents are concerned with the quality of service they receive from social workers. If for some reason they are not satisfied, they are assertive enough to point that out.
C	I do not have experience with white clients.	
D	For a social worker in this country, both cross-racial [and] cross cultural competences are important. Most whites are negative to[wards] a black social worker; they do not trust that they can be assisted professionally by a black social worker.	This observation was made elsewhere by other black social workers who have had Whites as their clients. Black social workers in cross-racial situations have to face the challenge of having to deal with embedded racial attitudes by being professional; they should not take things personally.
E	I saw one [W]hite client a long time ago, I am not sure if this cultural, they always present themselves as above [B]lack people. They come to you seeking for help and they attempt to show you how you should help serve him/her.	The impression that this respondent has of white clients is based on the one client they had a long time ago. Be that as it may, the respondent was able to notice the arrogance of white clients that other black social workers have noticed. It is possible that the respondent used her previous experiences with a white client to arrive at the response that she gave.
F	I cannot pick one that is standing out.	This is one respondent who is cultureblind. She is "not into culture", she sees people as people outside of cultural context. Her view of black clients is also outside the cultural context.
G	There are no cultural issues among [W]hites except [that] the support system is not comparable to Africans.	Black and white clients are not affected by culture, they exist outside of culture, i.e. they are acultural.
H	Institutionalizing aged parents and children who might be mentally retarded does not present cultural problems for [W]hite people. They view it as an alternative way of caring for their aged parents and [for] children who may be disabled in one way or another.	This is one of the things with which black families have cultural problems; for them it signifies failure to take care of one's aged parent and it is frowned upon in an African setting. The fact that an institution might be having professional caregivers is immaterial among Africans.
I	Death among Whites mainly involves the immediate family. Major decisions about an individual are taken by that individual without involving others. Marriage involves mainly two people and is legal as against customary.	Whites own themselves, their decisions, their lives. They live as individuals, they are not communal. They do not have a lot of rituals surrounding death and the burial of the deceased. They believe in the law/legality of things.
J	My clients are basically the same, the only difference is language, I talk to them direct[,] while with Sotho I use an interpreter. Otherwise they are the same.	The respondent does not recognise the impact of culture in the lives of clients. Her view is that clients are acultural.

Table 6.19 shows that the respondents tended to compare blacks and whites on cultural issues. This is what respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent A said, *“Probing skills with whites are not important because once you have rapport with them, they are honest and direct even with personal issues. Whites do not have as many taboos as black people have.”* Respondent B said, *“They come to the office and get to the point; they are very open and direct even with personal things. Counseling and therapy is easier with them compared to black clients. They are concerned with the quality of service they get.”* The previous table shows that respondents alluded to the fact that black clients are not open and direct about personal problems, social workers therefore need more probing skills to get to the core of the problem. White clients who approach a social worker know exactly how to present their problems and there is no need for the social worker to attempt to read between the lines.

There is a sense in which white clients are more individualistic than their black counterparts who tend to live communally. This is what respondent I had to say in this regard, *“Death among Whites mainly involves immediate family members; major decisions about an individual are taken by that individual without involving others; marriage involves two people and is legal as against customary.”* This respondent indicated that White clients generally are individualistic as compared to black clients who tend to be communal in the manner in which they conduct their lives. Social workers who practise cross-culturally should therefore be informed by the clients’ culture in deciding the extent to which family members can be utilised as a support system in the clients’ problem situation.

There are cultural differences between blacks and whites when it comes to institutionalisation of family members. Respondent H had this to say about institutionalisation, *“Institutionalizing aged parents and children who might be mentally retarded does not present cultural problems for white people. They view it as an alternative way of caring for their aged parents and children who may be disabled in one way or another”.* In a black community, institutionalising family members is frowned upon.

The attitudes that are identified by black social workers who have had white clients are that Whites at first are reluctant to be attended to by black social workers and can also be arrogant in the process. This is what some respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent D: *"For a social worker in this country, both cross-racial and cross-cultural competences are important. Most whites are negative to[wards] a black social worker; they do not trust that they can be assisted professionally by a black social worker"*. Respondent E said, *"I saw one white client a long time ago, I am not sure if this is cultural, they always present themselves as above black people. They come to you seeking ... help and they attempt to show you how you should help them."* Goodman (1973) alludes to the problems experienced by black social workers who have white clients; such as issues of transference and counter-transference; and the perceived professional inability of black social workers to handle white clients effectively. Social workers should be trained to handle racial dynamics in clinical situations through appropriate training programmes and workshops to enhance cultural and racial competencies.

There is also a sense in which some (white) respondents did not think that Whites had any culture worth mentioning. Their views suggest that Whites are culture-less; this is what they had to say in this regard: Respondent F: *"I cannot pick one that is standing out."* Respondent G said, *"There are no cultural issues among Whites except [that] the support system is not comparable to Africans."* Respondent J said, *"My clients are basically the same, the only difference is language, and I talk to them direct while with Sotho I use an interpreter. Otherwise they are the same."* The respondents who said this were white; it could mean that they were not aware of the cultural issues that exist within their own culture and race. The researcher's view is that it would be unlikely for these respondents to be culturally sensitive to other cultural groups if they are not sensitive to their own cultural dynamics. The researcher expected white respondents to refer to the fact that there are a number of different cultures among Whites and that they also need to have their cultural heritage taken into account in social work casework

practice. The researcher does not think that all white people share the same view of the world.

Responses to the above table suggest the need for social workers in practice to receive training in cultural issues and social work practice. Gudykunst *et al.* (1977) have suggested methods that can be used to train people to function effectively in different cultures, e.g. the intellectual approach to cross-cultural training. This approach emphasises the cognitive understanding of people's culture, customs, traditions, history, and religious and spiritual orientations. Another approach is the behavioural approach to cross-cultural training. The main idea underlying this approach is that trainees should learn the skills necessary to behave appropriately in another culture. In the researcher's view, these are some of the approaches that can be used to assist social workers to be cross-culturally effective.

#### **6.8.7 Cultural issues and worker reaction**

Findings on cultural issues and how the respondents reacted to these issues are presented in Table 6.20.

**Table 6.20: Cultural issues and worker reaction**

Respondent	Ancestors	Witchcraft	Polygamy	Traditional Healing	Initiation School	Husband As head	Role of Women in decision making	Punctuality	Reaction	General remarks
A	yes	yes	yes	Yes	yes	yes	Passive	no	accept	These issues are not foreign to black respondents.
B	yes	yes	yes	Yes	yes	yes	Passive	no	Accept	Not foreign to blacks
C	yes	yes	yes	Yes	not always	yes	Passive	yes	Acknowledge	Not foreign to blacks.
D	yes	yes	yes	Yes	no response	yes	Passive	No	accept but unprepared to handle.	This is a challenge to training.
E	yes	yes	yes	Yes	yes	yes	active	yes	Training did not prepare us along the lines of African experiences.	Training should incorporate these issues to ensure cultural competence.
F	yes	yes	yes	Yes	no	yes	Rural women passive, urban active	yes	I put aside my feelings and accept.	This could mean they ignore the client's cultural self.
G	yes	yes	yes	No	no	yes	White joint decision. Black subservient	No (as long as they arrive; they do not have watches)	They are religious and also believe in traditions. I thought these are different things. I ignore witchcraft. Whites [more] punctual than blacks.	Respondent sees contradictions in the belief system and ignores some of the beliefs. In time keeping whites are more organized.
H	yes	yes	yes	Yes	no	yes	Active and passive	no	I accept diversity	Response is split between urban and rural clients.
I	yes	yes	Yes	Yes	no	yes	Passive	yes	Difficult to understand, I do not work with these issues.	Clear avoidance of cultural issues.
J	yes	yes		Yes	No	yes	Passive	no	I do not understand I just listen. Sometimes I refer clients to colleagues who might understand these.	Lack of cultural competence and undue reliance on referral of clients.

All the respondents presented in Table 6.20 had clients who brought up the following issues: initiation schools, traditional healing, ancestors, witchcraft, polygamy, and husband as head of the family. What this means is that the world-view of African clients is partly informed by these issues. Social workers who are not cross-culturally literate might have problems relating to some of the cultural issues that clients may present to social workers. Literature reviewed in this study shows that African clients indeed deal with such issues as part and parcel of their lives.

Authors such as Mbiti (1990), Hammond-Tooke (1974), Magubane (1998), Mukenge (2002), Mberengwa (2003), Gyekye (1995) and Kamalu (1995) have written about the beliefs and practices, as constituting the fundamentals of the African world-view. On the implications of world-views for social work education, Ow (1991:48) opines that the fundamental assumption is that world-views will inevitably influence perceptions in problem definition and problem resolution. Understanding world-views is an important key to understanding the nature of the individual's psychological outlook and his/her problem-solving approach. Mekada (1999) argues that the theoretical foundations of established social work practice models do not reflect the diversity of world-views and cultural values found among African clients. The Eurocentric nature of the underlying knowledge base of social work continues to assume that this knowledge is universally applicable. Mekada (1999:107-108) raises fundamental questions when he asks, "Why are social work theories and methods of intervention developed mainly by the dominant culture seen as the only legitimate social work designs for African people?" Speicher (2004:443) emphasises the importance of cultural awareness when he asks, "Is it too hard for us truly to step out of our worldview and enter another person's worldview without value judgment when the values are different, without pathologizing that which is different? These are questions which will occupy us for some time to come." In the researcher's view, African clients believe in these things to varying degrees, regardless of their level of education.

Respondents' reactions to these issues vary; some accept that clients believe in these things and try to cope. Respondents A, B and C accept and acknowledge these issues.

Respondent *D* “accept[s] but [is] unprepared to handle these issues”. Respondent *E* commented that “*Training did not prepare us along the lines of African experiences.*” These respondents are pointing to the need for training to incorporate cultural and world-view studies in the training of social workers. The initiative by the South African Council for Social Service Professions to introduce the continuing education programme for practitioners must also incorporate training that has to do with different client world-views and their implication for practice.

Others accept but are unprepared to handle clients who raise such issues. White respondents tend to accept the African cultural idiosyncrasies, even though they find some issues difficult to understand and to deal with. This is what they had to say: Respondent *F*: “*I put my feelings aside and accept*”. Respondent *G* said, “*They are religious and also believe in traditions. I thought these are different things. I ignore witchcraft... .*” Respondent *H* commented, “*I accept diversity.*” Respondent *I* found it “*difficult to understand*” and added: “*I do not work with these issues.*” Respondent *J* said, “*I do not understand, I just listen, sometimes I refer clients to colleagues who might understand these.*”

The respondents indicated that their caseloads are both multicultural and multiracial. Caseworkers have clients from all the cultural groups, racial groups and language groups living in the Limpopo Province. Respondents had problems related to language, cultural and racial differences. Some dealt with these problems by adopting a culture-blind approach to casework, by which they focused on the problem without acknowledging its cultural dimension. Some respondents dealt with language differences by using interpreters or through referrals, while others learned the languages spoken by clients. Racial attitudes were also reported, mainly by African respondents in instances where they dealt with white clients. Caseworkers dealt with these racial problems by building a relationship with clients.

The following were identified as some of the cultural elements to be taken into consideration in casework among African clients: Theory is not always applicable in

reality, particularly when theory is not culture sensitive. African clients do not respond well to therapy and counselling because therapeutic and counselling models are not culture sensitive and also because Africans are not open about their personal problems. There is therefore a need for caseworkers to develop models of counselling and therapy that are inclusive of the African world-view and are based on their practical experiences. Cultural barriers constitute a significant hindrance to the provision of services such as counselling and therapy. These issues were not as foreign to black respondents as they were to white respondents. The problem is that social work training did not prepare them to deal with these issues in clinical situations.

## **6.9 AFRICAN CULTURAL ELEMENTS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN ADDRESSING THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS OF THE CASEWORK SITUATION**

This section aims to identify African cultural issues that have to be taken into account when addressing the following components of the casework situation: person, problem, client support systems and the casework process. This was done by asking the respondents the following questions:

- What is your notion of the person?
- What, in your experience, do clients present mostly as problems that they need assistance with? I.e. do clients present psycho-emotional problems to social workers or material problems?
- Who else do clients go to when they have problems before they come to the social worker?
- What has been your experience in the application of the casework process with African clients?

Tables 6.21 to 5.24 present data based on the above questions.

### **6.9.1 Awareness and application of theories of personality and casework models**

Findings with regard to respondents' awareness of and application of theories of personality and casework models of intervention are presented in Table 6.21.

**Table 6.21: Awareness and application of theories of personality and casework models**

RESPONDENTS	THEORIES	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Have to refer to theories of personality when you diagnose and when you are applying the problem solving process. In practice you have to visit theory.	Appreciates the value of theories together with the practical experience that one gains with time.
B	There are times when one deviates from theory, when one has to tell the client what they must do instead of allowing them to take their own decisions. Clients do not always do what theory anticipates they will do in a clinical situation	Sometimes clients might cause the worker to deviate from theory by refusing to take responsibility in making decisions for themselves. The client-centred approach is not always applicable to all clients.
C	Theories and experience are used to assess the client. Some theories are not applicable in practice. E.g. the client centered approach, clients do not want to make decisions you must tell them what to do. Otherwise they do not feel assisted, if they have to decide.	Some theories are not culture sensitive. Client-centred theory would be applicable in cultures where an individual owns herself/himself but not in communal cultures.
D	The biopsychic model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs are applicable across cultures, I use those to assess people. Client centered approach does not fit the African client.	The respondent is sensitive to the relationship between theories and cultures. Some theories are universal; others are particular to cultural situations.
E	Theories help, once you are out there a person is a person. The psycho social theory is helpful to understand the clients' psychological and social environment.	The psychosocial approach is applicable across cultures. Workers can use it in the African context to assess clients.
F	I do not have a theory that I am working with which I can pinpoint. Maybe it is there I did not give it a name yet. I look at a person as a whole and his functioning.	This is an example of those professional people who work with clients without linking their practice to a theoretical framework.
G	I do not focus on the person deeply; I focus on what he needs to capacitate him.	Some social workers focus on what clients need on the material level; they avoid the psycho-emotional aspects of the problem.
H	Theory is useful in practice, you can see it in some clients' problems, and they enact what theory says. I need to be updated though on the latest theories of behavior.	This points to the need for continuing education of social workers, to revive in them the link between theory and practice.
I	Those things form the basis, foundation for practice; you do not always realize when you apply them. They are the foundation. Sometimes I go with the flow, but I always keep theories in mind.	There are some workers who go with the flow and rely on experience to the total exclusion of theory. Other workers, like this respondent, are keenly aware of the value of theory.
J	Practice is a different ball game. I do not think that theory works in reality. You have to work with the real person, his needs and not with your theory. When you start working you apply theory but as time goes on you find it is not practical and you forget about it.	This is an example of a worker who has totally abandoned theory. This respondent does not believe in the value of theory and is probably guided by practical experience.

Table 6.21 shows a range of responses, from those who believe in the value of theory to those who have totally abandoned the theoretical foundations of social work practice. There are also respondents who sometimes use theory, but not all the time. Five out of ten respondents believe in the value of theory in social work practice. They have this to

say: Respondent A: *"You have to refer to theories of personality when you diagnose and when you are applying the problem solving process. In practice you have to visit theory."* Respondent D: *"The biopsychic model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs are applicable across cultures; I use those to assess clients. They are the foundation. Sometimes I go with the flow, but I always keep theories in mind."* Respondent E: *"Theories help, once you are out there, a person is a person. The psycho-social theory is helpful to understand the clients' psychological and social environment."* Respondent H: *"Theory is useful in practice, you can see it in some clients' problems, they enact what theory says."* Respondent I: *"Those things form the basis, foundation for practice; you do not always realize when you apply them."* The challenge here is to make sure that relevant theories are applied in helping clients. The social worker is supposed to know theories that are applicable to specific cultural groups and those that are not culture sensitive. Responses in this table reflect that the biopsychic model, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the psychosocial theory are applicable to African clients. Respondents have also identified the client-centred approach as inapplicable to African clients.

Respondent B said, *"There are times when one deviates from theory, when one has to tell the client what they must do instead of allowing them to take their own decisions. Clients do not always do what theory anticipates they will do in a clinical situation."* This, in the researcher's view, means that social workers must always realise that the client and his/her problem are more important than a theory. It does not always follow that theory will always accurately predict client behaviour. Social workers should therefore use theory as a guide to practice, bearing in mind that it may never or at any stage yield complete information about the client and his/her problem situation. Social workers should also be sensitive to those moments in the African context when the client's behaviour may inform or enrich theory. The researcher is suggesting here that, instead of theory informing practice, practice can also inform theory in the African context, or the two can simultaneously inform each other. As respondent C suggests: *"Theories and practice experience are used to assess the client."* Here it is important to state that, in the African context, the choice should not be between experience in practice and theory,

it should rather be the appropriate application of both theory and experience in practice. This is important in the researcher's view, because South African social work practice realistically is still at the stage where it should be creating its own theoretical base of social work and casework practice in a multicultural milieu.

There is also a view that some theories are not applicable to the African context. Respondent C states: "*Sometimes clients might cause the worker to deviate from theory by refusing to take responsibility in making decisions [...] Some theories are not applicable in practice, e.g. the client centered approach, clients do not want to make decisions you must tell them what to do. Otherwise they do not feel assisted if they have to decide themselves.*" The client-centred approach, amongst other things, assumes that the client must be afforded a chance to make decisions about his/her life. When African clients come to the social worker, they expect the worker to tell them what to do, to be directive and prescriptive. If the worker does not do that, they do not feel assisted. Social workers must therefore be careful not to choose or apply theories that do not fit the clients' ability to be part and parcel of the helping process. Theories that are above the realm of the clients must be avoided.

Another view expressed by respondent J is that "*Practice is a different ball game. I do not think that theory works in reality. You have to work with the real person, his needs and not with your theory. When you start working you apply theory but as time goes on, you find it is not practical and you forget about it.*" This is an example of a social worker who has completely abandoned theory in favour of experience gained in practice. This view is well represented in the field where social workers are more exposed to practical experiences than to theoretical precepts of the profession. The problem, according to the researcher, is that social workers no longer have time to read and update themselves with regard to theoretical matters once they have graduated into practice, they. Respondent H confirms this by stating that "*...I need to be updated on the latest theories of behavior.*" The South African Council of Social Service Professions has diagnosed this situation well and has responded by initiating a programme of

compulsory continuing education for social workers in practice. This initiative by the Council will hopefully reassert the position of the role of theory in social work practice.

### 6.9.2 The nature of problems mostly presented by clients

Findings on the nature of the problems mostly experienced by clients are presented in Table 6.22.

**Table 6.22: The nature of problems most frequently presented by clients**

RESPONDENTS	PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS	MATERIAL PROBLEMS	GENERAL REMARKS
A	They are present but not predominant.	Predominantly it is material needs that clients bring, because of the economic situation in the country.	It could be that this reflects the unemployment in South Africa.
B	Approximately half the number of clients present psycho emotional problems.	Approximately half the number of clients present material problems.	Workers must be ready to address both categories of problems.
C	Clients associate social workers with material assistance and nothing else.	Mostly clients will present material problems. They do not understand therapy.	Clients do not seem to know that social workers can also provide counselling and not just material services.
D	Present but not predominant, mainly relationship problems. They probably see traditional healers for the psycho emotional needs.	Clients come for material assistance mostly followed by emotional problems.	Survival needs are more urgent than emotional needs. For psychological needs they might be seeing withdoctors or healers.
E	Clients come for material assistance more these days than for professional services.	Due to unemployment things have changed, material needs are more than psycho emotional needs.	Caseloads to some extent reflect the consequences of unemployment.
F	Psycho emotional problems, mainly relationship problems and statutory services. Counseling is high on the list of things I have to do. 60% of the clients come for psycho emotional problems.	Present, but not predominant at this stage. Marital problems and HIV/AIDS cases increase the counseling load. 40% of the clients are looking for material assistance.	Relationship problems and AIDS cases are the predominant forms of psycho-emotional problems that social workers deal with.
G	They predominantly come for basic needs. Mainly professional people would come for counseling services.	Most of them come for basic needs. Professional people come in for professional services since they are mostly moved above the basic needs level.	This in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
H	Though there is need for psycho emotional services, we mostly dispense material assistance.	Material problems are predominant; we dish out food all the time.	The government is focusing on more grants without exploring ways of encouraging grant recipients to exit welfare. Welfare budgets are biased in favour of social security grants.
I	Most white clients present psycho emotional problems. Most black clients present material problems.	Most black clients present material problems. Most white clients present psycho emotional problems.	The types of problems presented here indicate that Blacks have more basic survival needs than white clients.
J	Material needs must be met first before one can consider psycho emotional problems.	Mostly material assistance, people are dying of hunger. You have to assist at that level first before you do counseling.	Material assistance seems to be the place to begin before addressing psycho-emotional needs.

According to the responses shown in Table 6.22, six out of ten respondents indicated that clients mostly need material assistance as opposed to psycho-emotional interventions. Respondents reported as follows in this regard: Respondent A: *"Predominantly it is material needs that clients bring, because of the economic situation in the country."* Respondent C: *"Mostly clients will present material problems. They do not understand therapy."* Respondent D: *"Clients come for material assistance mostly followed by emotional problems".* Respondent E: *"Due to unemployment things have changed, material needs are more [urgent] than psycho emotional needs."* Respondent H: *"Material problems are predominant; we dish out food all the time."* Respondent J: *"Mostly material assistance, people are dying of hunger. You have to assist at that level first before you do counseling."* From these responses one can conclude that social workers mostly address the survival needs of the clients.

Respondents A, C, D, E, H, and J attest that psycho-emotional problems are there but are not predominant compared to material problems. This is what they indicated: Respondent A: *"They are present but not predominant."* Respondent C: *"Clients associate social workers with material assistance and nothing else".* Respondent D: *"Psycho emotional problems are present but not predominant, mainly relationship problems. They probably see traditional healers for the psycho emotional needs".* Respondent E: *"Clients come for material assistance more these days than for professional services."* Respondent H: *"Though there is need for psycho emotional services, we mostly dispense material assistance".* The preponderance of material assistance cases is an indicator of the levels of poverty and the state of unemployment in South Africa, which the country needs to address.

It is important to note here that, though the needs of clients are mainly material in nature, social workers are also presented with psycho-emotional problems that they are required to address. It is when social workers deal with psycho-emotional problems that they really need to be familiar with issues related to the African world-view. In the researcher's view, dispensing material assistance, which is what mostly occupies social workers, is not really rendering professional service. The respondents in this study are

therefore saying that social workers do work that is suited for auxiliary social workers. It is important for professional social workers to rededicate their time and energies to rendering professional services, which primarily involve work with the clients' psycho-emotional aspects of being. The provision of material assistance, though important, remains the secondary responsibility of the social workers.

Mainly professional people would come for counselling services. But cultural factors have a role to play in the type of service clients would require. Respondent I pointed out that *"Most white clients present psycho emotional problems. Most black clients present material problems"*. Elsewhere in this study, respondents indicated that white clients are more open about personal problems compared to Blacks and that they respond well to therapy and counselling. Respondent C, above, stated that Blacks do not understand therapy. The researcher's view is that it would be difficult indeed for black clients to understand and even appreciate the value of therapy, because most of it is couched in or premised on Western cultural paradigms that are alien to the African psyche. There is therefore a need for social workers to begin to appreciate the possibility of developing models of counselling that will be inclusive of the African experience and world-view.

### **6.9.3 Sources of assistance utilised by clients in addition to social workers**

The responses of the respondents regarding additional sources of assistance utilised by clients are illustrated in Table 6.23.

**Table 6.23: Sources of assistance utilised by clients in addition to social workers**

RESPONDENTS	WHO ELSE	GENERAL REMARKS
A	Police and family members.	When police threaten to arrest husbands, wives withdraw the complaint. Family members are not always objective in advising a family member.
B	Family members, pastors, tribal authorities and traditional healers.	The worker should always remember that she/he is a member of the treatment team put together by the client, particularly when dealing with African clients. This might even confuse the client; the advice offered by different members of this team might be too much and contradictory.
C	Traditional healers, church and different helping institutions.	The worker should be aware that he/she always shares a client with many other people and professions. The final choice as to where they think their problems might be solved should be left to the clients.
D	Extended family, traditional doctor, faith healer church, and a friend.	It might be important to ask who else has been consulted and what they were told, in order to be able to begin where the client is. Almost all clients will begin at home.
E	Family members, people rely on the support from family members. They also consult their pastor, traditional healers, police and civic members.	Family and extended family are mentioned consistently as the first port of call when clients have problems. It is important to note that family members can be supportive of the clients but they are not trained to deal with problems professionally.
F	Family members and tribal chiefs try to solve the problem before it is presented to the social worker. Sometimes the problem is brought to the social worker too late. Family members are not trained to deal with problems.	Family members and tribal chiefs play a role in supporting people who have problems, but the fact remains they are not professionally trained to handle certain problems; the sooner they involve the professionals the better.
G	Within the African culture they go to their families. White families will go to the social worker. White families do not go to social workers and psychologists easily, it is viewed as a sign of not coping, and it is a scandal.	Some white clients and professional black people prefer to be seen by private social workers rather than the ones that work for public agencies. Seeing a social worker or a psychologist is seen as stigmatising these clients as failing to cope.
H	Magistrates, clinics, pastors and they get referred to social workers. Sometimes clients do not want to be seen coming to social workers, because of the stigma attached to being on welfare.	There are some clients who prefer to be seen at home to avoid being seen queuing in the social worker's office, particularly educated people. Unfortunately there are still too few private social workers to cater for this category of client.
I	Families and extended families, basically extended families.	Reliance on the extended family is more applicable to black clients than to Whites.
J	They come to us social workers because we market our organization.	This is rare but encouraging; most clients start with family and spread out to other people and / or organisations.

Table 6.23 shows that six respondents out of ten indicated that clients mostly go to their family members. This is what respondents had to say in this regard: Respondent A *“Police and family members.”* Respondent B: *“Family members, pastors, tribal*

*authorities and traditional healers.*" Respondent D: *"Extended family, traditional doctor, faith healers, and a friend."* Respondent E: *"Family members, people rely on the support from family members; they also consult the pastor, traditional healers, police and civic members."* Respondent I: *"Families; basically extended families."* Respondent F stated that *"[f]amily members and tribal chiefs try to solve the problem before it is presented to the social worker. Sometimes the problem is brought to the social worker too late. Family members are not trained to deal with problems"*. Respondent B: *"Family members, pastors, tribal authorities and traditional healers."* Respondent D: *"Extended family, traditional doctor, faith healers, and a friend."* Respondent E: *"Family members, people rely on the support from family members; they also consult the pastor, traditional healers, police and civic members."* Respondent I: *"Families; basically extended families."* Respondent F stated that *"[f]amily members and tribal chiefs try to solve the problem before it is presented to the social worker. Sometimes the problem is brought to the social worker too late. Family members are not trained to deal with problems."* Respondent G; *"Within the African culture they go to their families. White families will go to the social worker."*

In the African setting this shows that family, both nuclear and extended, plays an important role in the lives of African clients. This view is supported by Pacheco *et al.* (2003:52) when they opine that family is the primary source of social support, providing information, material resources and emotional help to cope with problems in many non-western cultures. In fact, in some cultural groups the responsibility of providing support for problems rests mainly on the head of the family. Several studies have pointed out the importance of being bound by family ties for individuals in these cultures rather than using social services. Family ties ensure stronger support than reliance on welfare agencies. Daniels (2001) states that the social worker must view the family, including the extended family, as a source of support when children, parents and spouses have problems.

White families do not go to social workers and psychologists easily; it is viewed as a sign of not coping, and it is seen as a scandal. Respondent H indicated this in saying:

*“Sometimes clients do not want to be seen coming to social workers, because of the stigma attached to being on welfare.”* Respondents further explained that professional people also do not prefer to be seen in the office, they would normally ask whether the social worker could see them at home after hours. They also indicated that, whilst black clients view family as their first port of call when they have problems, Whites will try to solve the problems themselves without resorting to family members. The family ties are stronger in the black community than they are in the white community. Social workers working with these population groups should be aware of this cultural dynamic. Respondent F cautions social workers to realise that, while family members might be important sources of support for some clients, families are not trained to deal with problems and they might delay professional intervention.

Four respondents (B, C, D and E) also indicated that, in addition to resorting to family members, clients also go to traditional doctors/healers. This, in the researcher’s view, is another source of support utilised by African clients in particular. In African societies, deaths, divorces, accidents and psychological problems are often attributed to witchcraft and require traditional healing. Whether this is real or a figment of the clients’ imagination, the point is that traditional healing and witchcraft play a role in the lives of Africans. Other people to whom clients go for help include pastors, the police, civic members and tribal authorities. There is therefore a need for the social worker to know these sources of client support and to find ways of working with them.

#### **6.9.4 Experiences in the application of the casework process with African clients**

Findings on the application of the casework process with African clients (intake study, diagnosis, treatment and evaluation) are presented in Table 6.24.

**Table 6.24: Experiences in the application of the casework process with African clients**

RESPONDENTS	FOLLOW THE PROCESS	DO NOT FOLLOW THE PROCESS	GENERAL REMARKS
A		When one is still new, you follow the process. After that one resorts to short term interventions due to [the] large caseloads we carry	The process of casework is not fully implemented in practice; workers rely on 'practice wisdom.'
B		In practice intake, study, diagnosis and intervention happens in one session. Short term intervention is preferred due to the type of clients we have, cannot afford long sessions	Short-term intervention is done to avoid financial problems that clients may have if they have to come for a number of sessions.
C	Practitioners follow the process of casework without being aware; at the end of it all they find all the steps of the process have been followed.		The process is followed in a haphazard manner. Through workshops and continuing education, workers should be able to follow the processes consciously.
D		Following the process is not really what clients want. Clients want their problems sorted out on the spot. When one follows the process they do not feel like they have been assisted. They think the process is a delaying strategy to avoid helping them.	The short-term approach seems to be preferred in dealing with most clients. Clients do not know about the process, they want to be told what they must do. They want answers.
E		Most of the cases that we deal with have this one long interview that takes care of everything. I see most of my clients once or twice and that is all.	The process of helping should be adapted to suit the type of clients that workers deal with; a poor African client.
F		At times I do not, due to the large caseloads that social workers carry. Some cases have to do with documentation and do not need counseling.	The dynamics of the case should inform the worker whether or not there is a need for long therapeutic sessions.
G		It depends on the problem presented; there are issues that need long term intervention. Methods have to be combined to address problems, if there [are] similar issues, community projects should be done. There are too many clients; casework may not be able to cope on its own.	The application of the process depends partly on the nature of the problem and the client's ability to present the problem. An integrated methods approach is suggested here for big caseloads.
H		It depends on the problems presented, some are short term and some require that we should go into therapy. Clients want their problems solved now.	The tendency is towards short-term interventions. White clients are likely to be dealt with on a long-term basis.
I		Most of the cases are short term; most of my clients do not have transport for sessions.	For practical reasons, some clients cannot afford long-term sessions.
J	Most of the time clients have long sessions		This depends on the problem dynamics.

Table 6.24 shows that two respondents follow the process of casework with their clients. In this regard, Respondent C said, *“Practitioners follow the process of casework, without being aware; at the end of it all they find all the steps of the process have been followed.”* Respondent J said, *“Most of the time clients have long sessions.”* Quantitatively, only 20% (two) of the practitioners who were interviewed followed the process of casework. This is a clear indication to the researcher that very few social workers follow the processes, theories and models of the casework method of social work practice.

Eight respondents did not follow the casework process with their clients. Quantitatively this means that 80% of the practitioners interviewed do not follow the casework process. When asked to explain this tendency they cited a variety of reasons, such as the large caseloads that they carry. This is what they said in this regard: Respondent A: *“When one is still new, you follow the process. After that, one resorts to short term interventions due to large caseloads ... .”* Respondent F: *“At times I do not, due to the large caseloads that social workers carry. Some cases have to do with documentation and do not need counseling.”* Respondent G: *“There are too many clients; casework may not be able to cope on its own.”* The researcher’s observation is that, though caseloads may partly account for the abandonment of the casework process by the social workers, it is not the real reason. The main problem in social work practice is that social workers have abandoned the theoretical underpinnings of the profession. They have tended to rely on practical experience that is not based on a sound conceptual framework of practice. Very few of them indicated a theoretical understanding of the process. Manganyi (1991) observed a similar trend with clinical psychologists, his sentiments are as follows: *“... the majority of the clinicians lack a definite theoretical basis of their practice. Psychologists suffer from an absolute lack of depth. If you ask a clinical psychologist: what is your theoretical orientation, they will quickly say eclectic, when they have no clue what the word means.”* In the case of social workers, the researcher would say that social workers in the field lack theoretical depth, and have a limited theoretical basis, to their social work practice. They function without a conceptual framework.

Another reason advanced by the respondents is that they do not follow the process because clients do not need it, as respondents B and D point out. Respondent B: *"In practice, intake, study, diagnosis, and intervention happens in one session. Short term intervention is preferred due to the type of clients we have, they cannot afford long sessions."* Respondent B: *"Following the process is not what the clients want. Clients want their problems sorted out on the spot. When one follows the process they do not feel like they have been assisted. They think the process is a delaying strategy to avoid helping them."* One wonders whether the clients have to prefer the process for the worker to apply it, and one again wonders also whether clients really want to be assisted in a manner that is not methodical and professional. To the researcher this is another lame excuse advanced to cover up the lack of depth and professionalism among social workers. There is a sense of worker burnout that the researcher observed in the field.

Due to the problem of large caseloads, respondents tend to deal with clients on a short-term basis, as indicated by respondents E, H and I. Respondent E: *"Most of the cases we deal with have this one long interview that takes care of everything. I see most my clients once or twice and that is all."* Respondent H: *"Clients want their problems solved now."* Respondent I: *"Most of the cases are short term; most of my clients do not have transport for sessions."* This shows that research is needed to develop short-term intervention techniques that will not compromise the theoretical basis of professional social work practice.

The practice situation where the theoretical framework is undermined poses a serious challenge to the profession. Universities and professional boards should work out a mechanism whereby social workers should be obliged to pursue continuing professional development even after they have graduated. This will prevent the situation referred to by respondent A who pointed out that *"When one is still new, you follow the process. After that one resorts to short-term interventions, due to [the] large caseloads we carry."* Very little if any theoretical professional development takes place after social workers complete their studies at universities.

What respondents are pointing to in this study is that caseworkers are not guided by theory in their practice of casework. They tend to rely on their practice experience for dealing with clients. Respondents cite a number of reasons for deviating from theory, such as the ever increasing caseloads that they carry and the fact that there are clients who are not amenable to most of the theories of social casework practice. When caseworkers follow theory, clients do not feel helped. There is also a view among respondents that practice is a different ball game, it does not work in reality. Respondents recommend short-term intervention strategies with African clients, since African clients want their problems solved here and now; they do not like long-term interventions that follow the problem-solving process that social caseworkers prefer.

## **6.10 CONCLUSION**

Data in this study yielded the following findings: social work training lacks culture sensitivity, students were not exposed to content on culture, race and ethnicity; social caseworkers lack cultural competence even though they have clients from different cultural backgrounds; the African world-view must be taken into account when practising casework among Africans. This, amongst other things, consists of beliefs in the ancestors, traditional healing, witchcraft, the practice of polygamy and a communal way of life. These findings provide the basis for suggesting that there is a need for social casework training to prepare future casework practitioners to be culturally competent within the South African context, so that caseworkers can serve the different cultural groups in South Africa effectively.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a discussion of the following: the overview of the study; overview of the findings; conclusions and recommendations. Literature reviewed in this study shows that, in the developing countries, social work training is mostly based on First World concepts, ideas, models and theories. The Eurocentric training programmes that are prevalent in South African universities produced social caseworkers who are not culturally competent. The results of this study indicate that for social work, and social casework in particular, to be relevant to the African client there is a need for social work training to incorporate African cultural issues that constitute the African world-view. The incorporation of African cultural perspectives in the teaching of social casework will produce social caseworkers who will be able to practice across the cultures that are found in South Africa. The supporting courses that social work students study, for example psychology and sociology, must also incorporate the African's cultural perspectives, in addition to the standard Eurocentric view of reality. This chapter concludes by suggesting ways in which social casework training and practice can be made relevant to the African cultural environment.

#### **7.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

This study has dealt with African cultural aspects in the training and practice of the social casework method of social work practice. The objectives of the study were to determine, from caseworkers, whether training equipped them to be culturally competent; to investigate whether social caseworkers were culturally competent to render casework services to African clients; and to identify cultural elements that should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients.

In the study, the research design that was applied was the exploratory design, because of the scarcity of studies of this nature in South Africa. Very little research has been

conducted on the role of African culture in social casework training and practice in South Africa. Mouton and Marais (1988) state that exploratory research may be conducted by means of a review of literature and also by an investigation involving people who have practical experience of the problem to be studied. In this study, social caseworkers who were trained in the Western models of casework practice and were practising social casework with African clients were the subject of investigation. The study was qualitative in nature.

The sampling procedure that was utilised was purposive sampling. Qualified social workers that had been practising casework with African clients for at least five years or more formed the sample for this study; the sample size was ten respondents. A semi-structured interview schedule was used as the data-collecting instrument. Data were analysed thematically, as explained in Chapters 1 and 5 of this study.

### **7.3 OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS**

The study was intended to determine from the caseworkers whether their training equipped them to be culturally competent; to determine whether social caseworkers are culturally competent to render casework services to the African clients; and to identify cultural elements that should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients.

With regard to training, the study found that training did not prepare students to be culturally competent. With regard to the cultural competence of the caseworkers, the study found that caseworkers were not culturally competent. The cultural elements that should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients were identified as: beliefs in witchcraft, traditional healing, ancestors, polygamy, rituals and a communal way of living. The study found that social work training did not incorporate the African world-view and way of living, which consists of African cultural beliefs and traditions.

## **7.4 CONCLUSIONS**

Conclusions based on the findings of the study will be divided into the following categories: profile of the respondents; cultural sensitivity content in social work training; personal cultural competence of the respondents; cultural issues in social casework practice; and the African cultural issues that should be taken into account in casework practice. The discussion of findings will be followed by recommendations and conclusions.

### **7.4.1 Profile of the respondents**

The respondents' profiles were as follows: N = 10, nine (9) of whom were female. Five of the respondents (A-E) received their social work education (BASW) from historically black universities and the other five from historically white universities. Only one respondent (E) had attained a Master's degree in social work. The five black respondents spoke the following African languages: Northern Sotho (1), Tsonga (2), and Tshivenda (2). The five white respondents spoke Afrikaans. All respondents spoke English as a second language. Their employment experience in social work ranged from five to twenty years, the average being 13,7 years. Eight respondents were employed by the state Department of Social Development and two were employed by private welfare organisations in the Limpopo Province.

### **7.4.2 Cultural sensitivity content in social work training**

The findings of this study point to the fact that social work training in South Africa is deficient in that it does not incorporate content on race, ethnicity and culture. Training also did not expose students to clients from different language, racial, ethnic and cultural groups. The few respondents who had clients from different language, ethnic, cultural and racial groups had them by happenstance and not by design. There was no conscious intention on the part of the training programmes for this kind of exposure. During their practical training, students mostly dealt with clients that belonged to the same race and culture and spoke the same language. This resulted in students experiencing problems when they started working as professionals and were expected

to show competence in dealing with cultural, racial, ethnic and language dynamics in social casework service delivery.

Some of the problems that emanated from lack of culture sensitivity content in social work training in both theory and practice education are the following:

- **Students did not get to know and to appreciate the importance of learning languages spoken by clients who belong to language groups other than the one spoken by the students.** To avoid language problems during training, students were normally assigned cases in which they spoke the same language as the client. Upon graduation students found that they had to render casework services to clients who did not share a language with them. Some of these clients insisted that the caseworker should address them in their own (client's) language. There were social workers in this study who spoke and understood only Afrikaans but had clients who did not speak Afrikaans. There also were social workers who did not speak and understand Afrikaans but had Afrikaans-speaking clients. The language problems that social workers could be expected to experience in practice should have been dealt with when they were students, particularly in their practical education. One respondent was able to learn a language with which she came in contact for the first time when she was undergoing practice education. She now speaks the language fluently and deals effectively with clients who speak that language.
- **Students did not get to know and appreciate the impact of culture and ethnicity in casework situations.** In cases of marital dispute, for example, the caseworker should be aware of a number of African cultural nuances such as the issue of polygamy and the status and role of men and women in African culture. There are various beliefs that inform the lives of African clients, such as a belief in witchcraft, the influence of the ancestors and traditional healing. These beliefs constitute a significant part of the African client's world-view, which the caseworker must take into account when dealing with African clients.

- **Students did not get to know and experience how to handle racial dynamics in casework situations.** Racial dynamics are an issue in casework practice, as Goodman (1973) points out. There are dynamics that have to be taken into account if the worker and client are from different racial groups. Goodman alludes to issues of transference and counter-transference between the worker and the client. With South Africa's turbulent history of race relations, social work training in this country cannot justifiably ignore racial issues in training and in the practice of the casework method of social work practice.

On the basis of the shortcomings of the social work training programmes cited in this study, respondents recommended that social work training programmes should include content on the different cultures, races and languages that are established in South Africa, in particular African culture. Respondents pointed out that social work students should be exposed to clients from the different cultural, ethnic, racial and language groups as part of their fieldwork training in the casework method of social work practice. Cross-cultural training approaches suggested by Gudykunst *et al.* (1977:102) that were highlighted include the following:

- **The intellectual approach to cross-cultural training.** This approach emphasises the cognitive understanding of a culture's people, customs, traditions, history, religious and spiritual orientations, art, music, institutions and values. This approach utilises lectures, readings, films and other multimedia presentations to impart information to the students.
- **The simulation approach to cross-cultural training.** This approach attempts to create an environment or situation that is as similar as possible to that of the target culture. It uses role-play as a method of instruction.
- **The self-awareness approach to cross-cultural training.** This approach assumes that the students' understanding of him- or herself will lead to an ability to adjust in another culture. Training involves issues such as previously held cultural and racial stereotypes, prejudices and biases. McPhatter (1997:4) refers to this awareness as Enlightened Consciousness, which involves a process of reorienting one's primary

world-view. It requires a radical restructuring of a well-entrenched belief system that views oneself and one's culture, including values and patterns of behaviour, as not only preferred, but clearly superior, to another's. The ultimate objective of this shift in mindset is to create a belief in and acceptance of others on the basis of equality, premised on a sense of shared humanity.

- **The cultural awareness approach to cross-cultural training.** This provides the students with culture-general information. The major idea in this approach is that, for trainees from one culture to interact with a person from another culture, they must understand who the other person is in terms of his cultural system, before they can find out who they are as individuals.
- **The behavioural approach to cross-cultural training.** The main idea underlying this approach is that the students should learn the skills necessary to behave appropriately in another culture. Appropriate behaviours are modelled. The training occurs in simulated target culture environments and students are given exercises designed to reduce anxiety and fear towards situations that are likely to be encountered in the target culture.
- **Interaction approach to cross-cultural training.** In this approach, actual interactions between students and the people of the target culture take place. This approach strives to promote awareness among students concerning the role that their cultural background, values and learned behaviours play in influencing their perceptions and interactions with others.

Pacheo *et al.* (2003) suggested areas of knowledge to be incorporated into the core curriculum. They include the following: culture of the clients (history, traditions, values, beliefs, family systems, folklore and artistic expressions), impact of culture on behaviour, attitudes and help-seeking behaviours. Other areas suggested are the role of language and communication styles; the impact of social service policies on cultural groups and the resources provided by natural networks.

### **7.4.3 Personal cultural competence of the respondents**

This section presents conclusions about what respondents think about their own ability to deal with African clients in a culturally competent manner. Cultural competence, according to Diller (1999:10), is the ability to effectively provide services cross-culturally. It is a set of congruent behaviours, skills and attitudes that come together among professionals to enable those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. This section therefore will discuss, amongst other things, the respondents' knowledge of African culture and their ability to incorporate African culture in their framework of social casework practice.

As this study indicates, social work training in South Africa did not incorporate African cultural issues in the curriculum. Social workers interviewed in this study indicated that they were not culturally competent, as their training was not true to the practice situation in which they found themselves. Their training prepared them to practise within their own racial, cultural, ethnic and language environment. Siegel (1994:48) opines that the single challenge that faces social service delivery involves the inability of the therapists to provide culturally responsive forms of treatment. Although social workers are taught to recognise and respect ethnic and racial diversity in social work education and practice, they usually fail to integrate the knowledge of cultural differences when dealing with clients.

In terms of knowledge of African culture, respondents who were not Africans reported that their knowledge of African culture was inadequate. Diller (1999:136) suggests that one should do something about it if one feels anxious about lack of knowledge about the clients' culture, by way of research prior to meeting with them. It is not realistic to expect to become expert on culture and all its diverse aspects; it is better to ask questions about a person's culture. For example, "I have not worked with many clients from your community and I feel that I do not know as much about your culture as I would like. I would appreciate your assistance in explaining certain things I may not understand as you refer to them". In the process of helping clients, caseworkers should be willing to

learn some of the cultural nuances that may impact on the client-worker interface in the clinical encounter from their clients.

African respondents, who knew something about African culture by virtue of being Africans, did not incorporate their knowledge of African culture into their framework of casework practice. The possible reason for the failure of Africans to incorporate African culture in the framework of casework practice could be traceable to the fact that African intellectuals have been educated in Western ways, away from validating and affirming the cultural ways of their own people. They have imbibed Eurocentric education up to a point where they are ashamed of openly identifying with the cultural roots of their own people.

Mudimbe, a Zairean philosopher and novelist cited in Higgs and Smith (2002:101) has stated: "Africa is an invention of Europe. By this [is meant] that most of the discourse in Africa has been an extension of Western epistemology and has always been a victim of European epistemological ethnocentrism." He continued to say that this manifests "itself in the failure of Africans to understand or know themselves because of a crippling immersion, conscious or unconscious, in a European order of knowledge. A crucial issue in contemporary African intellectual practice then is the issue of how Africans can break away from an order of knowledge which apart from failing to take into account their history, culture and experience, is imperialistic in the sense that it seeks to understand pressing human problems exclusively from its own perspective, while at the same time claiming that this perspective is universal." African practitioners and researchers have an inherent responsibility to advance the implications of the African world-view in social casework practice, and to develop possible models of casework intervention in addition to the existing Eurocentric ones.

In terms of skills that a caseworker should have for working with African clients, language and probing skills were mentioned repeatedly by the respondents. Language skills are important at two levels; the caseworker should be able to communicate appropriately, verbally and non-verbally. In emphasising the importance of language and

communication skills in clinical situations, Drennan (1998) (<http://www.hst.org.za/research/conf98/sess5htm>) has been quoted as saying that, even in medicine, where there are often physical signs and symptoms, it is difficult to function effectively without adequate communication between the doctor and the patient. In instances where the professionals cannot talk to patients, the patients' conditions deteriorate. Without adequate communication, patients do not know if they will be adequately assisted.

"If one is treating a patient with whom one cannot communicate then one is violating the patient in a way ... fortunately patients are no longer exposed to the abuses of an era when they would be interviewed with a cleaner interpreting or even worse, a psychotic fellow patient." This was said by a doctor working at Valkenberg Hospital in Cape Town, after participating in a project to provide interpreters to under-resourced state services. Language differences that exist between the social worker and clients are a strong barrier to the utilisation of social work services by the clientele population. Diller (1999:19) points out that culturally competent counsellors value and strive for bilingualism and do not view another language as an impediment to counselling.

Other skills that are relevant to practising casework with culturally different clients are highlighted by Diller (1999): "Culturally skilled professionals possess specific knowledge and information about the particular groups that they are working with. They know their life experiences, cultural heritage, and [the] historical background of their culturally different clients. Culturally competent professionals understand how culture, ethnicity and race may affect personality development, help seeking behaviors and the appropriateness of counseling models. Culturally competent professionals know that poverty, racism, stereotyping and powerlessness leave major scars on the psyche of clients, and may influence the counseling process" Diller (1999:18).

In terms of the attitudes that the caseworker should display in working with African clients in a culturally competent manner, respect for cultural diversity and a positive regard towards clients were identified. The underlying values of the social work

profession were also mentioned as crucial in cross-cultural casework practice within the African context. General openness and a positive attitude to other cultures provide the key to cultural competence. Caseworkers should be open to alternative, culture-based ways of viewing and solving problems of living. Diller (1999:19) points out that culturally skilled counsellors are not averse to seeking consultation with traditional healers or religious and spiritual leaders in the treatment of culturally different clients when appropriate; culturally competent counsellors respect clients' religious beliefs; culturally competent counsellors respect indigenous helping practices and respect cultural community-intrinsic help-giving networks.

Weaver (1999) lists the following as the characteristics of a culturally competent social worker, which, in the researcher's view, must be inculcated in students and practitioners:

- The ability to understand and appreciate diversity among and within target populations
- Knowledge of the history, culture and contemporary realities of different cultures
- Possession of good general social work skills, and strong skills in patience and listening, and tolerance of silence
- Awareness of the worker's own biases in relation to different cultural groups
- Humility and willingness to learn from clients
- A non-judgemental attitude and open-mindedness
- The ability to empathise with people from a different culture
- An unconditional belief in the inherent worth of people.

To conclude on personal cultural competence, the study established that cultural competence in dealing with African clients is inadequate among the caseworkers interviewed, and that it has to be achieved at the levels of knowledge, skill and attitude. Caseworkers have to know as much as possible about African cultural issues as they relate to practice. Caseworkers must develop the necessary skills to work with African clients, particularly verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Knowledge of languages

is crucial for cross-cultural casework practice in South Africa. Caseworkers should have a positive attitude towards African culture and must always demonstrate the willingness to help and to be empathic towards African clients.

#### **7.4.4 Cultural issues in social work**

This section is about conclusions on cultural issues in social work practice. It will amongst other things, discuss the cultural and racial profiles of the clients that caseworkers deal with. The aim here is get an impression of both the racial and cultural milieu within which caseworkers function and to trace their experiences in dealing with a culturally and racially diverse clientele population. Particular attention will be given to instances where client and worker do not share race and culture and also to the cultural trends that respondents noted among white and African clients. The casework implications of cross-racial and cross-cultural practice will be pointed out.

One of the findings of this study is that social caseworkers interviewed for the study were carrying caseloads that consisted of clients from different cultural groups. The cultural groups represented in caseloads were Venda, Sotho, White and Shangaan. The cross-cultural experiences of caseworkers in this study included the following:

- Language differences between the worker and the clients constituted significant communication barriers, particularly where the client and the worker were not from the same racial group. There were clients who insisted on presenting their problems in their first language and also insisted on being addressed by the caseworker in their own language. To circumvent this problem, some caseworkers resorted to the use of interpreters and some dealt with the problem by referring clients to workers that shared a language with the client. The use of interpreters presents problems of confidentiality being violated by the presence of a third party during the interview. In instances where language differences exist between the worker and the client, Graham and Al-Krenawi (2003: 12-13) suggest using a cultural broker or a cultural consultant acculturated in a particular culture as well as in the mainstream culture who is able to straddle cultures and can function as a language and cultural bridge. Whenever a cultural broker is involved in a professional interview situation, both the

social worker and cultural broker must understand the requirement to abide by the principles of the casework relationship, in particular, the principle of confidentiality.

Two of the respondents in this study realised the importance of learning the clients' language and they took it upon themselves to learn the required languages from scratch. One African social worker learned the Afrikaans language and she speaks it fluently with Afrikaans-speaking clients. One White social worker learned the Northern Sotho language and she speaks it fairly well with Northern Sotho-speaking clients.

- African clients do not communicate directly compared to their white counterparts. To understand what African clients are saying, it becomes necessary for the caseworker to have probing skills and also to be patient. The indirect communication patterns of Africans are further complicated by the preponderance of idioms and proverbs in African languages. Graham and Al-Krenawi (2003:34) have observed that Westerners tend to have a very direct way of approaching, greeting and questioning people. This manner of approach may cause uneasiness among African clients because some questions may be asked at too early a stage, may be considered too personal, impolite, or as showing lack of respect for privacy and culturally taboo subjects. Eye contact, personal distance, and touching are examples of what may cause communication problems if the social worker is not culturally aware of the possible effects of the direct approach to communication
- Cultural conflict between the caseworker and the client. Even though they understand that they have to be non-judgemental and accepting, White caseworkers struggle to accept some things that are not in line with their view of the world and their religion. For example, they view such aspects as polygamy, witchcraft, belief in ancestors and traditional healers as contrary to their Christian religion and therefore wrong. Siegel (1994:87) states that values emanating from cultural orientations have an impact on the way individuals view the world. Different cultures have distinct patterns of family structure, child rearing and help-seeking behaviour. Cultural differences between worker and client in these areas interfere with effective delivery of services. Ow (1991) states that one of the reasons for the dichotomy of world-views between the client and the professional helper is the

difference in their stock of knowledge. Lay knowledge and professional knowledge can be further complicated by cultural differences between clients and professional helpers.

- There were social caseworkers who did not acknowledge the importance of culture when dealing with clients. They viewed clients as though they were the same, and therefore did not consider cultural issues in their clinical transactions with African clients. These caseworkers had a culture-blind approach to casework practice. Culture does influence the way in which people behave and view the world, as Hammond-Tooke (1972:10) states. It is clear from cross-cultural studies that different cultures impose different ways of looking at the world on their members, that they have "different ways of structuring the chaos of sense impressions that impinge on human consciousness". In the 'thirties, Margaret Mead, cited in Hammond-Tooke (1972), demonstrated that even such apparently inborn characteristics as psychological masculinity and femininity are culturally determined. Mead observed that, among the three New Guinea tribes, the Arapesh, Mundugumor and the Tchambuli, males exhibited feminine behaviour patterns while females showed masculine behavioural patterns. Very little in the human personality seems to be genetically derived; the mind can indeed be regarded as a blank tablet inscribed by culture. In the nature-versus-nurture controversy, nurture is obviously dominant (Hammond-Tooke, 1972:2-3). It would therefore be unrealistic to relate to clients as though they did not have a cultural background that informed their behaviour and their world-view.

The racial profile of caseloads carried by caseworkers interviewed in this study shows that caseworkers by and large are increasingly dealing with clients from both black and white racial groups. This requires caseworkers not only to be culturally competent but also to be racially competent. Racial dynamics were involved in instances where the client and the caseworker did not come from the same racial group. Some of the problems experienced in cross-racial casework situations were the following:

- White clients tended to look down on African caseworkers; they did not believe that a black caseworker could be able to provide them with whatever service they needed. African caseworkers indicated that, whenever a white client came to the office, they would ask if a white social worker were available to assist them. The reluctance to be assisted by African caseworkers was mainly noticeable among older white clients.
- Language problems were experienced by African caseworkers who could not converse in Afrikaans with Afrikaans-speaking clients. White caseworkers who could not speak any of the Black languages had problems with African clients. These communication problems resulted in situations where clients ended up requesting material assistance only, as it became clear that no form of counselling or therapy could take place between people who did not share a language.
- Some African caseworkers interpreted the behaviour of some white clients as racist and struggled with the urge they had to retaliate. African caseworkers relied mostly on relationship skills to gain the acceptance, respect and confidence of their white clients. On the issue the client-worker relationship, Goodman (1973:81) points out that racial differences between the client and the caseworker has an effect on the development of the rapport. Racial differences in turn contribute to cultural differences.
- It is difficult to establish and maintain adequate rapport when there are racial differences between the client and the caseworker. Though racial issues tend to be too sensitive to discuss, caseworkers must find a way of examining the impact of race in social casework practice, to improve competence.

On the question of cultural trends, social workers interviewed pointed out the following trends among African clients: African clients uphold a belief in ancestors, witchcraft, traditional healing, practise polygamy, see the husband as head of the family and support the passive role of women in decision making. These patterns of belief constitute the African world-view, which caseworkers must acknowledge, respect and find ways of interacting with clinically. Authors such as Mbiti (1990), Hammond-Tooke (1974), Magubane (1998), Mukenge (2002), Mberengwa (2003), Gyekye (1995), and

Kamalu (1995) talk about these beliefs and practices as constituting the fundamentals of the African world-view. On the implications of world-views for social work education and practice, Ow (1991:48) opines that the fundamental assumption is that world-views will inevitably influence perceptions in problem definition and problem resolution. Understanding world-views is an important key to understanding the nature of the individual's psychological outlook and his/her problem-solving approach. Mekada (1999) argues that the theoretical foundations of established social work practice models do not reflect the diversity of world-views and cultural values found among African clients.

Data in this study indicate that some caseworkers accept and acknowledge the existence of the African world-view with its idiosyncrasies, while others have problems relating to the existence of the African world-view. Those caseworkers who cannot relate to African cultural trends cite a number of reasons for not accepting the world-view of African clients, such as their Christian religious beliefs and the fact that they do not understand African culture. Those who do not accept or understand African culture refer clients to colleagues. Those who accept the notion of the existence of the African world-view and those who do not accept it both admit that social casework training did not prepare them to deal with such issues.

The experiences and problems that caseworkers have had in cross-cultural social casework practice indicate that there is a need for caseworkers to be trained effectively for cross-cultural casework practice because most of the social caseworkers now do carry caseloads that comprise multicultural clients. In South Africa there are instances of white social workers working with African clients and there are situations in which African social workers work with white clients. These instances of cultural and racial diversity, if not properly handled, may result in poor service delivery by both black and white social caseworkers. Caseworkers who work with African clients must accept the idea that various aspects of African culture constitute the African world-view which caseworkers must interact with in clinical situations.

#### **7.4.5 African cultural issues to be considered in casework practice**

The discussion and conclusion will deal with the application of theory in casework practice and the cultural elements that have to be taken into account when practising casework within the African cultural context. One of the findings of this study is that there is no identifiable conceptual or theoretical framework that informs the practice of casework by the social workers. The other finding is that African cultural experiences are not integrated into casework practice among Africans, therefore casework in its present state is not responsive to the needs of the African clientele population. This may partly explain why most African clients mainly present problems that have to do with material assistance and not problems that are psycho-emotional in nature. The existing theories and models of intervention are inadequate and non-responsive to the African world-view.

When asked about their view of the person as a component of the casework situation and how they go about implementing the casework process, it became clear that caseworkers did not relate what they did in the field to any theory or notion of a process. The reasons advanced as to why theory was not traceable to actual practice situations focused on the following:

- large caseloads
- some cases have to do with documentation and do not need counselling
- when one is still new one follows the process; after that practical experience takes over
- practitioners follow the process of casework without being aware of doing it
- Following the process is not what clients want, clients want their problems sorted out on the spot, and they think the process is a delaying strategy to avoid helping them.

The researcher's conclusion is that, though caseloads may partly account for the abandonment of the casework process by the social workers, it is not the real reason. The main problem in social work practice is that social workers have abandoned the theoretical underpinnings of the profession. They have tended to rely on practice

experiences that are not based on a sound conceptual framework of practice. Very few of them indicated a theoretical understanding of the process and the theories of personality. Manganyi (1991) observed a similar trend with clinical psychologists and expressed the following sentiments: the majority of the clinicians lack a definite theoretical basis of their practice. Psychologists suffer from an absolute lack of depth. If clinical psychologists were to be asked about their theoretical orientation, they would quickly say eclectic, while having no clue what the word means.

Findings from this study suggest that social caseworkers lack the theoretical depth and have almost no theoretical basis for their social work practice. Their awareness and knowledge of models of intervention in casework are very limited. It would seem that they learned models and processes in casework only to pass an examination and enter practice. They function without a conceptual framework. There is an urgent need for the professional board and universities and employers to address the issue of continuing education for social workers generally.

The African cultural issues that have to be integrated into casework practice are issues that constitute the African world-view referred to earlier and the fact that African clients mostly require to be dealt with on a short-term basis, focusing on their immediate material needs. Findings from this study also indicate that African clients are not open about personal psycho-emotional problems and are therefore not good candidates for long-term psychotherapeutic and counselling sessions. When psycho-emotional problems are concerned, African clients tend to discuss these mostly with other family members, traditional healers, and pastors. The caseworker should strive to co-operate with such informal family- and community-based mutual assistance networks that African clients might have.

## **7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations arising from this study will be presented according to the objectives of this study, which were the following: to determine from caseworkers whether training equipped them to be culturally competent; to investigate the extent to which social

caseworkers are culturally competent and to identify cultural elements that should be taken into account when practising casework with African clients.

### **7.5.1 Social work training**

This study found that social work training programmes did not present content that dealt with cultural issues. This is based on the following findings: the social work training programmes did not address race, culture and ethnicity; field practice education only exposed students to clients from the same race, language and culture as the students. Social work training therefore did not realistically mirror the cross-cultural and multiracial practice environment that awaited students upon graduation. The casework practice situation in the field is multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial. The predominant culture of the clients is the African culture, which should inform casework teaching and practice.

The study therefore recommends that social work training, in addition to its present curriculum, should create space for the previously marginalised world-views and their attendant epistemologies. Cultural and ethnic studies should be made compulsory for social work students; these modules should incorporate the African perspective. In field practice education, social work students should be assigned cases from racial, cultural and language groups other than that of a student. Opportunities must be created for students to experience the different cultures and languages of their future clientele population. White social work students must at least learn one of the African languages before they finish their social work training. African students must learn to speak Afrikaans and improve their English language skills. In this way, training will equip beginning caseworkers with the necessary skills to render casework service across the different cultures established in South Africa, particularly the African culture that has been marginalised for such a long time.

### **7.5.2 Cultural competence of the caseworkers**

This study concludes that social workers in practice are not culturally competent. This is because they obtained the theoretical knowledge, skills and attitudes that a social caseworker should have in order to be culturally competent, but they are not applying

what they know practically. Their knowledge is contrary to what they practise. They realise that there is a need to be knowledgeable about African culture but half of the respondents said their knowledge of African culture was inadequate. The respondents who knew something about African culture did not incorporate that knowledge in their casework practice with African clients. In the process of working with African clients, caseworkers encountered a number of African cultural issues to which they could not respond appropriately. Issues involving witchcraft, ancestors, traditional healing, polygamy and a communal way of living typical of Africans were some of the things that baffled some of the social workers. Caseworkers had contact with the African culture-based world-view for the first time when they entered practice and therefore encountered challenges, which could have been addressed through the curriculum, if it had been culture sensitive.

The study therefore recommends that a rigorous reorientation of social caseworkers be introduced, for social workers to be retrained with regard to how to deal with cultural issues in casework practice. Staff development programmes could be introduced by employers to upgrade the quality of casework service delivery with specific emphasis on cultural and racial issues. Training institutions could make a contribution by designing modules that will foreground the significance of cultural competence among service providers and by producing graduates who are culture competent. Lack of cultural competence on the part of the caseworker might lead to a situation where clients are assisted contrary to their culture. To avoid this, individual caseworkers should be encouraged to take their lack of competence seriously and do something about it, like learning and developing professional interest in cultural matters for so far as they have a bearing on professional practice. Caseworkers must be encouraged to handle culturally challenging clients and learn about their culture during the process, instead of referring them to colleagues.

### 7.5.3 Casework guidelines for assisting African clients

In addition to what is offered in existing casework practice models and processes, this study recommends that the following factors be taken into account with regard to casework practice with African clients:

- The context of casework intervention should be African culture with all its unique attributes, which are sometimes difficult to understand, especially for an outsider. African culture determines the African cognitive world-view through which an African relates to the world. African culture is the stuff that African paradigms are made of; it provides Africans with identity, beliefs, values, and behaviour. For the caseworker to begin to understand African behaviour, s/he must understand African culture, which in turn produces African behaviour.
- The caseworker should accept that family (nuclear and extended) is the primary source of social support, providing material resources and emotional help to cope with problems of living in many African cultures.
- The caseworker should accept and embrace the existence of the African world-view, which is informed by African culture.
- The caseworker should accept the existence of African thought, which is different from Western thought. According to Van der Walt (1997), African thought differs from Western thought in that Western thought generally ignores the spiritual dimension of phenomena and focuses on the visible, measurable physical reality. Possible supernatural causes are not considered plausible explanations for phenomena. In African thought, however, supernatural causes play an important role in explaining phenomena. Daniels (2001:303) points out that “The African worldview ... acknowledges affective reality as well as rationality”.
- The African world-view with which the caseworker must interface clinically consists of enduring beliefs concerning the following: ancestors, traditional healing, witchcraft, polygamy, a communal way of life and an awareness of the existence of God and the supernatural order of things that predates Christianity and the advent of colonialism in Africa.

- The social worker should understand that cultural beliefs underpinning the African world-view exist side by side with the belief in God, who is known by different indigenous names in different African cultural groups. All African tribes had and still have indigenous names for the Supreme Being. Among the African tribes in South Africa, the Supreme Being is known as *Dali* or *Qamatha*, by the Xhosa; as *Nkulunkulu* or *Umvelinqangi* (the first to emerge), by the Zulu; *Raluvhimba* by the Venda; and as *Modimo* by the Sotho (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:319). Elsewhere in Africa, God is called 'the Watcher of everything'; 'the Great Eye'; 'He who bends down even the majesties'; and 'He who roars so that all nations are struck with terror' (Mbiti, 1990:31).
- Social workers should understand that Africans vary in terms of the degree to which they have embraced the Western way of life, but it is rare for an African to depart completely from African cultural practices.
- Social workers should understand that African cultures have their own unique notions of the person, in addition to Western psychological notions of personality; there are typically African notions of person. Examples are as follows: According to the Zulu belief, human beings have a body (*umzimba*) and a spirit or soul (*idlozi*). In addition there is the *nhliziyo* (heart or feelings) the *mqondo* (brain, mind, understanding) and the *isithunzi* (shadow, personality). The Zulu believe that the soul/ *isithunzi/ idlozi/ ithongo* becomes the ancestral spirit after death, but only after the *ukubuyisa* ceremony has been performed, during which the spirit is brought back home (Magubane, 1998:62). The Basotho believe that man (*motho*) has two elements: the corporal body or flesh and the incorporeal spirit. The body is temporal and subject to death and decay, but the spirit is indestructible and immortal. The spirit can be either malevolent or benevolent. It is in this spiritual benevolence that the practice of ancestor worship is based. The Venda believe that the soul is a combination of the breath and the shadow; it is amazing to discover how fixed the idea is among them that a corpse throws no shadow. The Pedi have a tripartite conception of the body, soul and spirit. The Tsonga believe that a human being has a physical body (*mmiri*) and a spiritual body. The spirit enters the body at birth and

upon death joins the spirit world of the ancestors (Magubane, 1998; Hammond-Tooke, 1974). This notion of a person could serve as an alternative view of what constitutes a person for the purposes of casework practice. It could also serve as the basis of African psychology, which could begin to view the idea of person within the African context.

- The caseworker should understand that African clients are not averse to seeking consultation with traditional healers or religious and spiritual leaders in dealing with the problems of living.
- The caseworker must be open to the fact that some Africans embrace African values and Western values concurrently.
- In dealing with African clients, the role of the caseworker is to try and assist clients within the context of the clients' notion of reality and not the workers' notion of reality. If, in the process of interfacing with the client, the caseworker's world-view clashes with that of the client, it is the caseworker's world-view that may have to yield, since the client is always an expert on what constitutes his/her problems.
- The caseworker should attempt to be on more or less the same cognitive wavelength as the client. If worker-client world-views are diametrically opposed to each other, it might be difficult for the two to work together effectively. There are issues that can create this clinical scenario, for example if the client's polygamous marriage is seen by the caseworker as immoral and adulterous.

These are some of the guidelines identified in this study. They are by no means exhaustive, and they should be viewed as adding some perspectives on some of the critical issues that have to be considered when practising casework among African clients. Future research to investigate the world-views of the different racial and cultural groups that inhabit South Africa, such as the Indian, Coloured and Afrikaner world-views, and their implications for casework practice is recommended. Research on ethnicity-based world-views is also recommended because it would contribute significantly in aligning casework service provision with different ethnic and cultural views of the world.

## **7.6 CONCLUSION**

The training and practice of social casework in South Africa by and large remains Eurocentric. Social work education, because of its Eurocentric nature, does not produce graduates who are able to relate effectively to the cultural mosaic of people in South Africa. There is a need for social work academics to work jointly with practitioners to produce casework practice models that are responsive to the view of the world as seen by African clients. There is a lot of practical wisdom from the field of casework practice that can be developed into models of intervention with African people. It is not the researcher's view that Afrocentrism should be seen as a replacement for Euro-centric models of intervention in casework, but rather that it must be seen as one of the perspectives from which African clients can benefit.

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## **ANNEXURE**

**Department of Social Work  
University of Stellenbosch**

**Title: Social Casework: An Afrocentric Perspective**

**Instructions: This is an interviewer administered interview schedule. The researcher will personally conduct the interviews with the respondents.**

**Purpose of study: To assess cross-cultural competence among social workers.**

### **1. Respondents background information**

Age

Education

Training institution

Gender

Race

Home language

Work experience (rendering direct services to clients)

Type of employing agency (private or public)

### **2. Cultural sensitivity content in your social work training**

- In your social work training were you exposed to race and ethnicity courses or modules? Explain.
- In your social work training were you exposed to social work content relevant to clients who belong to other cultures other than your own? Explain.
- In your training were you exposed to clients from different cultural groups? Explain how you dealt with cultural differences.
- In your practicum training, did you have clients of other racial groups? If yes explain how you coped with racial differences.

- Did you have language differences with your clients? If yes explain how you coped with language differences.
- Based on your practice experience, what contents would you include in the training program of students to ensure cultural competence in social work trainees/ graduates?

### **3. Personal cultural competence.**

- What knowledge should a helping professional (caseworker) bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner?
- What skills should a professional (caseworker) bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner?
- What attitudes should a professional (caseworker) bring to working with African clients in a culturally competent manner?
- What cultural issues have you encountered in working with African clients?
- What do you do to ensure that you are able to accommodate client's cultural views in the helping process?
- How would you rate your knowledge of African culture? (In aspects that have to do with help seeking and utilization of assistance). Explain.

### **4. Cultural issues in social work practice and the reaction of social workers**

- What is the cultural profile of your clients in the last five years?
- What is your experience in dealing with culturally diverse clients?
- What is the current racial profile of your clients?
- What is your experience in dealing with racially different clients in a cross-cultural situation?
- What in your experience are the common cultural trends that you find among African clients?
- What in your experience are the common cultural trends that you find among white clients?

- Did clients, in the course of helping them, ever bring the following issues to your attention? What was your reaction?

Ancestors

Witchcraft

Polygamy

Traditional healing

Initiation schools

Husband as head of the family

Subservient role of women (e.g. in decision making)

Punctuality

**5. African cultural elements to be taken into account when addressing the following components of the casework situation.**

- What is your notion of the person? (Awareness of alternative theories of person/personality)
- What in your experience do clients present mostly as problems that they need assistance with? (Nature of the problems & the cultural dynamics e.g. do clients present psycho-emotional problems to social workers or material problems)
- Who else do clients go to when they have problems, before and after coming to the social worker? Explain.
- What has been your experience in the application of the casework process with African clients? (Intake, study, diagnosis, treatment and evaluation) or (assessment, intervention, and termination).

19 October 2003.