

Title

Social workers' historical and contemporary understanding of the social development approach

Nkqubela Aphiwe Jackson Ntloko, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa, Email: s211210919@mandela.ac.za

Abstract

Colonialism and apartheid influenced South African social welfare policies. After South Africa gained political freedom in 1994, democratic social welfare laws like the White Paper for Social Welfare were implemented (1997). Despite democratic social development initiatives, poverty, unemployment, and inequality marginalise most South Africans. Eurocentrism dominates social work practice and education with significant proposals for higher education decolonisation and indigenisation. Participatory action learning action research approach was used for this study (PALAR). PALAR uses critical, transformational, and democratic research methods to build a social work practice approach for African social systems in South Africa. For this research, an Afrocentric social work practice model was co-constructed for South Africa by black social workers who were purposefully and conveniently selected. The objective was to understand social workers' historical and present conceptualisations of the social development approach. Preliminary findings imply that social development does not address structural inequalities in South Africa, such as race and the land question. For example, after a decade of its adoption, the approach has not significantly addressed large-scale poverty and unemployment. Social development in practice is welfarist, disempowering, not community-based, and insensitive to African culture. Social development services are not adequately integrated. Social development in South Africa towards social welfare is a miscarriage; lacks relevance and appropriateness outside the Euro-North American axis and remains Eurocentric in all aspects. The social development approach does not represent the African values system and nor relatable to the African social systems. South African social work needs to be reimagined. Indigenous knowledge systems need to take precedence to realise relevance of social work practice approaches in South Africa. An Afrocentric turn to social work practice for South Africa's relevance is a viable answer.

Key words

social work, social development, colonialism, social welfare, social work practice, Africa

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