Editorial: Reconsidering psychosocial reality in the 21st century — the need for psychosocial services

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As you page through this issue of SAJP, you will quickly become aware of the increased emphasis that is placed on finding ways to deal with the psychological problems, which have become largely synonymous with 21st century psychology reality: burnout, anxiety, stress, and lack of empathy and social support. You will also no doubt soon share the concern of the contributors to this issue about the need to provide not only psychological support but also psychosocial support to the most vulnerable sections of our society: the poorest of the poor, the marginalised, the 'voiceless'. I have consequently chosen to devote this section of the editorial to a brief explanation of the need for the greater involvement of psychologists in the facilitation of not only psychological but also psychosocial services in South Africa's diverse communities. It is cause for concern that the efforts of organised health, psychological, educational and welfare services to institute a framework for psychosocial services for South Africans have been disappointing to say the least. This is most unfortunate as psychosocial needs impact all facets of humanitarian work such as distribution of food, provision of shelter and basic healthcare, and also handling of the emotional needs of those affected by healthcare shortcomings, disasters, trauma and conflict (Health and Community Care, 2010). It is essential to facilitate social safety nets to ensure the smooth and efficient functioning of essential psychosocial services (Naidoo, Van Wyk, & Carolissen, 2004). "[South Africa (SA) provides] a context where unemployment stands at 36% [some say 40+%] and where child poverty is estimated at 40% …" (Folscher, in Motala & Perry, 2001, p. 12). Southern Africa is also "the site of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today" (James Morris, UN Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, in Tromp, 2004, p. 2). Kriegler (1993) states that "the vast educational, psychological, and social needs of the non-privileged majority are minimally provided for … The average ratio [educational psychologist : number of students] for black education is 1 : 30 000, whereas for whites it is 1 : 2,750." This situation has not changed significantly since 1993.

Pillay, Naidoo, and Lockhat (1999) state that epidemiological data are in short supply in South Africa. Nevertheless, it is estimated that 15% of South Africa's adolescent population are experiencing mental health problems, which translates into two million adolescents, the majority of whom have grown up in different degrees of disadvantagedness (including extreme poverty). McLoyd (in Grieve, 2001, p. 333) argues that poverty increases developmental risk in children since "[e]conomic adversity and negative life events have an impact on parenting ability that leads to a diminished expression of affection, lessened responsiveness to children's expressed needs, a tendency to issue commands without explanation … and less likelihood of rewarding a child verbally".

When this is considered against the background of escalating socioeconomic deprivation, malnutrition, lack of education, joblessness (a large percentage of the population having to survive on government grants for survival) and high crime levels, we need to ask: Why are the psychosocial needs of our population not being met?

The social and economic conditions in which so many of our young children are growing up call for reform of intervention practices. In South Africa, where relatively few professionals venture into the field of psychosocial intervention, psychologists should take the initiative and involve themselves in issues beyond 'private practice' activities. Also, training institutions should prepare psychologists more adequately to deal with the complex issues confronting South African society.

In South Africa today, an approach is needed that will enable psychologists to answer the following questions: "How would this approach be useful to a man who has been sentenced to spend

the rest of his days in prison; or someone who consumes a bottle of gin a day and lives on the streets; or a gang member in an urban ghetto; or a single mother with four children living in abject poverty?" (Winslade, 2007, p. 52). I should like to add the following: How would this approach be useful to a blind young girl in a remote rural village in the Eastern Cape? To a 15-year-old boy from Soshanguve who sells newspapers to support his seven siblings? To a homeless learner in rural Sekhukuneland who lives next to a shebeen that is open 24/7? To a man who suffered brain damage in the war in Darfur? To a child soldier who lost his entire family in the Congo? To a mentally challenged woman who spends her days in abject poverty in a squatter camp outside Cape Town? To a criminal serving a lengthy prison sentence? To a six-year old rape victim suffering from AIDS?

Indeed: An approach is needed that (a) facilitates understanding of individual and collective strengths and barriers in personal and career development; (b) assists persons from all walks of life to utilise strengths and negotiate barriers in order to succeed in life; (c) enhances assessment (and employment) opportunities for all persons; (d) helps all persons negotiate major life transitions; (e) assists all persons to take their rightful place in society; and (f) links life stories and life's fundamental choices (Savickas, 2005; 2007).

An impressive collection of authors has contributed to this issue of the SAJP. Readers will be given insight into research endeavours in psychological subfields ranging from an investigation into temperament and character correlates of neuropsychological performance to an analysis of obstacles to the utilisation of psychological resources in a South African township community. Other topics include: Piaget, Vygotsky, and the cultural development of the notions of possibility and necessity: an experimental study among rural South African learners; secondary traumatic stress, level of exposure, empathy and social support in trauma workers; personality styles of patients with bipolar disorder: an exploratory study; and an inquiry into the essence of simultaneous and sequential cognitive processing in monolingual and bilingual children in South Africa. As usual, the contributions reflect research conducted in all three research paradigms (qualitative, quantitative and multimethod).

The association between temperament and character dimensions, on the one hand, and computerised neuropsychological test performance, on the other, is investigated by Nafisa Cassimjee and Raegan Murphy (2010) in the lead article, *Temperament and character correlates of neuropsychological performance*, temperament and character dimensions were operationalised as scores on the subscales of the Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) and neuropsychological outcomes were measured on six computerised tests of executive functioning and abstract reasoning from the University of Pennsylvania Computerised Neuropsychological Test Battery (PennCNP). Significant associations were found between neuropsychological performance and temperament and character traits, and the results conclusively demonstrate the importance of addressing the temperament and character correlates of neuropsychological performance in clinical as well as non-clinical studies.

The notion of cognitive 'delay' has for many years been central in studies on the development of subjects from non-industrialised, diverse sociocultural settings. In the second contribution, *Piaget, Vygotsky, and the cultural development of the notions of possibility and necessity: An experimental study among rural South African learners*, Azwihangwisi Muthivhi (2010) uses the theories of Vygotsky and Piaget to analyse the modes of experimental task performance and to explore the role of cultural content in the development and functioning of the notions of possibility and necessity. A Piagetian experimental task, comprising half circles of contrasting colours, was undertaken in this study, which involved 80 Venda learners.

A common topic of discussion today is the high incidence of the violent crime in South Africa that affects the majority of the population directly and/or indirectly. Although research has revealed that counselling victims of violent crime may cause psychological symptoms in trauma workers, which in turn may lead to Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), few trauma studies have been conducted on trauma workers themselves or on the roles that key variables play in the transmission of STS. In their article, *Secondary traumatic stress, level of exposure, empathy and social support in*

trauma workers, Victoria MacRitchie and Stacey Leibowitz (2010) explore the psychological impact on trauma workers of working with 'victims' of violent crimes. The authors focus on the level of trauma workers' exposure to traumatic material, their level of empathy, their level of perceived social support and the incidence of STS among them. The roles of social support and empathy as possible moderators between trauma workers' previous exposure to traumatic material and STS are highlighted.

In contrast to the largely under-researched previous research topic, the relationship between personality and bipolar disorder (BD) has been the subject of numerous investigations, and yet the results remain inconclusive. Sumaya Laher and Carla Rebolo's (2010) contribution, *Personality styles of patients with bipolar disorder: an exploratory study* (a study aimed at determining whether a relationship exists between personality and bipolar disorder in a South African sample of 23 bipolar individuals) should consequently be of interest to all professionals in this field. We learn, for instance, that whereas a statistically significant relationship was found between BD and debasement, no significant gender differences were found in the personality styles.

Scholars concur that academic success correlates positively with simultaneous and sequential cognitive processing (Das, Naglieri, & Kirby, 1994). However, the relationship between language, levels of proficiency in certain languages and cognitive processing needs to be established. Because relatively few studies on this topic have been conducted in South Africa, Diana Soares De Sousa, Kirston Greenop and Jessica Fry's (2010) contribution, *Simultaneous and sequential cognitive processing in monolingual and bilingual children in South Africa*, will be welcomed by colleagues specialising in this particular field of psychology. The findings confirm the usefulness of the K-ABC as a measure of cognitive processing for children from diverse cultural-linguistic backgrounds. This research has important implications for the use of the particular instruments in cultural-linguistic groups.

In the sixth contribution, *The significance of sub-threshold symptoms of anxiety in the aetiology of bruxism*, Reneda Basson, Kelvin Mwaba, Roelof Rossouw, Greta Geerts, Theunis Kotze and Martin Stuhlinger (2010) use a spectrum model to examine the relationship between the sub-threshold symptoms of anxiety and bruxism. By applying, firstly, an innovative research methodology (determining levels of anxiety using the Spielberger State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Kessler-10 (K-10)); secondly, determining a tooth-wear score by means of a clinical examination and dental casts; and, thirdly, rating bruxism on an ordinal scale according to specified criteria, the authors noted a dualistic trend in the relationship between sub-threshold symptoms of anxiety and bruxism: In roughly 50% of the subjects with higher than average anxiety scores, bruxistic behaviour was evident. The implications of this study for psychology are manifold: for example, dentists could refer patients for therapy or counselling if the patients experience anxiety that is expressed through bruxism behaviour. An understanding of the psychological factors involved in the aetiology of bruxism could also contribute to a more holistic approach to the treatment of patients showing signs of bruxism.

Research on burnout has tended to explore the organisational factors associated with this condition with little attention given to the relationship between burnout and personality. Brandon Morgan and Karina de Bruin's (2010) contribution, *The relationship between the big five personality traits and burnout in South African university students*, rectifies this hiatus. The authors found a number of statistically significant relationships between personality traits and burnout with personality explaining a sizeable degree of variance in burnout. The article makes for compelling reading in an ever-changing and uncertain world where psychology is now focusing more on personal well-being, strengths and opportunities for growth rather than on deficits in personality make-up.

Research on the fortigenic [from fortigenesis: "a process of producing strengths at more end-points than health only, for instance, in work, marriage and parenthood" (Strümpfer, 2006, p. 12)] qualities of psychotherapists is invaluable to professionals in the field. In *Narratives of therapists using a fortigenic approach — synthesis and synergy*, Erica Lange analyses from a fortigenic per-

spective the narratives of seven psychotherapists (clinical, counselling and educational psychology) who have been in full-time private practice for between 13 and 20 years. Researchers with an interest in Third and Fourth Wave approaches in particular will find the article an important addition to the literature on these approaches.

It is common knowledge that the typical work environment of the 21st century is characterised by uncertainty, discontinuity and loss of identity. Little wonder than that Van den Broek (2003) identified call centres as socially isolating environments, based on an individualised work design, which is determined and regulated by technology. Our ninth contribution by Karen Milner, Jennifer Russell and Ian Siemers (2010), entitled *Friendship in socially isolating work environments*, is consequently to be welcomed, especially because few South African studies have been conducted on this topic. Using a multi-method research design, the authors assessed the relationship between workplace friendship and organisational commitment in the call centre environment. Not surprisingly, whereas the quantitative analyses revealed a positive relationship between workplace friendship and organisational commitment in two of the three call centres, the qualitative analysis revealed four themes, including the alienating nature of call centre work resulting in lack of commitment to the call centres as well as agency on the part of call centre operators to resist the structural and managerial constraints on friendship. The authors' findings call into question the lack of attempt by management to either enhance the socially isolating effects of the call centre job design and technology or inves-tigate the positive organisational effects of workplace friendships actively.

In the concluding article, *Obstacles to the utilisation of psychological resources in a South African township community*, Ilse Ruane (2010) explores the attitudes and beliefs regarding the use of psychological resources of a group of black township dwellers 18 years and older. In her study, she investigated, for example, the participants' perceptions of psychologists and psychotherapy, and barriers to seeking treatment. Responses indicated that reasons for seeking treatment included HIV&AIDS, problems related to the participants' socioeconomic situation, relationship issues and educational problems (learning problems, career guidance and educational stress among tertiary learners). The stigma of mental illness, lack of knowledge, unaffordability of treatment, lack of trust, impersonal service and lack of cultural sensitivity were identified as important barriers to service utilisation. Race also emerged as a potential barrier as the participants believed that many white psychologists lacked sensitivity toward and knowledge of black communities. The participants also stated that black psychologists were not much better as a result of their acculturation during their training as psychologists.

The SAJP endeavours to publish articles on issues and themes that cut across the different subdisciplines of psychology and that provide a starting point for interpreting psychological reality and instigating debate on pivotal issues in psychology. The contributions in this issue are, once again, diverse in terms of institution, gender and national/ international profile. However, in the light of our commitment to capacity building and supporting black scholarship, we wish to repeat our special invitation to established, as well as emerging, black researchers to use the SAJP as an outlet for their publications. We also wish to request colleagues to review articles and to submit their reviews within the time allocated for this critical task. Sadly, we often experience considerable difficulty in soliciting a sufficient number of reviews to help us arrive at an informed decision regarding acceptance or rejection of an article. Without your support, there can be no journal. We realise that this is a selfless and often time-consuming task for which you receive little recognition, but we wish to assure you that your support is greatly appreciated. Reviewers receive three CPD points for each article reviewed, one of which is for ethics.

Please submit your contributions to help us stimulate debate on all aspects of psychology in South Africa, Africa, and abroad and to expand the existing network of scholars working in this field in South Africa, in the SADC region, and in the rest of the world. Should you have any ideas for improving the SAJP, please feel free to contact me personally (kobus.maree@up.ac.za). Your

feedback is important to us and will help shape the future direction of the journal.

In conclusion, I wish to thank colleagues involved in the editorial and publishing process for their sterling help and support. Our Associate Editors, Willy Nel and Martin Strous, our Consulting Editor, Anthony Pillay, our Consulting Editor: Statistics, Tyrone Pretorius, our Publishing Editor, Erna Kinsey, Fatima and Nosipho, from the PsySSA offices, and our Editorial Assistant, Temi Nkambule, all deserve a special word of thanks for their help and dedication.

Enjoy reading this issue of the SAJP.

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