



**THE IMPACT OF SCHIZOPHRENIA ON FAMILY
FUNCTIONING:
A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research study entitled: “The impact of schizophrenia on family functioning: A social work perspective” is my own work and that all sources I have consulted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

S. R. MOJALEFA



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SUMMARY

As a social worker working in a mental health hospital, the researcher became aware of an increase in the number of deteriorating patient-family and patient-friend relationships. In addition, there was an increase in the relapse of discharged patients suffering from schizophrenia. Against this background, the researcher was motivated to investigate the impact of schizophrenia on the relationships, interactions and functioning of the family.

The objectives of the study included the following:

- To undertake a literature study of the phenomenon of schizophrenia and family functioning from a social work perspective
- To investigate the impact of schizophrenia on relationships, attitudes, interaction and functioning of the family
- To investigate relevant family intervention programmes and develop social work guidelines for use by social workers to guide the family to cope with the impact of schizophrenia, particularly in the home and community.

A quantitative research approach was chosen to describe the relationships between the lack of insight into schizophrenia as a type of mental illness and the negative impact of schizophrenia on family functioning. The type of research for the study was applied. As an outcome of determining the negative impact of schizophrenia on family functioning, guidelines were developed for social workers to guide the patients and their families, through family intervention programmes, to cope with the negative impact of schizophrenia and to rebuild their family life.

A descriptive research design was chosen to reveal the potential relationship between the lack of insight into schizophrenia and the negative impact of schizophrenia on family functioning.

A pilot study was undertaken to test the validity of the semi-structured interviewing

schedules. Through dimensional sampling, five patients were selected for the research, diagnosed respectively as catatonic, disorganised, paranoid, residual and undifferentiated. In addition, the patients' key relatives¹ who were also the caregivers, were selected as respondents.

Semi-structured interviewing schedules were self-administered and conducted twice with the same patients and their key relatives. The first interviews were conducted mostly one month after the respective patients' admission to the hospital, once their conditions had been stabilised. The second interviews were conducted with the same respondents one month after the patient had been granted a leave of absence or discharged to be with his² family at home.

The research findings indicated that there is a negative impact on family functioning when a patient in the family suffers from schizophrenia. The reasons for this impact can be consolidated in a lack of insight in schizophrenia as a type of mental illness and an inability to cope with the impact of the illness in the recovery process. Research findings confirmed the need for family intervention programmes designed and implemented by social workers.

Social work guidelines were developed by the researcher in collaboration with social workers from Weskoppies Hospital. The social workers were engaged in a focus group which was conducted by the researcher and a co-interviewer from North Gauteng Mental Health. The proposed guidelines for social workers for family intervention programmes involving the patient suffering from schizophrenia and his family reflects an integrated perspective derived from the literature survey, empirical research findings and the findings from the social workers' focus group.

Derived from the proposed guidelines, specific recommendations are made for social work family interventions. In conclusion, recommendations are made with regard to further research in this field of research.

¹ The term "key relative" also refers to the caregiver throughout this research study.

² Throughout this research study the words "he", "him", "his", "himself" refer to both the female and male gender.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER ONE	
GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION	
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF SUBJECT	2
1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION	3
1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	5
1.5 HYPOTHESIS FOR THE STUDY	5
1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH	7
1.7 TYPES OF RESEARCH	10
1.7.1 Applied research	13
1.8 DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH DESIGN	14
1.9 RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND STRATEGY	15
1.10 PILOT STUDY	16
1.10.1 Literature study	16
1.10.2 Consultation with experts	17
1.10.3 Overview of the feasibility of the study	18
1.10.4 Pilot test of semi-structured interviewing schedules	19

	<u>Page</u>	
1.11	DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION, BOUNDARY OF SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD	19
1.11.1	Research population	19
1.11.2	Sample and sampling method	20
1.12	STATISTICAL ANALYSIS	21
1.13	ETHICAL ISSUES	21
1.13.1	Harm to experimental subjects and/or respondents	22
1.13.2	Informed consent	22
1.13.3	Deception of subjects and/or respondents	23
1.13.4	Violation of privacy	23
1.13.5	Actions and competence of researcher	23
1.13.6	Release or publication of finding	24
1.14	SHORTCOMINGS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	24
1.15	DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS	24
1.15.1	Family	24
1.15.2	Family functioning	25
1.15.3	Guidelines	26
1.15.4	Home-based care	26
1.15.5	Ecosystemic approach	26
1.15.6	Key comparative parameters as assessment areas	27
1.15.6.1	<i>Ecological context</i>	27
1.15.6.2	<i>Family life cycle</i>	28
1.15.6.3	<i>Family organisation</i>	28
1.15.6.4	<i>Migration and acculturation</i>	29
1.15.7	Mental health	29
1.15.8	Mental health professionals	30
1.15.9	Mental illness	30
1.15.10	Schizophrenia	31



		<u>Page</u>
1.15.11	Schizophrenia types	31
1.15.11.1	<i>Catatonic type</i>	31
1.15.11.2	<i>Disorganised type</i>	32
1.15.11.3	<i>Paranoid type</i>	32
1.15.11.4	<i>Residual type</i>	33
1.15.11.5	<i>Undifferentiated type</i>	33
1.15.12	Temperament	34
1.16	SCOPE OF STUDY	34
CHAPTER TWO		
THE IMPACT OF SCHIZOPHRENIA ON FAMILY FUNCTIONING: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK		
2.1	INTRODUCTION	35
2.2	MODELS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SCHIZOPHRENIC PATIENT	35
2.2.1	Biological model/perspective	36
2.2.2	The psychological model	37
2.2.3	The bio-psychosocial model	38
2.3	ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH	39
2.3.1	Assumptions	42
2.3.2	Key comparative parameters as assessment areas	45
2.3.2.1	<i>Ecological context</i>	46
2.3.2.2	<i>Acculturation and migration</i>	48
2.3.2.3	<i>Family organisation</i>	49
2.3.2.4	<i>Family life cycle</i>	56
2.3.3	Techniques	59
2.3.3.1	<i>Ecomap and genogram</i>	60
2.3.3.2	<i>Circular questioning</i>	64



	<u>Page</u>
2.3.3.3 <i>Reformulation and paradoxical tasks</i>	65
2.3.3.4 <i>Creation of order</i>	66
2.3.3.5 <i>Metaphors</i>	66
2.4 CONCLUSION	68
CHAPTER THREE	
SCHIZOPHRENIA AS A TYPE OF MENTAL ILLNESS	
3.1 INTRODUCTION	70
3.1.1 Schizophrenia as a type of mental illness	71
3.2 ETIOLOGY OF SCHIZOPHRENIA	75
3.2.1 Genetics or biological factors	76
3.2.2 Genetic-environmental interaction	77
3.2.3 Physical changes in the brain or neurological abnormalities	78
3.2.4 Metabolic factors	78
3.2.5 Psychosocial factors	79
3.2.6 Social factors	81
3.2.7 Perinatal factors	82
3.2.8 Viral hypothesis	82
3.2.9 Onset	83
3.3 SYMPTOMS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA	84
3.3.1 Cognitive symptoms	86
3.3.2 Mood symptoms	88
3.3.3 Somatic symptoms	89
3.3.4 Motor symptoms	90
3.4 PHASES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA	92
3.4.1 Prodromal phase	92
3.4.2 Active phase	93

	<u>Page</u>	
3.4.3	Residual phase	93
3.4.4	Burned-out phase	94
3.5	CLASSIFICATION AND TYPES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA	94
3.5.1	Catatonic type	95
3.5.2	Disorganised type (Hebephrenic)	96
3.5.3	Paranoid type	97
3.5.4	Residual type	99
3.5.5	Undifferentiated type	99
3.6	CONCLUSION	100
CHAPTER FOUR		
SCHIZOPHRENIA AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING WITHIN AN ECOSYSTEM FRAMEWORK		
4.1	INTRODUCTION	102
4.2	THE IMPACT OF SCHIZOPHRENIA ON FAMILY FUNCTIONING	102
4.2.1	Expressed emotion (EE) and family interaction	103
4.2.2	Communication and schizophrenia	106
4.2.2.1	<i>Communication deviance (CD)</i>	107
4.2.3	Patient and family attitudes	108
4.2.3.1	<i>Relatives' attitudes to schizophrenia</i>	109
4.2.3.2	<i>Attitudes of patients suffering from schizophrenia towards the family</i>	110
4.3	GENERAL FAMILY BURDEN	110
4.3.1	Objective burden	111
4.3.2	Subjective burden	114
4.3.2.1	<i>Feelings and family interaction</i>	114

	<u>Page</u>	
6.2.3	Family functioning within an ecosystem framework – Ecological context	172
6.2.4	Family functioning within an ecosystem framework – Acculturation and migration	186
6.2.5	Family functioning within an ecosystem framework – Family organisation	204
6.2.6	Family functioning within an ecosystem framework – Family life cycle	215
6.2.7	Family functioning within an ecosystem framework – Intervention programmes for schizophrenia	223
6.3	SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS	231
CHAPTER SEVEN		
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SOCIAL WORK		
GUIDELINES		
7.1	INTRODUCTION	233
7.2	OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	233
7.2.1	Objective 1	233
7.2.2	Objective 2	234
7.2.3	Objective 3	235
7.2.4	Objective 4	236
7.3	SOCIAL WORK GUIDELINES FOR INTERVENTION WITH THE PATIENT SUFFERING FROM SCHIZOPHRENIA AND HIS FAMILY	237
7.4	HYPOTHESIS	242
7.5	RECOMMENDATIONS	243

	<u>Page</u>
BIBLIOGRAPHY	245
ADDENDUM A: Semi-structured Interviewing Schedule for Patients Suffering from Schizophrenia	
ADDENDUM B: Semi-structured Interviewing Schedule for Key Relatives of Patients	
ADDENDUM C: Guiding Questions for the Focus Group	



TABLES

		<u>Page</u>
Table 1	Negative and positive symptoms of schizophrenia	90
Table 2	Age distribution	158
Table 3	Qualifications	160
Table 4	Ethnic group	161
Table 5	Religious denomination	161
Table 6	Number of months/years that the patient had been suffering from schizophrenia at the time of the interview	164
Table 7	First hospital admission date	165
Table 8	Reasons for admission	166
Table 9	Types of schizophrenia as diagnosed	167
Table 10	Patient-relative relationship	167
Table 11	Understanding of schizophrenia	168
Table 12	Symptoms of schizophrenia	169
Table 13	Patient's behavioural characteristics	171
Table 14	Patient-family relationship, as seen by the patient and the key relative	173
Table 15	Disturbance of patient's thinking and strained relationships, as seen by the key relative	176

		<u>Page</u>
Table 16	Comparison between patient's disturbance of thinking and patient no longer having a role to perform, as seen by the key relative	176
Table 17	Comparison between patient's disturbed thinking and patient's behaviour towards his family, as seen by the key relative	177
Table 18	Comparison between patient's disturbed thinking and relationship with his family	178
Table 19	Patient-friend relationship	179
Table 20	Rating of how patient's family deals with patient	187
Table 21	How the patient deals with the family, as seen by the patient and by the key relative	190
Table 22	Rating the extent of the burden experienced by the family because of the patient's condition	198
Table 23	The most significant caregiver according to the patient and the key relative	204
Table 24	Communication style between the patient and the family, as seen by the patient and the key relative	206
Table 25	Causes of relapse	213
Table 26	Patient's preferred place of residence	214
Table 27	Patient's pleasure in sexual activities	216
Table 28	The quality of patient-peer group relationship	216
Table 29	Patient's upbringing	217

		<u>Page</u>
Table 30	Socio-cultural factors affecting patient	221
Table 31	Patient's unemployment history	222
Table 32	Families' insight into schizophrenia	223
Table 33	Manner in which families gain knowledge about schizophrenia	224
Table 34	Who should attend educational group sessions	225
Table 35	The needs of a discharged patient suffering from schizophrenia	226
Table 36	Relatives' care of the patient	227
Table 37	Type of assistance that families receive from mental health professionals	228
Table 38	Other needs shared by patients and key relatives	230

FIGURES

		<u>Page</u>
Figure 1	Ecological context, adapted from Zastrow (1996:56) and Becvar and Becvar (2000:47)	46
Figure 2	Ecomap graph, adapted from Becvar and Becvar (2000:148)	62
Figure 3	Residential areas	157
Figure 4	Sex distribution	159
Figure 5	Marital status	163
Figure 6	Patient-friend relationships	182
Figure 7	Comparison between patient-family and patient-friend relationships, as seen by the patient	184
Figure 8	Comparison between patient-family and patient-friend relationships, as seen by the key relative	185
Figure 9	Comparison between how the family deals with the patient and how the patient reciprocates, as seen by the patient	193
Figure 10	Comparison between how the family deals with the patient and how the patient reciprocates, as seen by the key relative	194
Figure 11	Interaction between family members and the patient	196
Figure 12	Burden experienced by the family	200
Figure 13	Burden on the family, as seen by the patient	202
Figure 14	Burden on the family, as seen by the key relative	203
Figure 15	Communication style between the patient and family members	208

	<u>Page</u>	
Figure 16	Communication between the patient and the family, as seen by the patient	210
Figure 17	Communication between the patient and the family, as seen by the key relative	211
Figure 18	Socio-economic-health status reported by the patient and key relative	219