

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO
EMPOWER POVERTY STRICKEN FAMILIES
IN RURAL AREAS**

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SUMMARY

Almost half of the South African population lives in poverty. The circumstances of particularly the poor in the rural areas are worse in absolute and relative terms because of a legacy of unequal access, control and distribution of resources.

The aim of this research study was to examine the nature and the effect of poverty on families in a rural area and to provide guidelines for the empowerment of poverty stricken families. From the research study it was clear that the inhabitants of Modimola village were very poor, taking into account their low level of education, high rate of illiteracy, small income and unsatisfactory living conditions. They even experienced a shortage of basic needs such as water, electricity and transport. Several factors contribute to their poverty, such as lack of job opportunities, lack of skills and lack of support from the government and additionally, due to improper infrastructure. It was evident that poverty had a negative effect on the families, and that problems such as malnutrition, illiteracy, ill health, marital problems, unemployment and violence were rife in the community. The people were unable to help themselves and felt hopeless and useless. They need to be empowered. The social worker has an important role to play in this regard. She can play the parts of social broker, enabler, teacher, mediator and advocate so as to help the people alleviate their poverty.

OPSOMMING

Ongeveer die helfte van die Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking lewe in armoede. Die toestande van spesifiek die armes in die plattelandse gebied is erger – in die geheel gesien en betreffende besonderhede – weens 'n nalatenskap van ongelyke toegang, beheer en verspreiding van hulpbronne.

Die doel met hierdie navorsing was om die aard van die uitwerking van armoede op gesinne in 'n plattelandse gebied te ondersoek en om riglyne vir die bemagtiging van armoedige gesinne te voorsien. Uit die navorsing was dit duidelik dat die inwoners van die dorp Modimola baie arm is, gesien hul lae opvoedingsvlak, hoë ongeletterdheidspeil, geringe inkomste en onbevredigende lewensomstandighede. Hulle ervaar selfs ook 'n gebrek aan basiese behoeftes soos water, elektrisiteit en vervoer. Etlke faktore dra by tot hul armoede, soos 'n gebrek aan werksgeleenthede, 'n gebrek aan vaardighede en 'n gebrek aan ondersteuning van die regering, en daarbenewens, weens ontoereikende infrastruktuur. Dit was duidelik dat armoede 'n negatiewe uitwerking op die gesinne gehad het en dat probleme soos wanvoeding, ongeletterdheid, swak gesondheid, huweliksprobleme, werkloosheid en geweld in die gemeenskap heers. Die mense was nie in staat daartoe om hulleself te help nie en het hulpeloos en nutteloos gevoel. Hulle moet bemagtig word. Die maatskaplike werker het in hierdie verband 'n belangrike rol om te vervul. Sy kan die rol van maatskaplike makelaar, bemagtiger, onderwyser, tussenganger en advokaat vervul om die mense by te staan om hulle armoede te verlig.

FOREWORD

The article format has been chosen in accordance with Regulations A.11.2.5 for the degree MA (SW). The article will comply with the requirements of one of the journals in Social Work, entitled Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk. This article comprises 10 percent of the total mark of the course.

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

The Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk publishes articles, short communications, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of Social Work. Contributions relevant to Social Work from other disciplines will also be considered. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice. Commentary on articles already published in the Journal must be submitted with appropriate captions, the name(s) and address (es) of the author(s) and preferably not exceed 5 pages. The whole manuscript plus one clear copy as well as a diskette with all the text, preferably in MS Windows (Word or WordPerfect) or ASCII must be submitted. Manuscripts must be typed double spaced on one side of A4 paper only. Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1967:12). More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors.

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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO EMPOWER POVERTY STRICKEN FAMILIES IN RURAL AREAS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Almost half of the South African population lives in poverty. Poverty is about lack of access, lack of power, lack of income and resources to make choices and take advantage of opportunities. In order for the people to be lifted out of poverty, strategies need to be sought. The social worker can play an important role to empower poverty stricken families.

This article focuses on the nature of poverty, the effect of poverty on families and the roles of the social worker. The problem statement, aims and research methodology will be dealt with. The findings of the study will be discussed and finally the social workers will be provided with guidelines to empower poverty stricken families.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Knight (2004:1), South Africa is the most developed and modern country in Africa with extensive natural resources, a developed agricultural sector and significant manufacturing. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2002 was \$ 104.2 billion – larger than any other country in Africa. Real GDP growth averaged 2.7% since 1995. The Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is \$ 2,520, more than 5 times the average for all of sub-

Saharan Africa. The country suffers from chronic unemployment and one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world. 50% of South African people live in poverty and at least seven million people live in shacks in informal settlements (Knight, 2004:1). In per capita terms, South Africa is an upper middle-income country, but most South African households experience outright poverty or vulnerability to being poor. In addition, the distribution of income and wealth in South Africa is among the most unequal in the world and many households still have unsatisfactory access to clean water, energy, health care and education (Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, 2005:1).

Poverty in South Africa is layered, and the extent of poverty stands in inverse relationship to its visibility. Shack dwellers in urban informal settlements are more visible than the rural poor, but even though numerous studies have shown that they are better off than many inhabitants, the state's efforts at alleviating poverty are aimed at them (De Jongh, 2002:441). The fact is, poor people the world over face similar challenges, namely how to democratize governance at all levels, and how to change the distribution of economic power to ensure that resources are not monopolized by a small, rich elite, but used to meet all people's needs equally (Barberton, C., Blake, M & Kotze, H., 1998:3).

Economic growth and human development are linked and should enhance quality of life, and this is best achieved through advancing the capabilities of disadvantaged communities, households and individuals by improving their access to physical and social assets (Centre for Socio Legal Studies, 2005:1).

The underlying issue here is that the young South African democracy has thus far failed to deliver the full benefits of citizenship to large numbers of people, but conspicuously to local communities in the rural areas (De Jongh, 2002:442). The circumstances of the poor in the rural areas, and in the particular case study under consideration here, are worsening in absolute and relative terms because of a legacy of unequal access, control and distribution of resources.

At the world summit for social development, the South African government committed itself to enhance social development so that all men and women, especially those living in poverty, may lead satisfying lives and contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind. Poverty is about lack of access, lack of power, lack of income and resources to make choices and take advantage of opportunities. The human face of poverty is often a woman or a child's face. People centred strategies to fight poverty must directly involve finding solutions to their problems. The energy, creativity and assets of the poor are key-human and social resources. All of society needs to be involved in the struggle for social development (Raphern, 2005:1).

Poverty is not only about shortage of money. It is about rights and relationships about how people are treated and how they regard themselves, about powerlessness, exclusion and loss of dignity. Yet the lack of an adequate income is at heart (Church of England, 1985:11).

Whilst people living in poverty share a lack of command over resources, the causes of this lack of resources and the consequences of poverty itself vary between different groups that are poor. At the heart of a relative perspective on poverty is a concern with the ways in which those living in poverty are excluded from participating in society and from the benefits which accrue to the majority of the population (Davidson & Erskine, 1992:11). According to Townsend (1979:31), individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary in the societies to which they belong.

The problem of poverty and the problems defined as environmental by nature are often seen as separate, needing separate solutions. Sustainable development, the theme of the world summit in Johannesburg 2002, is that to lift people out of poverty, we must address the problems that have caused it or that are made worse by its existence –and most of these problems are environmental (Mitchell, 1981:6).

The ability to see poverty in its larger frame is important for social workers. In their day-to-day work they are faced with the manifestations of poverty in the lives of individuals and families and it may be difficult to avoid perceiving this poverty as a characteristic of the individual rather than a feature of the wider social and economic landscape which that person inhabits (Davidson & Erskine, 1992:11).

The social worker's concern is people. As a professional person he must seek an objective understanding of all relevant factors in the situation, which will encompass a broader view than the people involved. His concern is also with the welfare of others in the immediate environment, such as family members and others interacting with those being helped. From a preventive viewpoint he must give consideration to the problems of all persons suffering from the same difficulties as those he is currently working with. Further, he must be part of policy and planning groups involved in any situation and with the interests of the whole community (Mitchell, 1981: 6). Although not the only orientation, the basic and primary orientation of the social worker is to understand the situation from the position and viewpoint of the people involved. To achieve a better fit between the individual and his environment, it becomes clear that social workers are required to help people directly and to involve themselves in measures with the view to change their environment.

The poor are deprived of many essential services and their basic needs are not satisfied. We cannot accept that poverty is necessary or that they are content with their fate in life. For this reason, poverty constitutes the terrain of social work. Specifically, one of the primary obligations of the welfare institution is that of poverty. Social work is there to help the destitute and, where possible, to assist them to emerge from their state of dependency (Mitchell, 1981:8-9).

From the above information, the following questions should be posed:

- What is the nature of poverty in a rural area?
- What is the effect of poverty on families?
- How can social workers empower poverty stricken families?

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

3.1. AIM

To examine the nature and the effect of poverty on families in a rural area and to provide guidelines for the empowerment of poverty stricken families.

3.2. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the nature of poverty in a rural area by means of a literature study and empirical research
- To investigate the effect of poverty on these families by means of an empirical research.
- To provide social workers with guidelines to empower poverty stricken families.

4. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION

Social workers are able to empower people in improving their life circumstances and thus alleviating their poverty.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Neuman (2003:68), methodology refers to the techniques that a particular discipline uses to manipulate data and acquire knowledge. The method of research consists of a literature study and empirical survey.

5.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature study is aimed at contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified. Smit (1995:22) states that a researcher is

able to plan a project in a meaningful and scientifically valid manner, only if he has made a thorough study of the literature relevant to the research theme.

In the literature review a study was made on poverty stricken families in rural areas. The literature showed that those families struggle to lead a normal life and that they need to be empowered.

There are a considerable number of books, web, journals and publications on poverty both nationally and internationally. The database, which was utilized for a systematic library search, was Repertoire of South African journals, psychology and sociology books, Social Work Abstracts and Social Science Indexes.

5.2. EMPIRICAL STUDY

5.2.1. Research design

According to Grinnell (2001:547), a research design is a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study from the conceptualization of the problem right through to the dissemination of findings. The research design the researcher used was the exploratory design. Fouché and De Vos (2005:134) are of opinion that the purpose of the exploratory design is to gain insight into a situation and the phenomena and community of the person.

With regard to the study, the researcher explored the impact of poverty in a certain area. Though much has been written on poverty, not much has been done on the methods social workers utilize to empower families.

5.2.2. Sampling

A sample was drawn from the study. According to Strydom and De Vos (1998:204), a sample is a small portion of the total set of the object, event or person that together comprises the subject of the study. In this study under discussion systematic sampling was used.

Strydom and De Vos (1998:197) emphasize that in this sampling only the first case is selected randomly and all the subsequent cases according to a particular interval.

South Africa comprises of nine provinces. The focus of this study was on the North West Province, as the sample was drawn from Modimola village in Mafikeng. Grinnell and Williams (1990:127) point out that a sample size of 10% of the population is sufficient to provide reasonable control over sampling error. For this study, the population is the village consisting of 340 houses, whilst 40 families comprise the sample. The researcher included every 8th house in the village and interviewed the head of each of these households. The first house in the first row was the starting point.

5.2.3. Measuring instrument

Survey research was used in the study, and specifically the personal interviews, to collect data. The schedule was self-developed after having studied similar schedules in Engelbrecht (1997:269), Nkuna (2001:321) and Strydom (2002:395).

The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:51) defines a questionnaire as a set of questions on a form which is completed by the respondents in respect of a research project. There are different types of questionnaires such as the personal, the telephonic, the hand delivered, the group administered and the mailed questionnaire. In this research the personally administered schedule was used, which means that the questionnaire was personally completed by the researcher. The advantage of personally administered

schedules is that the researcher has received first hand information that was reliable and accurate (Fouché, 1998:154-155).

5.2.4. Procedure

The researcher did the following:

- Consulted with the headman of the village in order to obtain permission for the research study.
- Compiled the schedule in both English and Setswana.
- Tested the schedule with three (3) people not included in the sample to maximize the level of reliability and validity of the instrument.
- Obtained permission from the 40 respondents in the village to complete the questionnaires.

5.2.5. Ethical issues

Grasso and Epstein (1992:118) describe ethics as those principles that are intended to define rights and responsibilities of the researchers and practitioners in social work in their relationship with each other and with other parties including employers, research subjects, clients and students.

In the study the following aspects were considered:

- Harm to respondents

Strydom (1998:25) holds that the researcher must, within reasonable limits, protect subjects against any form of physical discomfort which may emerge from the research projects. In the study the researcher thoroughly informed the respondents about the purpose and nature of the investigation beforehand.

- Informed consent

In the study the issue of informed consent was regarded as important. Participants were informed about the goals of the investigation as well as the procedures which would be

followed. It was important for them to realize that the research would lead to the development of strategies that would also be beneficial to them in the long run. Permission from the residents in the village was obtained to complete the schedule.

- Violation of privacy

Singleton, Straits and Straits (1988:454) define the right to privacy as the individual's right to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs and behaviours will return to the former condition. In this study the researcher respected each respondent's right to privacy by ensuring that the schedule was completed in the seclusion of their homes.

- Voluntary participation

In this study the respondents were not forced to participate. The participants were simply regarded as volunteers in the study. They knew that they had a choice to participate and could withdraw at any stage (Creswell, 2003:64).

- Confidentiality

In the study the issue of confidentiality was considered with the intention of protecting the privacy of the respondents. All the information that deserved to be treated as confidential was dealt with accordingly. No identification particulars were required.

Ethical permission was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. The project number is 05K09.

5.2.6. Data analysis

Data was analysed by the Statistical Consultation Services of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University.

6. RESULTS

The empirical data was organized according to the schedule and will be discussed as follows:

6.1. IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS

6.1.1. Age of respondents

TABLE 1: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

AGE OF RESPONDENTS	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
31 – 35	6	3	
36 – 40	2	4	
41 – 45	3	5	
46 – 50	6	3	
51 – 55	5	3	
TOTAL	22	18	40

The average age of the female respondents was 31 years and that of the males 35 years.

6.1.2. Gender of respondents

TABLE 2: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
6 (15%)	34 (85%)	40 (%)

6.1.3. Language of respondents

All the respondents were Tswana-speaking.

6.1.4. Marital status

TABLE 3: MARITAL STATUS

MARRIED	DIVORCED / SEPERATED	LIVING TOGETHER	WIDOWED	NEVER MARRIED	TOTAL
9	1	7	6	17	40

6.1.5. Level of education of head of household

TABLE 4: LEVEL OF EDUCATION

STATEMENT	HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD
Never attended school	20 (50%)
Grade 1-4	17 (42.5%)
Grade 5-8	3 (7.5%)
TOTAL	40

From the table it is clear that most of the respondents have a low level of education, with 50% never having attended school.

Potgieter (1998:68) states that illiteracy is a difficult concept to define and that people use different criteria for its measurement. Some authors use six years of formal schooling as the indicators of literacy. Others see differences in educational systems as well as differences between schools in a single system as factors that influence the quality of education and eventually the literacy level (Mostert & Lotter, 1990:14). It is estimated that 7,5 million people over the age of 15 were illiterate or severely undereducated in South Africa in 1994. Close to 3 million people never attended school and 4,5 million people had had some form of primary school education that left them barely literate (Booyens, 1997:114).

Illiteracy is much higher in rural areas of South Africa and plays an important role in poverty and low level of entrepreneurship (Bernstein & Gray, 1997:114). According to

the Green Paper on population policy (1995), an estimated 50% of the rural population are illiterate, compared to 38% in urban areas (South African Communication Service, 1996:317).

Households with poorly educated household heads have a far higher incidence of poverty than those with better educated household heads (Whiteford, Posel & Kelatklang 1995:8).

6.2. LIVING CONDITIONS

6.2.1. Basic services in house

TABLE 5: BASIC SERVICES

STATEMENT	YES	NO	TOTAL
Has electricity	31 (77,50%)	9 (22,50%)	40 (100%)
Has no running water	0 (0%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)

From the table it is clear that the majority of the respondents have electricity, while no one has access to clear running water in their houses. About 3,5 million people in South Africa have no access to clear running water while 15 million people in the country have no access to sanitation (Tempelhoff, 2006:5).

South African Communication Service (1996:84) states that 80% of the world's disease and sickness (cholera, diarrhoea, polio and typhus) is due to poor water supply and insufficient or non-existent sanitation facilities. This is underlined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which believes that the number of water taps per 1 000 of a population is a more meaningful health indicator than the number of hospital beds that are available (Bradley, 1987:84).

South Africa is a land endowed with great natural resources, but water, possibly the most important resource, is in very short supply. South Africa is also facing the grave threat that what little water we have may become unusable as industrialization proceeds virtually

unchecked (Cock & Koch, 1991:130). Not only is the country facing severe water shortages, but there is a need to check the quality of water available, which also poses a problem. It is believed that every citizen of the country will be affected by water shortages by the middle of the next century, and industrial development may already be affected by the year 2000 (Cock & Koch, 1991:138).

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) further aims at providing 50 to 60 litres of clean water per person per day (Potgieter, 1998:67).

The majority of households had electricity, which compares well with the population of South Africa. In 1993, Escom estimated that more than 60% of the population of South Africa (23 million people) had no access to domestic electricity (South African Institute for Race Relationships, 1994:350). Thirty per cent of the population still depend on firewood as their main source of energy with obvious implications for the country's natural timber resources (Booyens, 1997:46). In many areas the supply of usable wood has already been exhausted, which leaves the population struggling to prepare basic food. Generating electricity, on the other hand, relies on the burning of coal, which spews half a million tons of smoke particles into the air each year accompanied by acid-forming sulphur and other noxious gases (Cock & Koch, 1991:98).

6.2.2. Housing

Of the total number of respondents, all (100%) are living in their own houses, and none are renting. Most houses are built of mud.

The average number of people sharing the household was six. The largest number of inhabitants was ten. The houses were crowded because family members are mostly unemployed and are unable to extend their houses.

In 1993, the backlog in respect of housing in South Africa was estimated to be in the region of one-and-a-half million units of which 24% represented the needs of the African

population. Many more people (1 million) are housed in hostels that need urgent upgrading and redevelopment. In a 1995 publication of the South African Institute for Race Relations the estimate for informal houses rose to 4,5 million units, of which nearly 3 million were located in rural areas (South African Institute for Race Relations, 1994:323-350).

6.2.3. Household appliances

TABLE 6: HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES

STATEMENT	YES	NO	TOTAL
Have radios	6 (15%)	34 (85%)	40 (100%)
Have televisions	2 (5%)	38 (95%)	40 (100%)
Have fridges	0 (0%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)
Have stoves	2 (5%)	38 (95%)	40 (100%)
Have washing machines	0 (0%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)
Have bicycle	1 (2,5%)	39 (97,50%)	40 (100%)
Have motorcars	0 (0%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)
Have donkey carts	40 (100%)	0 (0%)	40 (100%)

From the table above, it is clear that only a very small percentage own any household appliances. This is a sign of poverty, seeing that Malan (2006:2) points out that 73% of South Africans own radio's and 54% have television sets.

6.3. HOUSEHOLD INCOME

6.3.1. Employment of the head of the household

In the research group, 100% of the head of the households are unemployed.

The development Bank of South Africa estimated that there were 2,5 million unemployed people in South Africa in 1991 and it maintained that the figure had more than trebled since 1980. During the period 1980-1991 the South African labour force grew by 4,5 million people, but the economy created a net total of only 350 000 new jobs. The rural unemployed usually move to urban areas out of desperation and are then faced with a far worse situation, rife with violence and crime (Potgieter, 1998:66).

In South Africa 31% of black people are unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2006:11). Black women and youth have been identified as major at-risk groups among the unemployed. In the vicinity of a third of black youths under the age of 24 were unemployed in 1994, while 20% of the group between 25 and 34 years of age were also unemployed (Potgieter, 1998:66).

Job creation is critical in most economies of the world, but particularly so in South Africa where unemployment is increasing. Many see self-employment as the driving force of economic growth in developing countries, as it has brought about significant growth in developed countries. In the United States, for instance, more or less one in seven of the working population is self-employed. South African employment growth is typical of a developing country in that growth in self-employment has been 15% per annum since 1991 (Roodt, 2005:18-19).

However, self-employment is difficult. There is strong competition in most industries and satisfying the needs of clients demands a sophisticated entrepreneur. As entrepreneurs of the future increasingly move into higher-value service firms, they will also have to attain higher levels of education and skills to be able to interact with foreign suppliers and customers if they are to succeed. Entrepreneurs should thus be more globally focused, better educated, and more focused on service delivery. If they are to succeed, South Africa urgently needs to create jobs and cannot afford to have a high failure rate among the self-employed, as one of the “jobs” of the self-employed is to create job opportunities for others (Roodt, 2005:18-19).

In South Africa, with the government's preference for free market economic policies, an estimated 1.6 million sustainable jobs have been created between 1995 and 2002. This growth has, however, not matched the growth of labour force during the same period (i.e. the number of persons who have entered the job market) which is estimated at more than 5 million. The net result is that between 1995 and 2002, unemployment in South Africa has increased from approximately 30% to 40% (Le Bruyns & Pauw, 2004:202-203).

6.3.2. Means of income

TABLE 7: MEANS OF INCOME

STATEMENT	YES	NO	TOTAL
CHILD SUPPORT GRANT	17 (42,50%)	23 (57,50%)	40 (100%)
SOCIAL PENSION	9 (28,50%)	31 (71,50%)	40 (100%)
DISABILITY GRANT	2 (5,00%)	38 (95,00%)	40 (100%)
FOSTER CARE	1 (2,50%)	39 (97,50%)	40 (100%)
MAINTENANCE GRANT	20 (50,00%)	20 (50,00%)	40 (100%)

According to the information in Table 4, most of the households receive grants.

About 5.1 million people in South Africa receive social grants or pensions (Malan, 2006:20). The amounts of the pensions for 2006 are as follows:

Old Age Grant	R820.00
Disability Grant	R820.00
Foster Child Grant	R580.00
Care Dependency Grant	R820.00
Child Support Grant	R190.00
Grant in Aid	R190.00

It is the responsibility of the parents to see to it that the necessary means are provided to support the family adequately (Rossouw, 1999:61). Financial stability means that a

sufficient income is sustained, which in turn ensures that the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing are satisfied. If the parents are unable to support the family system financially, this will usually mean that the living standard drops. Normally this is accompanied by a possible shortage of food, housing, medical care and stronger dependence on others (South African Council for Social Work, 1997:136). Poverty is seen as a contributing factor to social disorganization, therefore unfavourable economic and social circumstances can lead to delinquent behaviour (Gibson-Cline 2000:221).

6.3.3. Feeding scheme

The majority of the people 38 (95,00%) do not belong to any formal feeding schemes. However, the children are provided with bread and soup on a daily basis at their schools. In South Africa, 4.6 million children are now involved in the government feeding schemes at school (Malan, 2006:20).

6.3.4. Vegetable garden

None of the respondents have vegetable gardens due to insufficient water. A food garden could have helped in generating income.

6.3.5. Basic needs

Respondents mentioned that they are unable to meet their basic needs due to lack of employment opportunities. In the village the respondents reported that they always go hungry due to lack of food. Respondents indicated that their daily food is porridge and wild vegetable (morogo). They sometimes eat bread and milk.

6.4. EFFECT OF POVERTY ON THE HOUSEHOLD

The respondents were asked what the effect of poverty on their households was. The following comments were received:

- “We have no transport”

- “We have no money to buy clothes”
- “We cannot eat healthy food”
- “We are malnourished”
- “Because of hunger we cannot think straight”
- “We feel useless, helpless, demotivated and unsure about the future due to few job opportunities and lack of skills in starting projects.”
- “We are frustrated and devastated”
- “We are easily infected by diseases, especially tuberculosis.”
- “We are dependent on others for handouts”
- “The children are unhappy because they lack basic essentials and have no toys”
- “The children find it difficult to concentrate at school”
- “The family members are separated as some have to look for work in far places”
- “We have marital problems”
- “There is violence in the community.”

From the above comments it is clear that poverty has a negative effect on the families.

6.5. ALLEVIATION OF POVERTY

The respondents were asked ways of alleviating poverty. The following comments were received:

- “People should engage in existing projects”
- “People should start their own projects by forming support groups”
- “People should go to the cities to look for work”
- “People should better their knowledge and skills by attending workshops and other training opportunities”
- “The government should give people wages to assist them in finding work”
- “The government should give children bursaries”
- “It should be possible for the residents to sell their products, such as vegetables and knitted garments to nearby villages, by liaising with relevant government departments that could assist in marketing products.”

- “The products could be sold at pay points during pension days.”

From the above-mentioned comments it is obvious that the families need assistance to alleviate their poverty. They look mostly to the government for assistance.

6.6. MEANS OF SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT

TABLE 8: MEANS OF SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT THAT HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVE AND WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE

STATEMENT	SUPPORT RECEIVED	WOULD WELCOME SUPPORT	TOTAL
Regular visits from the social worker.	3(2,63%)	37(97,37%)	40 (100%)
Counselling Services.	1(2,50%)	39(97,50%)	40 (100%)
Providing life skills information, e.g. financial management.	6(15,00%)	34(85%)	40 (100%)
Linking the community with relevant resources, e.g. relevant and available departments.	0(0%)	40(100%)	40 (100%)
Forming support groups.	0(0%)	40(100%)	40 (100%)
Helping them to engage in or start community projects.	0(0%)	40(100%)	40 (100%)
Helping them to complete business plans for financial assistance.	0(0%)	40(100%)	40 (100%)
Referral system.	0(0%)	40(100%)	40 (100%)

According to the above table, the respondents presently receive little service from social workers. They would welcome all the services indicated in the table, as it would empower them.

The Acting Deputy Director General of North West, K. Sehularo, said the North-West Province was in desperate need of skilled entrepreneurs to establish and run viable businesses. The importance of development of small business cannot be over emphasized, and for historical reasons the majority of the people are not able to find employment in the market place. They live in hunger and poverty; therefore the development of thriving small businesses can go a long way towards alleviating these hardships (Sehularo, 2006:3). The social worker, with the necessary support from the government and private organisations, can help in this regard.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1. THE NATURE OF POVERTY

It is evident that most of the community members are poverty stricken. Their level of education is very low and 50% of household heads never attended school.

Their houses are overcrowded because they are not up to standard. They have no running water or sanitation. There are almost no basic appliances in the houses such as stoves, fridges, televisions and radios.

The research findings indicate that most of the people are unemployed. They derive their income mainly from grants. Due to the small income they always go hungry and there are signs of malnutrition.

7.2. EFFECT OF POVERTY

According to the research findings, it is evident that poverty causes problems. This is also supported by the literature of Schenck (2004:158-160) in which she asked social workers in the rural areas to name the problems. They mentioned HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, unemployment, ill health, malnutrition, alcohol and drug dependency, marital conflict, domestic violence and crime. HIV/AIDS makes them feel weak and isolated. Illiteracy leaves them uninformed, dependent and disadvantaged. Unemployment makes them feel depressed, worthless and helpless. Ill health and malnutrition makes them prone to other diseases and they are unable to perform duties. Because they have no jobs and nothing to keep them busy, they end up abusing alcohol and drugs. Marital conflict and domestic violence is rife because they blame each other for their poor circumstances. The crime rate is high because there are no recreational or entertainment facilities and people have to steal to eat.

The families struggle to cope, because everything they get is from hand to mouth. They survive through handouts and grants. Children receive food from the feeding schemes at schools. Families are sometimes provided with food parcels from the government. A few of them volunteer for a small stipend once in a while.

7.3. ROLES OF THE SOCIAL WORKER

Social workers should identify with those people who are especially vulnerable and ensure that their abilities and potential are developed and strengthened (Roux 2002:116).

In order to assist a client to reach his/her potential, while identifying and implementing a solution to the problems, the social worker takes on a variety of interventive roles. The worker's interventive roles constitute the behaviour expected of the social worker by both the client and the social worker to accomplish objectives (Compton & Galaway, 1999:309). In other words social workers' roles are dependent on client needs (Hoffman &

Sallee, 1994:76). From the findings it was clear that the households welcomed social work support.

- **Social broker**

A social work broker links the client with other community resources in order to accomplish the objectives. This requires a broad knowledge of community resources so that the social worker can help a client find and use a needed resource (Compton & Galaway, 1999:309). The social worker should liaise with relevant stakeholders in the Province who could supply the community with information.

- **Enabler**

In the enabler role, the social worker assists clients in finding the coping strengths and resources within themselves in order to produce the changes required by the objectives (Compton & Galaway, 1999:31). The enabler's work is built on a helping relationship with client systems (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994:86). The social worker should present programmes on life skills development.

- **Teacher**

In the teacher role, the social worker provides clients with new information necessary for coping with problem situations, assisting clients in practicing new behaviours or skills or model alternative behaviour patterns. The enabler helps clients to mobilize existing resources, whereas the teacher introduces additional resources into client systems (Compton & Galaway, 1999:311). The social worker should provide workshops during which the community members are taught various skills and techniques including surviving skills, how to manage their funds or money and on project management.

- **Mediator**

Mediation involves efforts to resolve disputes between the client system and other persons or organizations. In the mediating role, the social worker assists clients and the other party to find a common ground on which to resolve the conflict (Compton & Galaway, 1999:311). The social worker should be a peacemaker between different parties,

especially concerning the misuse of funds such as grants from the government or donations from outside.

- **Advocate**

As an advocate, the social worker presents and argues the client's cause when necessary, in order to accomplish the objectives. In mediation the effort is to secure resolution to a dispute through give and take on both sides; in advocacy the effort is to win for the client (Compton & Galaway, 1999:312). The social worker should speak on behalf of the community members to the chief of the village concerning a small plot/land to develop a project.

7.4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

In this study one of the objectives was to examine the nature of poverty in a rural area. It was clear that the inhabitants of Modimola village were very poor, taking into account their level of education, income and living conditions.

The second objective was to investigate the effect of poverty on the families. According to the research findings it was evident that poverty causes problems from malnutrition, ill health to marital problems and violence.

The third objective was to provide guidelines to social workers to empower poverty stricken families. Guidelines were compiled from the literature and research findings.

By meeting the three objectives, the aim of the research study was reached and the theoretical assumption that social workers are able to empower people to improve their life circumstances and thus alleviate their poverty was proven correct.

8. GUIDELINES/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF A SOCIAL WORKER IN EMPOWERING POVERTY STRICKEN FAMILIES

- Provide material assistance such as food, school fees, uniforms and bus fares for hospital visits. One community leader described social workers as daughters of the government, illustrating the belief that social workers had access to resources and specifically that social workers were in a position to give effect to government promises for a better life for all;
- Counsel people and give them advice. While counselling people is usually accepted as being a function of social work, giving advice is generally treated with caution. However, community leaders felt that in many cases social workers did have more knowledge pertaining to possible solutions and that advice was expected (Simpson, 2003:157);
- Refer people to resources and help them obtain pensions and grants and other forms of material assistance such as food parcels;
- Start clubs for children and the youth. Clubs were seen as an important means of preventing problems, as they could keep young people occupied and off the streets as well as teach them useful life skills that would help them in future.
- The government should avail more resources in the form of manpower, financial resources and communication resources to help decrease poverty through information given to the community, especially in the areas or groups where poverty has been found to be more prevalent.
- Social workers should be more aware of poverty stricken areas and use community development methods acquired during their training as social workers.
- Social workers must become part of cutting-edge research and help in bringing about change to facilitate social and economic development in rural communities (Schenck, 2004:169).
- More research is necessary to obtain more detailed knowledge and find more solutions for some of the problems in the rural communities.

- Community members must be encouraged to engage themselves in projects that are sustainable, such as market gardens and sewing groups. Some people felt that learning practical skills such as how to make patchwork blankets and design clothes would be useful, as people could apply them in income generating activities.
- Send some representatives/delegation to attend courses, conferences or workshops on poverty in order to gain some knowledge so as to come and share ideas with other group members or to empower them with skills.
- Teach the community life skills. Life skills are self-helping skills that enable people to help themselves.

9. CONCLUSION

It is clear that poverty is a major problem in the research area. Most of the respondents have a low level of education, which means that they are unqualified for jobs. Because they have no salaries, they are unable to purchase basic needs. They stay in inadequate housing with hardly any appliances.

In the community there is a lack of resources, such as clinics and shops. Also, very few job opportunities are available in the area. Due to a lack of water they are unable to cultivate vegetable gardens. They also have no means to look for better jobs in other areas. They do not have any projects in the area. In other words the people are not coping with their poor situation and are not doing anything to help themselves.

The people need someone to guide and empower them. The social worker can play the roles of broker, enabler, teacher, mediator and advocate to help alleviate the poverty in the area.

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ADDENDUMS

QUESTIONNAIRE

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS TO EMPOWER POVERTY STRICKEN FAMILIES IN RURAL AREAS

1. Demographic Details					
1.1. Age					
1.2. Gender		Male		Female	
1.3. Marital Status			Married	1	
			Divorced / Separated	2	
			Living together	3	
			Widowed	4	
			Never married	5	
1.4. Education				Head of household	
			Never attended school	1	
			Grade 1-4	2	
			Grade 5-8	3	
			Grade 9-12	4	
			Trade school	5	
			Collage / University	6	
1.5. Housing			Own home	Yes	No
				1	2
1.6. Number of people sharing household					
1.7. Do you have electricity?		Yes	1	No	2

1.8. Do you have running water?				Yes		1		No		2				
1.9. Which of the following appliances in working condition do you have?														
Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes		No				
Radio	1	2	TV	1	2	Fridge	1	2	Stove	1	2	Washing Machine	1	2
Bicycle	1	2	Car	1	2	Donkey Cart	1	2						
2. Financial Circumstances														
2.1. How is the head of the household employed										Full-time		Not employed		
										Part-Time				
2.2. Is the income for the family derived from														
Wages						Yes		1		No		2		
Child support grant						Yes		1		No		2		
Social pension						Yes		1		No		2		
Disability grant						Yes		1		No		2		
Foster care						Yes		1		No		2		
Maintenance grant						Yes		1		No		2		
2.3. Is the family able to meet their basic needs?						Yes		1		No		2		
2.4. How many of the people in this household belong to a feeding scheme?														
2.5. Do you have a food garden?						Yes		1		No		2		
2.6. Would you say that the people here always, occasionally, seldom or never go hungry?								Always		4				
								Occasionally		3				
								Seldom		2				
								Never		1				

2.7. What did you and the others in this household eat yesterday? Write down what the person tells you)	Porridge	Yes	1	No	2
	Vegetables	Yes	1	No	2
	Bread	Yes	1	No	2
	Meat	Yes	1	No	2
	Fruit	Yes	1	No	2
	Milk	Yes	1	No	2
	Tea/Coffee	Yes	1	No	2
	Other				

3. Means of social work support

What support do you currently receive from the social worker and what support would you welcome from the social worker?

	Support received		Would welcome support	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
3.1.Regular visit from the social worker	1	2	1	2
3.2.Counselling services	1	2	1	2
3.3.Provide life skills information, e.g. financial management, project management	1	2	1	2
3.4.Linking the community with relevant resources, e.g. relevant and available department	1	2	1	2
3.5.Formation of support group	1	2	1	2
3.6.How to engage in/start a community project	1	2	1	2

3.7.How to complete business plans for financial assistance	1	2	1	2
3.8.Playing the advocacy and education role	1	2	1	2
3.9.Referral system	1	2	1	2
3.10. What does poverty do to your family members?				
.....				
.....				
.....				
3.11. What can you do to alleviate your poverty?				
.....				
.....				
.....				
3.12. What can you do to market the products that you produce, such as vegetables or knitted garments?				
.....				
.....				
.....				
3.13. What can the social worker do to alleviate poverty in your area?				
.....				
.....				
.....				

3.14. Do you have any other comments?

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Thanks you for your cooperation.

Ellen Tlhojane
Researcher