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## ADOLESCENTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: THE ROLES OF THE CHURCH, SPIRITUALITY AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES IN PROMOTING MOTIVATION TO OVERCOME DISADVANTAGE

MAARMAN, Gerald J. and LAMONT-MBAWULI, Kim

### ABSTRACT

*In the South African context, communities are considered disadvantaged if they are excessively burdened with poverty, gangs, violence, crime, bad role models and unbecoming stereotypical norms. Thus, the disadvantage is, in essence, multifactorial, and has deleterious effects on society as a whole and particularly adolescents. Interventions mitigating the negative impact of multifactorial disadvantage on adolescents should be practical, relatively easy to implement and affordable. In this review, we discuss previously published research in this niche to argue that church/spirituality; services of non-governmental/non-profit organisations and mentorship programmes should be a focal point of social development strategies. We propose an implementation model and contend that the collaborative action of church/spirituality, services of non-governmental/non-profit organisations and mentorship programmes in national social development strategies could be beneficial to disadvantaged adolescents.*

**KEY TERMS:** *adolescent; disadvantage; interventions; church; mentorship; non-governmental organisations (NGO); non-profit organisations (NPO); South Africa*

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## INTRODUCTION

In South Africa (SA), apartheid is considered the root cause of financial, social, economic, and educational inequality, between White, so called Coloured and Black communities (Carter & May, 2001; Kingdon & Knight, 2007). The current SA democratic government has put enormous effort into alleviating the lasting effects of apartheid (Redding, 2006; Saunders, 2006). These alleviating efforts include the enactment of land reform (Atuahene, 2011), provision of social grants (Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013), implementation of black economic empowerment, and job-creation (Mebratie & Bedi, 2013). This review paper will demonstrate that despite these commendable efforts made by the current SA government, disadvantage still exists, and it surely has deleterious effects on the nation, but more especially on developing adolescents. In turn, this has an adverse effect on the country, as adolescents who are victims of disadvantage, interact with civil society, and these interactions can be both good and bad. This paper provides an extensive review of the literature on the topic, and after dissecting the unique nature of disadvantage in SA, we seek answers from literature of which interventions may attenuate the adverse effects of advantage on adolescents.

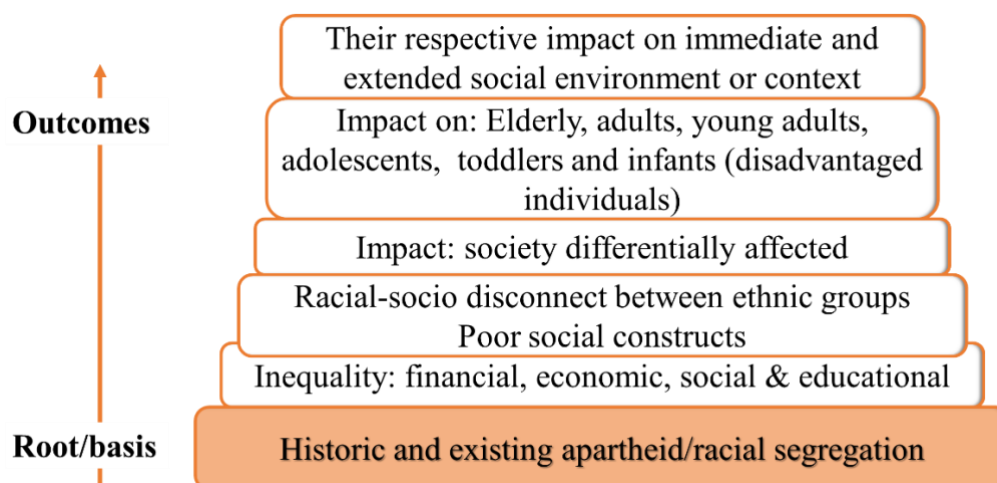
## DISADVANTAGE AND ITS MULTIFACTORIAL NATURE

In South Africa (SA), apartheid is considered the root cause of financial, social, economic and educational inequality, between White, so called Coloured and Black communities (Carter & May, 2001; Kingdon & Knight, 2007). The current SA democratic government has put enormous effort into alleviating the lasting effects of apartheid (Redding, 2006; Saunders, 2006). These alleviating efforts include the enactment of land reform, provision of social grants, implementation of black economic empowerment, and job-creation (Mebratie & Bedi, 2013).

However, despite these commendable efforts, the legacy of apartheid is still evident and many Coloured and Black South African citizens remain disadvantaged in one form or another (Nel, 2013). The disadvantage is reflected by the worrying poverty statistics and economic inequality between the different ethnic groups. The authors would like to propose that a continued *racial-social disconnect* was a result of apartheid and still exists between individuals from various ethnic groups. With this racial-social disconnect, we argue that a proportion of different ethnic groups continue to be separated based on race/ethnicity, culture and social context. Sadly, by being disadvantaged in one form or another, Coloured and Black communities still largely bear the scars inflicted by apartheid.

The disadvantage is not the same in all ethnic groups and it associates with poverty that provides a breeding ground for community violence, abuse (sexual and domestic) and a culture of crime (Chari, 2008). We argue that disadvantage is multifactorial within the SA context as it refers to more than just poverty or a lack of finances. In the SA context, disadvantage is an umbrella term for (1) suboptimal housing, (2) high prevalence of gangs, (3) crime, (4) abuse (sexual or domestic), (5) community violence, and (6) substance abuse. Disadvantage affects social constructs, social cohesiveness and social arrangement of communities (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The basis/roots of disadvantage, and its impact on the various individuals in society



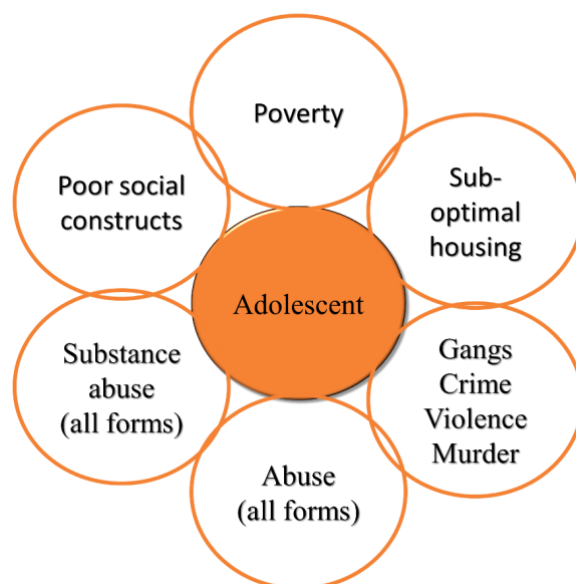
Disadvantage is rooted in apartheid that gave rise to inequality, racial-social disconnect between ethnic groups and poor social constructs. These secondary outcomes of disadvantage affect the broader society in different ways,

and of note is its negative impact on developing adolescents. The effects of this social context suggest that disadvantaged adolescents can affect their immediate environment and social context reciprocally, especially if the impact of disadvantage is not counteracted by something positive.

A society generally consists of the elderly, adults, adolescents, children, toddlers and infants (Chudacoff, 1989). However, adolescents are often considered the future of a country, the leaders of tomorrow and therefore the adverse effects that disadvantage has on them is concerning. These adolescents are not “previously disadvantaged”, as often mistakenly referred to, but disadvantaged, period. They are disadvantaged because they are born and raised in an environment defined by (1) suboptimal housing, (2) high prevalence of gangs, (3) crime, (4) unbecoming social constructs, (5) abuse (sexual, domestic, emotional or verbal), (6) community violence, and (7) substance abuse.

In Figure 2, we depict our argument that adolescents are central to the disadvantage that is evident within their social context (Figure 2). Disadvantage negatively affect adolescents and even if the impact is not significantly visible at a given point in time, it does not negate its existence. Adolescents are not partially affected by disadvantage, but they are undoubtedly affected in many ways. This puts them at a disadvantage compared to those who live in wealthy areas where many of these factors are not pronounced yet psychosocial support is available.

Figure 2: A schematic diagram showing how adolescents are central to the negative effects of disadvantage



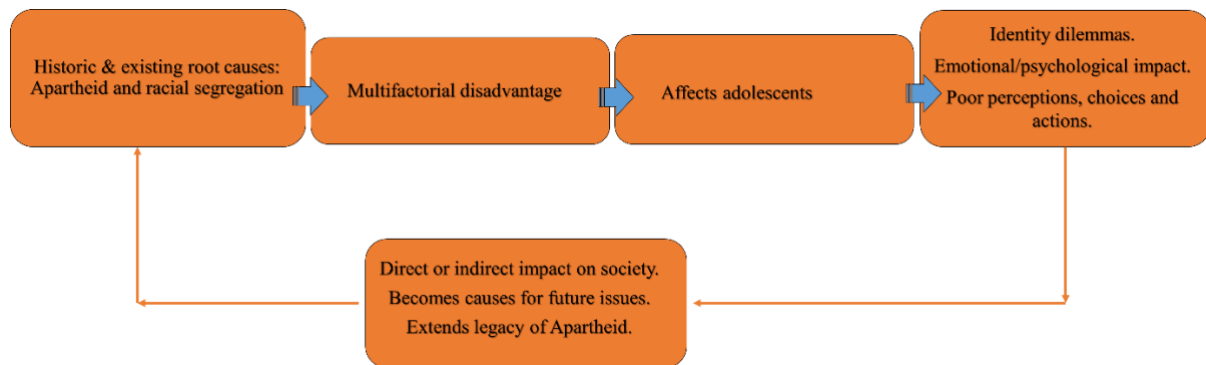
Adolescents are not partially affected by disadvantage but affected in many ways even if these effects are not visible in the short-term.

### CONCEPTUAL-THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The developmental systems theory emphasizes that transactions/interactions occur between developing adolescents and embedded sociocultural contexts within their immediate environment. This theory establishes how the immediate environment or social context affects their perceptions and choices (Lee & Stewart, 2013; Townsend & Foster, 2013). Subsequently, we highlight that the impact of disadvantage on adolescents gives rise to poor perceptions and choices by the predisposed adolescent (Figure 3).

Akin to this, the socio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) argues that an adolescent is part of a complex set of systems. The relationship between an adolescent and their immediate environment (i.e. system) determines their actions. Central to these developmental theories is the concept of plasticity that refers to the potential of individuals to change in positive or negative ways (Roeser, 2008). Plasticity ultimately promotes positive adolescent development. These theories further imply that an adolescent whose interactions with their socio-contextual environment are beneficial, is more likely to commit to a sense of identity that promotes reciprocity with their family and society (Lerner 2006). For example, an environment with community violence places adolescents at risk for engaging in violent acts themselves (Lerner 2006). In figure 3, we depict and highlight that the impact of disadvantage on adolescents gives rise to poor behaviour and actions (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Multifactorial disadvantage negatively affects adolescents and to a certain extent, determines how they reciprocate with their environment*



The disadvantage can adversely affect adolescents by promoting identity dilemmas, negative emotional and psychological effects, poor perceptions, choices, behaviour and actions. Unbecoming actions of disadvantaged adolescents not only affects them but also their immediate environment and the larger society. If the impact of disadvantage on the developing adolescent is not counteracted by some form of multidisciplinary intervention, it will promote a cycle of disadvantage. For example, poor and disadvantaged adolescents are likely to have poor educational status, be unemployed, join gangs and that can further continue generational poverty and the legacy of apartheid.

Disadvantage affects the choices/decision-making processes of adolescents and this further affects their academic performance and education status (Haroon, 2001). Haroon and Murry (2001) argue that as a secondary outcome of disadvantage, limited education affects the propensity of the disadvantaged adolescent to eventually participate in the labour force, their probability of being employed and their earnings. Disadvantage contributes to limited education (low educational status), and functions as a determining factor in earnings distribution amongst populations (Haroon, 2001). In fact, a disadvantage in a developmental context also predisposes adolescents to poor health outcomes that can place a burden on public health services (Pednekar, Gupta, & Gupta, 2011). Therefore, disadvantage not only affects the adolescent, but also the larger community, economic sector, health sector and the education system (Figure 3).

Accordingly, in figure 3, we depict that an adolescent contributes to society in many ways, and even their actions can have a direct impact on their immediate environment and society as a whole (WHO, 2003). Based on the work of Haroon and Murry (2001), many adolescents, negatively impacted by disadvantage, are likely to have low educational status and be unemployed. This can increase unemployment rates and thus affect the country's economy. If not corrected and surmounted by some form of intervention, the adverse effects of disadvantage on adolescents can cause them to continue a cycle of generational poverty and unemployment and thus extend the legacy of Apartheid (Figure 3).

## DESIGN AND EXECUTION OF THIS REVIEW

Devising ways in which to support disadvantaged adolescents to help them surmount the effects of their socio-economic context is critical. However, it is a difficult area to conduct research in, as many elements interact in a complex manner to bring about negative influence in a developing adolescent. The different constituents of disadvantage may require different kinds of interventions, particularly so, given that issues in the SA context are deeply rooted in racial inequality and discrimination. Moreover, in this historical context, it is likely that the solutions will not be universal. However, it is not feasible to cover all interventions in one paper, and we do consider it important that a paper is composed to highlight and discuss possible interventions. According to our knowledge, there is currently no paper of this nature.

Therefore, this review was constructed to highlight crucial interventions that are practical, affordable and relatively easily implementable in low resource settings. These include those that can be implemented during routine/national social development programmes within schools and communities. We perused online search engines for papers with research and findings on *adolescents within the South African context*. These engines included Education Abs, EBSCO, Web of Science, Lista EBSCO, and ERIC EBSCO. Our focus was to search for and include only papers on (a) disadvantage that exists in this context, (b) how disadvantage influences the development and social behaviours of adolescents, and (c) practical, affordable and relatively easily implementable interventions. The findings of our search are discussed in this review and inferences are drawn in the light of the literature on this topic. We aim to use this review to inform and reaffirm the potentially instrumental role of these interventions in routine social development programmes. Upon investigation of the literature, we

realized that many of the proposed literature could be categorized into three groups: church/spirituality, roles of non-governmental/non-profit organisations and mentorship programmes. Lastly, we aim to stimulate the conceptualization of social development strategies that are culturally and socially appropriate to disadvantaged adolescents in low resource settings.

### **PRACTICAL, AFFORDABLE AND RELATIVELY EASY IMPLEMENTABLE INTERVENTIONS**

If one considers that affected, disadvantaged adolescents enter a classroom and are yet expected to function optimally, then this points out a major flaw (Saltzman, Pynoos, Layne, Steinberg, & Aisenberg, 2001). Often, the reciprocal interaction of disadvantaged adolescents and their impact on society does not generate positive educational outcomes. There is, therefore, a need for interventions that can promote resilience in disadvantaged adolescents in spite of social-contextual challenges, and a lack of social infrastructural or socio-economic change.

The question remains, does a country like SA have the necessary, effective inventions to address the implications of disadvantage on the developing adolescent? This question is open for discussion and requires deep reflection. Furthermore, how does one address the issue of disadvantaged adolescents who enter a classroom with a predisposition and who perhaps deal with undisclosed abuse, domestic violence or addiction issues? What would the best intervention in such a case be? There is also the question of individual attitude towards or perceptions of current interventions offered by the government or private organisations. Unfortunately, either these questions remain unanswered or appropriate interventions are yet to be developed and implemented effectively.

Research suggests that possible interventions include creating a safe environment for the adolescent, discipline with a “love approach”, the use of incentives for success, education about violence and cognitive restructuring, processing of emotional cues, social problem-solving and effective parenting skills (Bowers-Stephens, 2006). Other inventions include the eradication of poverty and socio-economic inequality and the redistribution of wealth (Bowers-Stephens, 2006).

A systematic review demonstrated that a decade ago, social support via social financial grants/welfare programmes were relatively effective in reducing poverty (Kenworthy, 1999). However, due to the constantly growing population, the burden on the government increases simultaneously and it may become increasingly challenging to provide this form of support. Therefore, the social welfare approach to eradicating disadvantage is considered a “safety-net measure” and not ideal when for the long-term reduction of disadvantage (Aliber, 2003). Interventions that merely increase financial wealth do have a role in eradicating generational poverty. However, they may not eradicate other constituents of disadvantage such as gangs, violence and substance abuse. These safety-net measures may be a short-term solution, but due to its one-dimensional nature, it cannot solve a multifactorial problem such as disadvantage (Hopwood, 2005; Seccombe, 2002). Other strategies are therefore necessary to improve the efficacy of solutions against disadvantage. These strategies should, however, be combined with current government interventions in order to mitigate the impact of disadvantage. Moreover, in communities where poverty reduction interventions are not feasible, other equally effective interventions can be employed.

### **STRATEGIES PROMOTING ADOLESCENT DRIVE TO SURMOUNT THE IMPACT OF DISADVANTAGE**

#### **The church and spirituality**

Historically, the church has been recognized as a social institution that interacts with and influences family, school and community (Abrams, 1963; Este, 2004). It has played a crucial role in alleviating the undesirable impact of disadvantage on developing adolescents. The church has been involved in improving public school performance, supporting youth development and providing of counselling and social support. Kutter and McDermott (1997) argue that church plays a crucial role in educating adolescents about drugs and substance abuse. Moreover, the church is instrumental in educating adolescents about the challenges of a disadvantaged community, and thereby alleviating the impact of disadvantage.

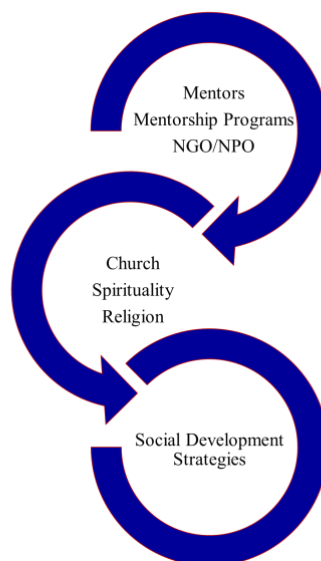
Dass-Brailsford (2005) investigated 16 first-year university students originating from disadvantaged, non-white SA communities. They described an individual’s resilience to overcome life’s obstacles and challenges and identified factors that motivated them to achieve academic success despite disadvantage during their adolescent years. Individuals in this study acknowledged that the church community and church leaders played an important role in their success (Dass-Brailsford, 2005). In line with these findings, neighbourhood contexts such as *Ubuntu* affirmed are known to affect an adolescent’s aspirations to pursue tertiary education (Holloway & Mulherin, 2004). Such a context can easily be created within churches or religious organizations because of its interpersonal values of family. More importantly, from a social development perspective, existing government programmes can utilize the services provided by churches and spiritual leaders.

There is further evidence that spirituality, religion and active participation in church activities form part of coping strategies employed by abuse survivors and youth who experienced trauma (Farley, 2007). The individual's belief in a higher power and the support they receive from their faith community are integral to their post-traumatic mental and emotional healing (Farley, 2007). In an interesting study by Gillum, Sullivan and Bybee (2006), 151 women who survived domestic violence events were interviewed. The majority (97%) of these women acknowledged that God or spirituality was a source of strength or comfort after the trauma. Authors suggested that the extent of church related involvement predicted increased psychological well-being and decreased depression. With this in mind, we argue that social development strategies should utilize the aspect of spirituality during interventions that are designed to support disadvantaged adolescents.

Qualitative findings of a 14-site, 11-country study of resilience among adolescents, support the fact that religion or the individual's spirituality is an important contributing factor in their resilience to overcome disadvantage (Ungar et al., 2007). These authors also contend that the resilience is the individual's capacity to overcome challenges associated with disadvantage. Furthermore, the individual's environment can also provide access to conducive resources in culturally relevant ways (Ungar et al., 2007). Taken together, these studies suggest that as a means of helping adolescents to overcome disadvantage, social development strategies should encourage (1) them to indulge in their spirituality and (2) their involvement in church activities. This type of approach can have positive effects on adolescent behaviour towards life, education, community and health (Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Morales, 2008). This can be achieved if social development departments work closely with spiritual institutions when implementing support programmes for disadvantaged adolescents.

Professionals who work with adolescents should, when applicable, encourage disadvantaged adolescents to indulge in spirituality (Figure 4). This is increasingly important in the SA context, where religion has been an intricate part of schools for many years. Findings from the aforementioned studies (and many others) reaffirm the importance of continuing religious activities in schools (in a non-discriminating manner), particularly, those schools in communities where disadvantage remains rife. It is appreciable that church and spirituality might not be perceived as relevant by all adolescents, and that those who are not spiritually inclined should not be forced to participate. There are ways to use the benefits of church/spirituality without infringing on the rights of others. Of note, we argue that church and spirituality should be entwined with social development interventions to support adolescents in disadvantaged communities (Figure 4). Governments should invest in social development interventions that involves the church by providing a platform for churches to contribute to interventions for disadvantaged adolescents. Churches could even be used as service delivery points where social development interventions can be hosted and implemented in disadvantaged communities. However, it begs the question, are churches ready to collaborate effectively with the government to help disadvantaged adolescents overcome adversities to achieve success?

Figure 4: Church, spirituality, religion, NGO/NPO services, mentors and mentorship programmes should be an integral part of social development strategies or interventions aimed at disadvantaged adolescents.



Abbreviations: NGO: non-governmental organisations and NPO: non-profit organisations.

### **Non-profit/non-governmental organizations**

The efforts of the church in assisting disadvantaged adolescents should be supported by other non-profit/non-governmental organisations (NPOs or NGOs). The roles of NPOs or NGOs in addressing the impact of disadvantage on adolescents have been investigated extensively (Considine, 2003; Hasenfelda, 2006; Helmut, 2000). These organisations often provide a safe environment and academic assistance to adolescents. They provide counselling and opportunities that promote vision and optimism, regarding the future and facilitates access to academic, health and social services.

These NPOs or NGOs are generally distinguished by four interrelated attributes: (1) Upholding and promoting cultural values that are typically different from institutionalised values. (2) Offering services to society according to their own values to catalyse social change. (3) Meeting the expressive and social identity needs of their members by promoting a collective identity. (4) Lastly, upholding service provision and mutual aid (Hasenfelda, 2006). According to Taylor (2007), NPOs or NGOs have played an instrumental role during the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, by inspiring social-political change and enrichment of civil society (Taylor, 2007). The services and attributes of NPOs or NGOs are critical for social development, particularly for adolescents.

A systematic review by Barry et al. (2013) demonstrated that in SA, NPOs or NGOs focusing on life skills-education, had positively influenced adolescents (Barry, Clarke, Jenkins, & Patel, 2013). Life skills-education offered by these organisations included critical thinking, decision making, problem-solving, communication and coping skills (Barry et al., 2013). Adolescents from utilizing services of these organisations displayed significant improvement in self-esteem, perceived self-efficacy, pro-social behaviour and adequate coping better with adjustment. Moreover, they displayed better adjustment in school and improved classroom behaviour. Authors demonstrated that NPO or NGO programmes promote better adolescents' physical and mental health (Barry et al., 2013). Therefore, these organizations have tremendous value for positive adolescent development, particularly for disadvantaged adolescents.

Of note, auditing of NPO/NGO efficacy and outputs should be performed routinely. This will ensure transparent effectiveness and prevent exploitation or abuse of funding (Helmut, 2000). A systematic review by Kareithi and Lund (2012) assessed the efficacy of NPOs or NGOs in developing countries and confirmed the continued need for increased research on factors influencing the performance of NPOs or NGOs. Authors revealed that these organisations do not always seek beneficiaries' perspectives and input about their service delivery (Kareithi, 2012). Therefore, to improve the performance, NPOs or NGOs should gather the perspectives of beneficiaries and not only assess beneficiaries' needs (Kareithi, 2012).

Due to the constant growth of the population, there is an increasing need for NPOs or NGOs to assist the government in the eradication of disadvantage. Their input in assisting disadvantaged adolescents is required, as their skills and services could provide support to current social development strategies (Figure 4). Social development interventions should be designed and implemented while actively engaging and getting input from NPOs and NGOs (Figure 4). We propose that countries like SA should increase their support to these organisations and put appropriate measures in place to assess and increase their performance. Furthermore, we propose that the government place greater emphasis on culturing relationships between social development programmes and NPOs/NGOs operating in disadvantaged communities. A stronger focus should be placed on supporting disadvantaged adolescents who hail from disadvantaged communities.

### **Mentorship programmes and the role of mentors**

Mentoring programmes emphasise the relationship between an adolescent and a caring adult (Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002). This relationship involves spending one-on-one time together and providing support and guidance, to help the adolescent confront challenges. It is a long-term relationship that aims to provide support and opportunities for social and academic development (Kahne & Bailey, 1999).

Kahne and Bailey (1999) reported findings from a two-year study that focused primarily on a mentorship programme, named "I Have a Dream (IHAD)". The aim of the study was to better understand the implications of bringing the IHAD-youth development strategy model to greater scale. The secondary aim was to ensure that adolescents would graduate from high school and attend college in the future. Student performance-data were collected in different IHAD sites in Chicago (Kahne & Bailey, 1999). The programme was developed in such a way, that an IHAD sponsor adopted an entire sixth-grade class, together with a project coordinator. It provided long-term mentorship, financial, academic and social support. Investigators compared the IHAD adolescents' graduation rate with that of non-IHAD adolescents, who were in the sixth grade at the school in the previous year (Kahne & Bailey, 1999). Graduation rates of the IHAD students were approximately twice as high (71% and 69%) as those from non-IHAD adolescents (37% and 34%) (Kahne & Bailey, 1999). The programme, cultivated relationships between adolescents and mentors that resembled family relationships and fostered a sense of belonging (Kahne & Bailey, 1999). It also developed social trust that facilitated access to social networks and social services and financial resources that helped adolescents achieve more than they otherwise would not have

achieved (Kahne & Bailey, 1999). Thus, the impact of a mentoring programme is invaluable to developing adolescents and can improve how they function within a particular social context.

Muscott and O'Brien (1999) reported on an inclusive after school mentorship programme that was developed to enhance character-development of elementary students. This was achieved by teaching students character traits such as responsibility and self-control, cooperation, teamwork as well as respect and appreciation for diversity via language arts (Muscott, 1999). For the duration of the programme, high school and college students fulfilled the roles of mentors, introduced the programme curriculum to and built friendships with students. Afterwards, investigators examined the participants' knowledge of the curriculum and also performed in-depth ethnographic interviews with nineteen students with behavioural and learning disabilities (Muscott, 1999). After the programme, students expressed responsibility for their actions, responded to the ideas of cooperation and teamwork and developed the confidence to make new friends (Muscott, 1999). This extended the usefulness of mentoring to an approach geared toward peer mentoring, something that current social development strategies could utilize. This can be achieved by identifying reliable, successful individuals that could serve as peer mentors to disadvantaged individuals. For such an approach, we propose that unemployed graduates be used as mentors who can provide mentorship in schools from disadvantaged communities. Future research studies can be designed to test whether the collaborative implementation of social development and such mentors can benefit disadvantaged adolescents.

In a longitudinal study, Whiting and Mallory (2007) conducted a mentoring project aimed at determining behavioural outcomes, of high-risk middle-school students. Data collection was achieved using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale and the Achenbach measures, and reports were obtained from mentors, parents, teachers and the mentees themselves. Academically below-average male students demonstrated positive outcomes from the mentoring experience (Whiting, 2007). Taken together, these studies reiterate the benefits that mentorship provides to adolescents. They show that even those with learning and behavioural disabilities benefit from having a mentor. As Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) have demonstrated, mentors can play an important role in the lives of disadvantaged adolescents.

A central component of mentorship is motivation or motivating the mentee to achieve particular goals, whether academic or non-academic (Schrubbe, 2004; Van Emmerik, 2006). The classic work by Ryan and Deci (2000) outlined the relevance of motivation in mentorship. Mentors typically either serve as motivation to the mentee (for example a mentor who achieved success despite disadvantage) or they provide external motivation to the adolescent mentee (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This external motivation and the mentor himself would provide the adolescent with proof that it is possible to overcome challenges stemming from disadvantage (Areepattamanni, Freeman, & Klinger, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Perhaps of closer relevance to SA lies the motivational story of the late *uTata* Nelson Mandela, as adequate proof that in spite of great adversity, one can become the best that one can be and inspire others to do likewise (Soudien, 2015; Soudien et al., 2014). A caring individual and guiding mentor can assist in co-creating and fostering authentically supportive relationships and networks that enhance the social capital of adolescents (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). This reaffirms that effective mentorship programmes and culturally appropriate mentors can support disadvantaged SA adolescents.

We hereby suggest a model that can be implemented in schools with a good likelihood to have positive effects on adolescents. With this model, we propose that government or stakeholders in civil society (1) invest money into mentorship programmes in schools; (2) utilize the skills of unemployed graduates for this approach, (3) provide them with adequate training and (4) allow them to mentor adolescents in a school. (5) Their mentoring can be implemented (6) as part of a structured social development programme (7) under the leadership of a qualified expert. (8) Funding can be acquired and used to (9) remunerate the graduates for their time and services (i.e. taxable remuneration). It is acknowledged that this model might not be fully implementable in all countries but can be adapted to fit a particular context or financial budget. In whichever way the model is implemented, a mentoring programme of this nature can help SA disadvantaged adolescents. In addition, this model has job creation potential, where the underutilised skills of unemployed graduates can be put to good use. If not by this model, other ways can be devised to provide practical, relatively easy implementable interventions for adolescents faced with disadvantage.

## WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

Considering the adverse effects of disadvantage (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001), it seems unreasonable to expect a disadvantaged adolescent to achieve academic success in e.g. a classroom or workplace. Even more so, if they face undisclosed sexual/physical abuse, victimisation and poverty. Therefore, this should be kept in mind when social development interventions are developed, schooling systems are managed, and educational curricula are modified. Future research should investigate the feasibility of support programmes for disadvantaged adolescents. Are there mechanisms in place to help adolescents, who are exposed to, for instance, some form of abuse in a disadvantaged community? Is this help accessible and confidential to the average



disadvantaged adolescent? These are important questions or hypotheses that could be investigated by future scientifically designed studies.

Due to the multifactorial nature of disadvantage, in theory, only a multi-disciplinary approach will be effective. Therefore, an effective, appropriate and contextually fitting multi-disciplinary intervention is needed for disadvantaged adolescents. Such a multi-disciplinary intervention should include (1) eradication of poverty/social inequality, (2) job creation, (3) encouraging indulgence of church/spirituality/religion, (4) collaborative efforts of NPOs/NGOs and (5) a strong focus on mentorship or mentorship.

This multi-disciplinary approach should involve government, schools and communities. It should promote multidirectional communication with parents, adolescents, guardian psychologists, social workers and rehabilitation centres located near a disadvantaged community. To achieve this, there should be strong collaboration and intercommunication between government and various stakeholders of civil society and increased investment in alternative strategies (Figure 4). However, in low resource settings such a multi-disciplinary intervention may not be feasible. In this case, we recommend that social development strategies be entwined with components of church/spirituality, (4) collaborative efforts of NPOs/NGOs and (5) a strong focus on mentorship or mentorship programmes (Figure 4). Departments of social development should work closely and interactively with churches/faith-based organisations, NPOs/NGOs, mentors and mentorship programmes toward designing interventions for disadvantaged adolescents.

## CONCLUSION

This review discusses the multifactorial nature of disadvantage in the South African context and its negative impact on adolescents. The eradication of poverty and socio-economic inequality is a much-needed solution but often a tedious, expensive and challenging. Alternative interventions have been reviewed in this paper, and we highlighted how they can assist disadvantaged adolescents. These interventions comprise church/spirituality, NPO/NOGs and mentorship/mentorship programmes. They have shown notable benefit to adolescents and are practical and relatively easy implementable interventions for adolescents faced with disadvantage. We have described possible hypotheses that future studies could test, and a model of incorporating mentorship/spirituality into social development interventions. Such comprehensive social development strategies can be implemented in low resource settings, to provide practical, affordable and implementable interventions to support disadvantaged adolescents.

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