

Editorial

Monica Ferreira, Editor

SAJG comes of age

When does a scientific journal come of age? Should it wait the customary 21 years of rites of passage as human beings must before they are initiated into society? To be fair, ten years may be a reasonable lapse of time to assess how well a journal has shaped up and proven itself. Could a journal on ageing conceivably come of age after three years?

Thinking about it, there are probably no ground rules for the time that must pass for a journal's initiation – especially in Africa where most things are youthful and survival itself is no mean feat. *SAJG*, the only gerontology journal of its kind on the African continent, has survived all of three years – and shows no signs of becoming a ghost. Three years may well be time enough to take a look at the journal's achievements thus far, to learn where we may have fallen short and to consider new directions in which we should move.

First, what are the facts and figures that add up to *SAJG*'s coming of age? Five numbers of the biannual journal have been published, up to and including Volume 3(2) (October) 1994. Only one number of the journal, Volume 1(1) (October), was published in 1992.

Over the three-year period, 60 manuscripts were processed of which 28 were published. In each case, the manuscripts were sent to two (or more) reviewers, to provide feedback to the author(s) and to guide the editorial committee on the acceptance of a manuscript for publication. All the articles published required some revision; in several cases they required extensive revision. Prospective authors should take note of this norm and not be discouraged by the editor's request for a manuscript to be revised before it is accepted.

The published items included 22 original research papers, three review or forum articles, two letters, and an introduction to the special issue on "Intergenerational relations" (Volume 3(2), October 1994).

A multidisciplinary journal

The journal aims to serve multiple disciplinary and professional groups. Twenty-one items published to date dealt with topics relating to the social sciences, while five items dealt with matters relating to geriatric medicine and two were concerned with health services.

Until early 1995, no practice-oriented papers were received for consideration for placement in *SAJG* – despite substantial encouragement of prospective authors by the editor. We are keen to publish practice reports from practitioners, and invite authors to submit papers about cases, methods, training and organizational innovations. We also encourage readers' views and letters commenting on specific papers already published in the journal.

In the editorial in the second number of *SAJG*, Møller and Ferreira (1993) noted that the political transformation period in South Africa is a critical time to review ageing issues and matters affecting the elderly. It was recently mooted that the

elderly are falling off political agendas in the transformation period. Louw (1995) has noted that whereas the "care of the elderly" occupied almost a full page in the African National Congress' draft "National Health Plan for South Africa," planning regarding the specific concerns of the elderly has not been included in several crucial consultative forums. As a specialist scientific journal, *SAJG* is a valuable medium for publicizing the issues and reporting new interdisciplinary thinking on how matters concerning the elderly in South Africa – and the Southern African region – should be dealt with.

How has *SAJG* performed?

To find out how *SAJG* performed over the first three years, a survey was carried out among the Editorial Advisory Panel members at the end of 1994. Half the members who commented on the journal's performance live in countries outside South Africa.

Not surprisingly, the non-South African panel members rated the scientific nature and content of the published articles as "variable" to "good and improving." Local panel members felt that the articles were of "an adequate" or "a very high" scientific standard! In general, the respondents felt that the journal had served its goals; however, several members called for more practice-oriented articles, where "it is assumed that informal observation rather than quantitative evaluation is the approach."

Several members suggested that more articles based on "original research of a specifically 'developing country' nature" should be included in future numbers. A member suggested an "occasional journey into philosophical ponderings ... and the unshamed dealing with direct care issues."

When asked where they thought *SAJG*'s strengths lie, a member referred to the journal as being an instrument for the development of scientific gerontology in the region. This member also recognized that *SAJG* is a young journal in a young part of the world, and that a relaxation of scientific standards was forced; however, these standards will tighten as the field of gerontology grows in the region. Another member commended the journal's wider interest in Africa as a whole, as "the production of a similar journal would be very difficult in many other African countries."

Where did the members feel *SAJG*'s weaknesses lie? The members were kind: the majority could not name a weakness! However, the editors appreciated the suggestions of two members, that (1) we "resist an impulse to pack [the Editorial Advisory Panel] with non-Africans," and that (2) we "guard against ... trying to become too 'scientific' in a sense removed from the interest/comprehension of many people out there who could use a well-balanced journal of this kind."

Overall, the editors were complimented on the format and technical production of the journal. Some panel members also

singled out the special issue on intergenerational relations as "outstanding" and "of interest to everyone." We have taken note of and will heed each of the valuable suggestions made by the members in future numbers. Readers are warmly invited to write and give us their views on the journal, and to indicate which types of articles they would like to see more of.

This issue

The sixth number of *SAJG* includes varied and interesting contributions which will appeal to researchers and practitioners alike.

It is fitting that precisely a year after the first fully democratic elections were held in South Africa, an article by **Møller** on voter education of older Africans should be included in this number. Møller has captured the euphoria of the older first-time voters in her selection of quotations from media reports on the voting. She concludes in her article that for these older South Africans who waited over 40 years to be enfranchised, voting was experienced as a particularly fulfilling moment in their lives.

In an original paper **Burman** examines the findings of a study on the nature and extent of child care rendered by older coloured women in the Cape Peninsula – either to grandchildren, or to the children of other relatives or non-relatives. Burman considers the economic implications of the care which the women provide and finds that very few benefit financially. On the contrary, she notes a downward, rather than an expected upward flow of wealth, whereby social old-age pensioners share their pension money with other members of the household, including the grandchildren for whom they care. Burman concludes that not only are intergenerational relations strengthened by older women remaining in the family structure and caring for young children but through their pensions they enjoy considerable status in the household.

Three practice items are included in this number. Working within a social-work framework, **Howes** has developed a monitoring instrument for use in the case management of older clients in the community. She reviews recent literature on case management and introduces the concept to South African practitioners, indicating its potential usefulness in a restructured service-delivery system in South Africa. She argues that to address the backlog in service delivery in developing and rural communities, and in view of limited resources and other reasons which discourage institutional care, case management is a means of rendering and co-ordinating cost-effective care to older persons in the community.

Authors **Amosun**, **Mazarire** and **Mawere** examine the pattern of utilization of physiotherapy services by elderly Zimbabweans at a central hospital in Harare. They establish baseline data on the medical conditions for which the patients received physiotherapy. The authors highlight the need for adequate information in these areas in African countries.

In the third practice item, **Tooke** raises the issue of developing and providing training for carers in homes for the aged. He reports on the training methodology which he has developed for this category of worker, and calls for the setting of standards for such training and the institution of procedures

to ensure that standardized training of carers is carried out in homes.

The poor training of carers, or a lack of training for this cadre of workers has been mooted as a factor which contributes to the mistreatment or abuse of residents in homes (Conradie & Charlton, 1992). Historically, South African nursing bodies have not recognized these workers and have opposed formal training that might equip them to perform tasks done by student nurses (enrolled nursing auxiliaries). In post-election South Africa new cadres of workers increasingly need to be trained and employed, as part and parcel of the goals of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which includes not only training citizens but also creating work and career opportunities for all. To ascertain the present attitudes of national nursing bodies towards the training of carers, the South African Nursing Council and the South African Nursing Association were invited to reply to the proposals in Dr Tooke's brief. Their replies are published as rejoinders to the brief.

Finally, this number of *SAJG* also carries its first book review. Valerie Møller reviews the new publication of US authors Steven M. Albert and Maria G. Cattell, titled *Old age in global perspective: cross-cultural and cross-national views*. The book, which adopts a multidisciplinary approach, presents ethnographic case studies and evidence from cross-national surveys to assess variation in the experience of ageing and old age. Møller concludes that Southern African readers will gain many insights from the book, to better understand the complexities of ageing in their own society.

Special issue next

The October 1995 number of *SAJG* will be a special issue on "The family and ageing in Africa." Professor Nana Araba Apt of the University of Ghana will be the guest editor of the special issue.

Several manuscripts have been submitted for placement in the issue and are being processed. The papers deal with trends and patterns of kin support and respect for elders in Africa. Some papers examine how the strains of modernization, urbanization, dislocation and family nucleation may be eroding traditional family life and threatening the extent to which old people may hope to enjoy support and respect from their families in the future.

If you are not already a subscriber to *SAJG*, please become one, or encourage your organization or university library to subscribe to the journal. Please do so now, to ensure that you receive your copy of the special issue. If you need to renew your subscription, please do so. Without subscribers, *SAJG* will not survive. Viva Africa! Viva *SAJG*!

References

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