

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The overall purpose of the study was to generate a greater understanding of the perceptions of occupational social workers about how their service provision has been affected by HIV/AIDS in the workplace since 1995. Specifically, the study explored the perceptions of occupational social workers regarding:

- a) The ways in which occupational social workers' service provision has had to be adjusted in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the workplace.
- b) The extent to which occupational social workers perceive their HIV/AIDS services at macro level to be acknowledged as valuable by both management and employees.
- c) How HIV/AIDS has impacted on their relationship with management in the workplace.
- d) How occupational social work service has changed in terms of accessibility, flexibility, vision, educational role and movement from micro to macro practice

The researcher had anticipated that:

Occupational social workers had begun to play a more educational role since 1995 in order to accommodate severe challenges such HIV/AIDS. Educational programmes can be easily carried out in the form of workshops and seminars for the workforce. These programmes are relevant because they equip management and the workforce with basic knowledge on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the individual health status, how to treat people living with HIV/AIDS, legal rights and implications.

Furthermore, the researcher assumed that generally, occupational social workers had not utilised macro programmes effectively to respond to HIV/AIDS in the workplace and that most occupational social workers continue to practice on micro level and find it hard to move to practice at macro level.

Lastly, the researcher anticipated that HIV/AIDS has negatively affected the relationship among social workers, employees and management. That was due to social workers not traditionally being central or powerful figures in decision making in HIV/AIDS related issues; effective HIV/AIDS services require involvement at policy level.

The findings will be discussed in relation to how the objectives of the study have been achieved and how the Du Plessis's (1994) principles guided the research in achieving these objectives.

6.2 Ways in which occupational social worker's service provision needed to be adjusted in the context of HIV/AIDS

Du Plessis's (1994) principles that were proposed to assist occupational social workers to move from micro to macro practice, guided the researcher. The research aim was guided by six of those principles: accessibility of social work services, professional flexibility, vision on the part of occupational social work, dual accountability of social work to both management and employees, evaluation of social work practice and management support. The research aim was influenced by the researchers anticipated findings.

Accessibility of social work services.

All respondents highlighted that their services were accessible to senior management, middle management, skilled/professional, semi-skilled employees and unskilled employees in the workplace. The services were used as usual even in the context of

HIV/AIDS. The difference was that service users were focusing more on and/or raises concerns around HIV/AIDS impact. No adjustment was needed by social workers but only the expansion of horizons to accommodate new service demands. Para-statal sector and government departments were also availing their services to the various unions involved in the workplace. The unions were utilising those services as often as possible.

Professional flexibility

Flexibility and expansion of horizons was important in order for the new service demands to be accommodated. Respondents felt that there was enough flexibility. That facilitated the fact that HIV/AIDS is not to be prioritised over other important challenges facing the workplace. The respondents were also well prepared as they were utilising more information by actions such as attending workshops, seminars and enrolling for relevant courses.

Vision on the part of occupational social work

The respondents indicated that they had a clear picture of what goals should be reached, how and why. With challenges such as HIV/AIDS, their clear vision assisted them in planning for positive change. That was because there was holistic vision of social work services and professional collaboration. That was why most of the respondents believed that they are well placed and well equipped to contribute to the developmental strategies responding to new service demands.

In the context of HIV/AIDS, occupational social worker's service provision did not seem to need to be adjusted according to all respondents. That is due to occupational social workers coping well irrespective of HIV/AIDS issues coming up most of the time. All twenty-seven respondents (100%) mentioned that HIV/AIDS cases were not treated differently or as priorities. Clients were not formally expected to wait but each case was dealt with as it was reported. It was depending on urgency of the matter, availability of the service provider and the schedule of the service provider.

Occupational social workers playing more of an educational role

Most respondents have played much of an educational role in the context of HIV/AIDS. That was done through one to one intervention, workshops and seminars. It was interesting to notice the support and participation from both management and employees. The findings were therefore in support of the researcher's anticipated finding that social workers play more of an educational role when responding to HIV/AIDS.

Movement from micro to macro practice

Du Plessis (1994) argued that there was lack of movement from micro to macro practice. The researcher was of that notion too. Surprisingly, a shift was presently noted. Most respondents especially from military, para-statal, manufacturing and government indicated that there was a progress towards moving from micro to macro practice. Respondents from finance were involved in macro practice even though it was sometimes not HIV/AIDS related. Besides, this form of practice continues to be regarded as the most difficult. Among other reasons, that was due to macro practice success depending on social workers, management, employees and relevant resources availability.

A good partnership between social workers and management already exist according to the findings. The findings therefore contradicted anticipated findings that there is lack of macro practice in the workplace. Even though the practice is limited, there is progress towards moving from micro to macro practice.

Relationship among social workers, employees and employers

Most respondents indicated that HIV/AIDS did not negatively affect their relationship with management and employees. Surprisingly, it seems as if the relationship was positively affected. The parties are working closely together. Looking specifically at

HIV/AIDS, there is growth in involvement, participation and support. Also, social workers perceived management and the workforce to have regarded their HIV/AIDS macro practice valuable to a greater extent. The findings therefore contradicted the researcher anticipated finding that HIV/AIDS has affected the relationship among social workers, employees and employers negatively.

6.3 The extent to which occupational social workers perceive their HIV/AIDS at a macro level to be acknowledged as valuable by both management and the workforce

The research aim was guided by Du Plessis's (1994) principle of dual accountability of social workers to employees and employers and evaluation of practice.

Dual accountability of social workers to both employees and management.

From the findings, there was a dual accountability of the worker to both management and employees. Not only did social workers value the support, involvement and participation of management and employees, but their contribution as well. The different parties involved have indigenous knowledge and skills that the respondents were tapping on. They did not only tap on them but also gave the involved parties an opportunity to illustrate their knowledge and skills. The dual accountability is not negatively affected by new demands such as HIV/AIDS.

Evaluation of social work services

According to most respondents, evaluation played a vital role in services they have offered in the workplace. It was holistic as social workers themselves, colleagues and management evaluated the services. Through that process, feedback was communicated among various stakeholders. It was assessed how effective, accessible and useful are the

services. That allowed critical analysis and constructive feedback to take place. Most respondents perceived their services as effective and benefiting to the target group.

Most respondents involved in macro practice perceived that their HIV/AIDS at macro level was acknowledged by both management and employees as valuable to a great extent. Du Plessis (1994) revealed that macro practice was less practiced than micro and macro. On the other hand, the findings indicated that most respondents were involved in macro practice either directly or indirectly. Even though there were professionals like AIDS activists who were involved in what the researcher believed was mostly social work duties, they were inviting social workers to take part in the HIV/AIDS programmes. At times, the workers were asked for their opinion regarding HIV/AIDS programmes and or HIV/AIDS issue affecting the workforce. Their involvement and participation indicated that their input and views were valued and acknowledged.

6.4 Perceptions of occupational social worker on how HIV/AIDS have impacted on their relationship with management

The research aim was guided by Du Plessis's (1994) management support principle.

Management support and participation

There was a common notion that management's support and participation impact positively on service provision. With a challenge such as HIV/AIDS, the support and participation had improved. Management realised that HIV/AIDS was a challenge that is hazardous to the workplace, society at large and South African economy. Such an enormous challenge needs immediate and effective response from all the relevant stakeholders. Without a solid partnership, an effective response would be impossible. Management is mostly in control of human and financial resources. If they do not support a certain programme, it would be impossible for the program to succeed. When responding to new service demands, planning needs to take place. Effective planning

requires human and financial resources. That was why the two parties seemed to have formed a strong partnership.

Employees support and participation

Management and social workers were not the only agents in the workplace. The employees played a vital role as well and can also be regarded as primary beneficiaries. Most respondents indicated that they were satisfied about the response of employees to programmes regarding HIV/AIDS even though few respondents thought that the response can improve. The employees were able to demonstrate what they have gained. According to most respondents, there were actions that showed behavioural change: urgency to know more, urgency to make a difference and development of trust. That was going to be difficult if management was not encouraging employee involvement by actions such as giving employees time to attend relevant programmes.

Most respondents were of the view that HIV/AIDS had affected their relationship with management positively. HIV/AIDS epidemic requires a coalition between management and social workers. According to the findings, a coalition developed. Management and social workers work very closely by looking at the positive and effective way of responding to HIV/AIDS. Specifically, the following illustrate the good working relationship between management and social workers.

6. 5 Factors that contribute negatively to the services offered by occupational social workers

Du Plessis (1994) found that there were issues that affected the services offered by occupational social workers negatively. As Du Plessis (1994) noted there was lack of management support, lack of resources and management lack of knowledge of what

social workers can offer. Even though there was a shift, the same challenges identified in 1994 are still identifiable presently.

Lack of management support

Even though most respondents felt that management was supporting them in the context of HIV/AIDS, a few respondents felt that the support they were getting was not enough. Some instances were mentioned in which management will claim to be supporting the respondents finding that they were setting respondents up for failure. For instance, management will offer financial support and not allow employees to attend programmes during working hours.

Lack of relevant resources

Most respondents were facing a challenge of not having enough resources. That meant both internal and external resources. In the context of HIV/AIDS, internal and external resources were of imperative importance. Once the resources were available and accessible, positive responses to the epidemic were utilised. Services were offered internally and community resources were utilised at a later stage for further consultation. That ensured a person in environment approach and holistic service provision

Management's lack of knowledge of what social workers can offer in the context of HIV/AIDS

Some respondents especially from para-statal and manufacturing sectors mentioned that management did not completely understand the role that social workers played in the workplace. In some instances, their professional counterparts offered services that were supposed to be offered by them.

6.6 Conclusions

Based upon the findings of the study, the following conclusions may be reached:

- Occupational social workers coped well in the context of HIV/AIDS. Their services were not negatively affected and did not have to be adjusted. HIV/AIDS cases were treated as any other cases.
- Occupational social workers perceived their HIV/AIDS services at macro level to be acknowledged as valuable by both management and the workforce. The ability of occupational social workers to identify new service demands that had developed and developing adapting strategies to meet those demands was vital in enhancing their service delivery.
- There was a positive relationship between management, the workforce and occupational social workers in the workplace. Respondents were satisfied with the way that every party was playing its part.
- Most occupational social workers' were playing much of an educational role in the context of HIV/AIDS. They perceived that employees and management were active participants in the process.
- There was a great potential for occupational social workers to move from micro to macro practice. That was because they are already in a process towards moving from micro to macro practice. Occupational social workers are well placed, well trained and well equipped to intervene in the context of HIV/AIDS together with other practitioners.
- The factors that may contribute negatively to practice were perceived by occupational social workers to be lack of management support, lack of knowledge

of what social workers can offer in the context of HIV/AIDS and lack of relevant resources.

6.7 Recommendations

Based upon the findings of the study and conclusions, the following were recommended:

- Occupational social workers should continue driving the process of moving from micro practice to macro practice as that can be an effective way of responding to new service demands such as HIV/AIDS.
- Management, occupational social workers and other relevant stakeholders should continue taking HIV/AIDS as a challenge that needs immediate and effective response and be aware of its impact on society in general.

Taking into consideration the limitations of the study and the findings, the following was recommended for future research:

- Investigation of the extent which occupational social workers move from micro to macro practice across all the sectors that employ social workers and the role of management.
- Exploring why the role of occupational social work is not clearly understood by management and employees and ways in which it can be clarified in the workplace.
- Exploring how HIV/AIDS affect occupational social workers on a personal level.