

ABSTRACT:

Social work in South Africa is challenged by high caseloads, dangerous working environments and poor remuneration (Social Work Indaba, 2015). These challenges combined with high voluntary staff turnover rates (40.4% in 2006) have negative consequences for the protection of South Africa's vulnerable children (Earle-Mallessen (2009). In this context, supervision is often proposed as a potential cure-all for the tensions in social work.

This study utilises an instrumental case study design to describe and explore child protection social workers' perceptions of supervision and retention. The key aim of the study is to interrogate the role of effective social work supervision on a social worker's decision to leave the employment of a child protection organisation in Gauteng.

Twelve participants were identified through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Utilising a semi structured interview schedule, face to face interviews were conducted with each participant. The data obtained from the interviews was transcribed and analysed thematically.

The research findings yielded concerning results on the supervision the participants had received with only 25% of the participants indicating that they found their supervision supportive and educational. High levels of organisational disengagement were noted, which created an organisational climate of neglect. This contributed indirectly to ten participant's decision to resign as a lack of supervision heightened their frustrations with the system and their increased perceptions of child protection work as monotonous. A lack of a supportive and educational focus also closed off opportunities for participants to grow as social workers and learn adaptive coping skills. This led to some participants feeling emotionally overwhelmed. Both of these factors were cited as reasons for exiting child protection organisations. These findings reaffirm the importance of supervision as a reflexive process and provide insight into the targeting of interventions aimed at retaining child protection social workers in South Africa.

Keywords:

Child protection; retention; effective supervision; job embeddedness; social worker; disengagement; voluntary staff turnover