

ABSTRACT

The promulgation of the Constitution in 1996 led to the inception and implementation of the White Paper on Social Welfare in 1997 and the social development approach to all social welfare sectors including social work. This implementation led to major changes that were met with resistance, challenges and confusing implementation practices. This also impacted on the role of social workers in health care. The study's purpose was to explore, describe and explain the implementation of the social development approach to social work in the Gauteng Department of Health. Utilising the social constructivist and pragmatic paradigms in conjunction with Habermas' theory on the two spheres of social reproduction i.e., the life world and the system, and ecological perspective, the study highlighted the state of, and the challenges experienced by social workers in health care regarding the implementation of the social developmental approach. The explanatory sequential mixed methodology research design was best suited in achieving the objectives of the study. The study was divided into four phases with regard to data collection and analysis. **Phase one** incorporated a quantitative approach in the form of a survey research design. Utilising saturation sampling, the cross-sectional survey was distributed to the entire social work population employed in the Gauteng Department of Health. Forty-five (45) surveys were completed. The data was analysed according to descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science. Content analysis was utilised to code and analyse the open-ended questions of the survey. **Phase two to phase four** contained the qualitative approach of this research study which followed the cross-sectional survey sequentially. Interpretative phenomenology was the research design for these qualitative strategies. The samples for each of these phases employed non-probability purposive sampling. **Phase two** focused on collecting data via semi-structured interviews, with the use of an interview guide, from ten (10) social workers in health care. **Phase three** encompassed data collection from two focus groups using a focus group guide. Four and three participants respectively took part in these focus groups. **Phase four** focused on interviewing two key informants as highlighted from the survey, interviews and focus groups.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilised to analyse the data from the different qualitative strategies. The study's findings offer clear understanding of the implementation of the social development approach to social work in health care. The social development approach is dominantly applied via its principles, awareness programmes, referrals to resources and liaison with stakeholders. The lack of consultation with social workers in the Gauteng Department of Health regarding policy implementation was raised. The absence of social investment strategies and community development are evident. Participants indicated social work in health care is a unique profession and has a pivotal role in a multidisciplinary team to enable the social development approach. Conversely, they reported that social work in health care is undervalued and seen as support staff to the rest of the multidisciplinary team. To be acknowledged as a specialist profession was implored by the participants. A framework of implementing the social development approach suitable for social work in health care should include a bottom-up approach that acknowledges the value of social work input. The need for a cultural competence model and practical examples of how to implement the social development approach in diverse health care settings were identified. It was evidenced that the implementation of the social development approach in the welfare sector impacted the roles and designated powers of social workers in health care. By virtue of this exploration social work, social development, social determinants of health and the sustainable development goals are inextricably linked through the mutual agenda of social justice, advocacy and empowerment. This study not only contributes to the field of social work in health care, the social determinants of health where social workers should be recognised as an instrumental role player, but also contributes to the implementation of the social development approach in health care settings in South Africa.

Key words: Gauteng Department of Health, Interpretative phenomenology, Pragmatism, Social constructivism, Social development approach, Social determinants of health, Social work in health care, Transformation.