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Challenges of social workers who work in employee assistance programme call centres

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ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for client- centred services and employee wellness programmes has led to an increase in the number of call centres which employs about 200 000 people across all departments. Professional counsellors entering the profession today have the option to communicate with clients through the telephone or social networking sites. There is an argument that call centre work is not classified as knowledge work, that professions such as social work cannot be employed in call centres, this study identifies that social workers do work in call centres and they have various challenges that they go through based on their profession. Social workers working in call centres experience several challenges, such as stress, monitoring and repetitiveness of job content, lack of opportunities, shift work. The aim of this study was to explore the challenges of social workers who work in an Employee Assistance Programme Call centre. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was used for this exploratory study. This study made use of an exploratory research and participants were drawn from an employee wellness company already offering online counselling through a call service centre environment. The research used non-probability purposive sampling. Data was obtained through conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews and using an interview schedule with ten social workers employed at the call centre. There was also pretesting done with one participant before having the interviews with participants. Data was analysed according to thematic analysis. The main conclusion of the study found that there are various challenges that participants go through, the most prevalent is that of feeling micromanaged by the system, which they compared to being in prison. Participants also highlighted the physical challenges such as not having comfortable chairs to sit on, with the environment that they work in, this was an interesting finding, because their environment is mainly an employee wellness department, yet internal wellness seems to be affected. Other challenges such as lack of training, compassion fatigue and burnout have been identified. With all the challenges identified there has been some positive data that the participants have shared. Some participants reported prospects of growth in the EAP call centre space, which links to the advantages of working in a call centre and is evident that even though the environment might have challenges, one can grow if they put in the hard work.

Keywords: Call Centres, call centre operators, challenges, social workers, Employee Assistance programme, Employee Wellness, Online counselling