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Exploring social workers' experiences regarding workplace violence.

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ABSTRACT

The workplace, in general, has been perceived as a comparatively violence-free environment. There have been many studies conducted on workplace violence in the helping profession in health-related occupations that involve substantial contact with clients, such as pre-hospital care, emergency medicine and nursing. However, there is a paucity of research that has explored the social workers' experiences of workplace violence in South Africa. Workplace violence inflicted on employees may come from both internal sources, such as co-workers, and clients and external sources, such as robbers or muggers. A qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 15 social workers from the Limpopo Department of Social Development in the Waterberg District. The study endeavoured to explore the experiences of social workers regarding workplace by external parties. Seven overarching themes and a number of sub-themes emerged from a detailed Thematic Content analysis. The themes highlighted a wide range of psychosocial factors associated with workplace violence. The themes examined are, namely: psychosocial effects on social workers, workplace resources and environment, management of workplace violence and human supervision, and types of workplace violence. The main finding of the study highlighted a lack of organisational resources that contributed to workplace violence and led to frustrations experienced by clients and social workers. This report concludes with a brief discussion of the psychosocial impact of workplace violence and recommendations.

Key words: Occupational safety, social workers, social development, workplace violence.