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Exploring social workers' views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside the social work field: Gauteng Province



A research report presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Master of Arts in Social Work by Coursework and Research Report in the Field of Occupational Social Work.

by

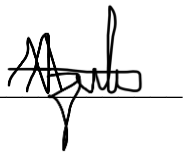
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08 June 2025

DECLARATION

I, Nokwanda Zulu hereby declare that this research paper titled “exploring social workers’ views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside the social work field: Gauteng Province” is my original work. And has not been utilized and submitted elsewhere or at any other higher learning institution besides Witwatersrand University for any other degree or examination. I have given full acknowledgement to all the cited and referred sources used, their words have been paraphrased, and their original words have been used with quotation marks.

Signature 

Date: 08 June 2025

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I would like to firstly thank God for the strength and wisdom throughout the process of my research study. Furthermore, I would like to show appreciation to my research supervisor Professor Roshini Pillay, who has been patient, supportive, providing guidance, and encouraging me from the beginning of the process. Her guidance has contributed greatly to this research report. I would also like to thank my family and loved ones for the consistent support and prayers, which have kept me going. My friends, colleagues and classmates have been encouraging and inspiring me to work hard and complete my research report, I am grateful. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to all the participants who contributed to this research study, their participation played a significant role.

ABSTRACT

The pursuit of postgraduate qualifications (Honors, Master's and PhD) by social workers may be regarded as an act to improve their career prospects. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the views of social workers who were pursuing postgraduate studies outside the discipline of social work, in Gauteng Province. The researcher employed a qualitative research approach and a case study research design. Additionally, the researcher used the purposive sampling method, resulting in the recruitment of 12 participants. Participants were a share of both men and women, who had more than three years of working experience as social workers. Semi-structured interviews were utilised for data collection. The collected data were analysed using qualitative content analysis (QCA). The participants in this study were generally motivated to study further by their exposure to various undergraduate courses like psychology, the desire to gain more knowledge and skills, as well as career progression. Reasons for further studies, particularly outside the social work field, were loss of interest in the profession, and not willing to be a social work supervisor. Participants were further hindered from furthering studies in their field by a lack of self-development and growth, being underpaid and more. The current study can promote the development of social workers and contribute to the field of Occupational Social Work (OSW), as it promotes the health and well-being of employees. Moreover, the study's findings may contribute to the curriculum changes of social work in the institutions.

Keywords: employee development, experiences, extrinsic motivation, further studies, intrinsic motivation, postgraduate studies, social work, South Africa

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **DPSA:** Department of Public Service and Administration
2. **DSD-** Department of Social Development
3. **EM-**Extrinsic Motivation
4. **IM-**Intrinsic Motivation
5. **MSW**- Master's in social work
6. **NGO**-Non-government Organisation
7. **NPO-**Nonprofit Organisation
8. **OSW-** Occupational social work
9. **PGCE**-Postgraduate Certificate in Education
10. **PhD-**Doctor of Philosophy
11. **QCA-** Qualitative Content Analysis
12. **SA-**South Africa
13. **SACSSP-**South African Council for Social Service Professions
14. **SAHO-** South African History Online
15. **USA-**United State of America
16. **WBG-**World Bank Group

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

To understand the future of social work and its advancement, one needs to be familiar with its history, its practices, its structures, and its developments (Vicary et al., 2018). Social workers recognise the importance and benefits of advancing their postgraduate studies, which sometimes they undertake in a different discipline other than social work (Mmadi, 2018). Reflecting on the history of social work education, legislation, and the profession's broader influence in South Africa, various motives and experiences shape social workers' decision to pursue postgraduate studies in another discipline. However, there is still a demand for further studies on exploring why postgraduate social workers choose to further their studies in areas outside social work (Christie & Kruk, 1998; Redmond et al., 2010).

1.1. Statement of the problem and rationale for the study

In 2008, the Department of Labour listed social work as a scarce and critical skill in South Africa (Earle, 2008). However, this has since changed due to an increase in number of registered social workers in South Africa. The government's strategy of responding to the shortage of social workers was to recruit and retain social work students by availing and providing scholarships to qualify them. The number of social work graduates increased from 4200 in 2010 to 5574 in 2016 (Waters, 2013). In South Africa, the rising number of social work graduates has resulted in a large number of unemployed social workers (Skhosana, 2020). This unemployment of social workers is a concern requiring attention and action from relevant departments such as the Department of Social Development (DSD). The lack of employment of social workers could be another reason for social workers considering undertaking postgraduate studies in other disciplines. In the year of 2021, Ms. Lindiwe Zulu who was the minister of DSD from 2019-2024, announced that there were 8873 unemployed social work graduates, of which 4829 of them were funded by DSD (South African Government News Agency, 2021). Having 8873 unemployed social work graduates could indicate a lack of strategic and effective planning from the department.

Researchers have identified and associated high turnover of social workers with several concerns, such as poor working conditions, unsatisfying support and resources, poor compensation, and work burnout (Skhosana, 2020; Gray & Lombard, 2022). The study by Wermeling (2013) found that individuals who were employed as social workers in the United State of America (USA) were

more likely to leave the profession compared to those not yet working. Social workers who left social work felt that the profession was not valued by the public (Wermeling, 2013).

For instance, Nilsson et al. (2025) argue that the media has not been adequately used to educate the public about the profession. Instead, scandals and rumors have been associated with the profession. Hence, it is also necessary for research to explore the role played by social workers in developing the recognition of the profession. Staniforth et al. (2016) found that social workers were concerned about the media not being effectively used to protect their image, including educating people about social work and their roles. As media has been identified as one of the effective strategies in shaping public perceptions (Nilsson et al., 2025).

In exploring social workers' decisions to pursue postgraduate studies, it is useful to consider the lack of recognition of both the social work profession and its postgraduate qualifications. Mmadi and Sithole (2019) found that a lack of recognition of postgraduate qualifications contributed to a decline in interest and desire among social workers to further their studies in the field. Similarly, Mack (2012) reports that some of their participants were reluctant when asked if they would choose social work as a career again if given the opportunity. Therefore, the lack of interest and reluctancy towards pursuing postgraduate studies in any social work-related field is concerning.

Staniforth et al. (2016) found that the public in New Zealand does not sufficiently value social workers. Some people are reported to believe that social workers might not have any qualifications or perhaps only high school qualifications. This view undermines the profession, especially compared to other fields. Staniforth et al.'s (2016) study found that 97% of 386 participants were not confident enough to consult social workers for personal problems. Thus, raising questions on other ideas and perceptions the public may have regarding the profession.

In Miller et al.'s (2018) study, social workers reported that they faced a challenge of high workload, while they lacked resources. This negatively affected service delivery, which led to burnout (Miller et al., 2018). Additional challenges experienced by social workers are family responsibilities whereby women, particularly, would feel overwhelmed with work, financial barriers due to low salaries, and poor supervision (Mmadi, 2018). The working conditions also influence social workers' decisions in pursuing their postgraduate studies in South Africa.

A study conducted by Calitz et al. (2014) reports that 41.7% of social workers reported that they wish to leave their jobs most of the time. These findings acknowledge the importance of developing strategies that will motivate social workers to stay within the profession. Therefore, there is a need for strategies that would contribute to the growth of social workers. Such strategies might motivate them to view the profession differently. Mack's (2012) study found that social workers were generally highly satisfied with their career, but they raised concerns and were less satisfied about specific areas of their job (Mack, 2012). Such areas included the salary and work environment (Mack, 2012).

In addition, Calitz et al. (2014) found that due to low salaries, one-third of social workers would rather work in other organisations outside social work, to earn a better salary. For instance, when comparing salary ranges of other 4-year degrees in South Africa, social work is one of the lowest paying degrees. According to the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (2018), annual salaries for the following four-year degrees are: social work (R242 553), engineer grade A (R679 338), pharmacist grade 1 (R655 980), and psychologist intern (R547 917). Thus, social work is paid very low salaries compared to other professions whose qualifications are also a four-year degree. Therefore, social workers try to pursue further studies outside the field of social work.

Another reason social workers may choose to further studies outside their field is that a Bachelor of Social Work course includes electives, such as criminology, human resource management, philosophy, social anthropology, religious studies, international relations, communication, and South African languages (Lombard et al., 2003). Social work students also must major in psychology and sociology (Lombard et al., 2003). These electives and majors offer social workers options and opportunities outside social work.

Several social workers have less motivation to further their studies in social work, due to a lack of incentives in their workplace (Mmadi, 2018). Both the public and social workers believe that they are under paid, which negatively impacts the profession and those choosing the profession as a career (Staniforth et al., 2016). According to Wilson and McCrystal (2007), social work students were not pleased by their career prospects and financial remuneration in their profession. This concern seems to affect social workers who are already in the field, and undergraduate students preparing to join the field.

The current study's aim is to explore the views of social workers pursuing postgraduate studies outside the social work discipline. The study contributes to the developmental programmes of social work in workplaces and the field of OSW, by promoting the health and well-being of employees. The study also contributes to the curriculum of social work in higher education institutions.

1.2. Aim of the study

To explore the views of social workers pursuing postgraduate studies outside the field of social work.

1.3. Objectives of the study

i. To explore the motivation behind social workers' decisions on postgraduate courses.
ii. To explore the reasons for further studies outside the field of social work.
iii. To explore concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in the field of social work.

1.4. Research question

i. Why do social workers choose postgraduate studies outside the field of social work?

1.5. Definition of key concepts of the study

1.5.1. Employee development

Employee development refers to an action taken to consistently provide necessary programmes, services, and resources, to help employees to effectively perform their duties. Employee development incorporates educational and training programmes, seminars, mentorship programmes, job rotations, incentives, as well as self-study materials (Jacobs & Christopher, 2003).

1.5.2. Experiences

Experiences are defined as the connection between people and the world, including all areas of an individual's life. The connection includes an individual's communication with people, past, and present events, as well as lifestyle rather than one's mental functioning (Hohr, 2012).

1.5.3. Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation can be referred to as external factors that inspire a performance to attain an outcome. Sometimes they are not related to the current performed tasks and activities (Reena et al., 2010).

1.5.4. Further studies

According to Mmadi (2018), further studies refer to a continuation of postgraduate studies in a tertiary level, such as Master's and PhD.

1.5.5. Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to internal desires that drive an individual to focus on their goals. Such as, taking part in certain activities or developing skills which are normally satisfying to an individual (Reena et al., 2010)

1.5.6. Motivation

Motivation inspires employees to work on achieving their goals. Therefore, it enhances the desire of employees to work on achieving their goals which contributes to their development, as well as the organisation's development (Parashar, 2016).

1.5.7. Postgraduate

A postgraduate is defined as a student who holds a degree in a tertiary level and studying further to obtain another degree (Mmadi, 2018).

1.5.8. Postgraduate studies

Postgraduate studies refer to the process of pursuing a Master's or PhD studies, including certificates and diplomas. Postgraduate studies are undertaken by students who have obtained their first degrees (House, 2010)

1.5.9. Social work

"Social worker means a registered social service practitioner who may practice with individuals or communities and groups, to promote social change, build capacity in human relationships,

enhance social functioning and advocate for social justice, including supervisory and management support functions" (DSD, 2020, p. 10)

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by discussing the problem statement and rationale of the study, which looked into the government addressing the shortage and unemployment of social workers in South Africa. In addition, the chapter discussed challenges faced by social workers. The aim, objectives and research questions were also included, as well as the definitions of the key concepts of the study. The following chapter will be looking into the theoretical framework of the study, which is Herzberg's motivation theory.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the relevance of a theoretical framework to this study. The study employs Herzberg's motivation theory to explain the motivation behind the participants pursuing postgraduate studies.

2.2. Theoretical framework: Herzberg's Motivation theory

According to Gant and Osanloo (2014), a theoretical framework is defined as a guideline which assists a researcher to develop and support a study. It also offers suggestions for the research approach and methods to be adopted by a study. In addition, Chukuere (2021) asserts that a theoretical framework helps the researcher identify the problem statement and decide on relevant literature, as well as the methods for data collection and analysis.

Therefore, in the current study the researcher employed Herzberg's motivation theory, also known as the two-factor theory. Herzberg established this theory of job satisfaction during the 1950's, in collaboration with Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (Haque et al., 2014). He discovered that the way employees are treated in a working environment can either make them happy or unhappy. Also, the tasks they perform can either motivate them or not. It is also acknowledged that both feelings may be influenced by certain factors (Haque et al., 2014).

Herzberg's motivation theory also states that motivators, also referred to as satisfiers are factors that have an influence in the job satisfaction, such as being recognised by colleagues and management, opportunities for development, status provided, sense of achievement, and responsibilities (Ball, 2003). According to the theory, these motivators may influence the employees' choice of courses to study, in either social work or other courses, to achieve job satisfaction. Therefore, motivators emerge from intrinsic feelings (Haque et al., 2014).

Participants in the current study had different motives for their choice of study. They were respectively pursuing postgraduate studies in three different courses. These included honors in Criminology, honors in Psychology and honors in Labour Policy. Motives behind their choice of study were, desire to open a private practice, enjoying doing major courses during their undergraduate studies (criminology and psychology), motivated by the field work, desire to further

studies (Master's or PhD), and to expand their job opportunities. These motives are also subthemes of the current study.

Motivation significantly influences a person's behavior and performance. Furthermore, an employee's performance can contribute to an organisation's development. Motivation starts by identifying the need that is missing at the time, which leads to the desire of achieving that need, and working towards achieving the goal or a need (Yusoff et al., 2013). Working towards achieving the goal could be in the form of studying further for development and better opportunities.

The study also focuses on two types of motivation, which are intrinsic and extrinsic. According to Giancola (2014), the difference is that intrinsic motivation develops from internal desires, while extrinsic comes from the external forces. Therefore, employees may have been motivated to further their studies by internal or external forces. The motives shared by participants regarding their choice of study could also be identified as intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation could be external concerns within the organisation that motivated participants not to study social work, such as lack of resources, delayed essential job training, and ineffective programmes, limiting structure, and systems, quantity over quality work, as well as poor working conditions.

According to Ball (2003), motivators often lead to a desire to grow and be empowered, however, when employees lack motivators, they shift the focus to hygiene factors, also referred to as maintenance factors. Hygiene factors may cause dissatisfaction and concern about the job. According to the theory, dissatisfiers often focus on factors specifically linked to a job specifically, such as salary, working conditions, management, leadership skills, organisation policy, job security, administration, and interpersonal relations (Ball, 2003). This is clearly described in figure 1, below. The figure indicates motivator factors, hygiene factors, and how they affect job satisfaction.

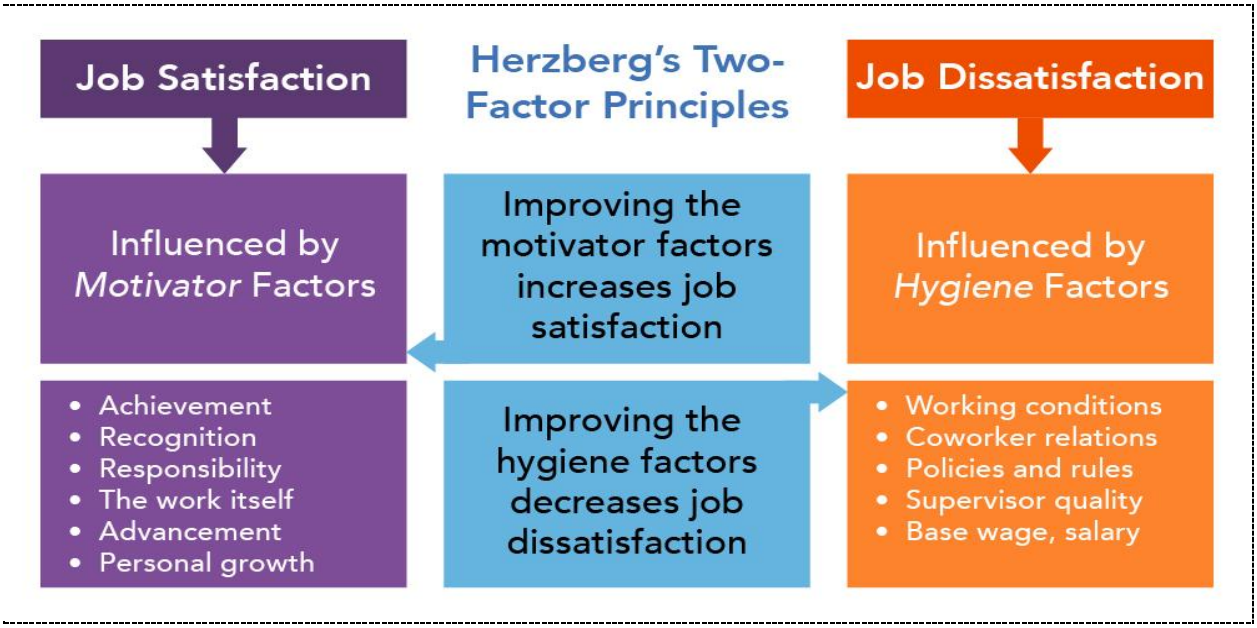


Figure 1: Herzberg's two factor principles

Source: Herzberg's Two factor principles. From "Organisational behaviour and human relations". *Lumen Learning.* Copyright 2016

Herzberg's two factor principles demonstrate that dissatisfaction is caused by hygiene factors, which are working conditions, policies, rules and salary. To reduce job dissatisfaction, hygiene factors must be improved. Conversely, job satisfaction is influenced by motivator factors, which are recognition, achievement, and personal growth. Therefore, improved motivation factors increase job satisfaction.

2.3 Conclusion

The relevance of Herzberg's motivation theory has been demonstrated by also making use of the table above. The theory will be used to further illustrate and support the fundings of the study which will be discussed in chapter five. The next chapter will be looking at the methodology of the study, it will outline the processes and steps that were taken to conduct the study.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

This literature review discusses the importance of education, history of social work, job satisfaction, and reasons for pursuing further studies outside the field of social work. The factors discussed include gender, finances, staff turnover, and lack of recognition. Furthermore, the discussion explores career change.

3.2. Importance of education

Poverty is a significant threat to societies. The World Bank Group (WBG) (2023) survey which was conducted between 2014 and 2015, indicates that approximately 55% of the South African population, which is 30 million people, was affected by the national upper-bound poverty line, which was ZAR 992, in 2015 prices. Conversely, 25% of people, which is proximately 19 million people, were facing challenges of food poverty. Therefore, one may argue that beyond career development, the pursuit of further studies may also be driven by the desire to eliminate poverty.

Education is often perceived as a foundation in achieving one's goals (Afifa, 2015). For some individuals, furthering their studies is a strategic move to secure a higher paying job or a promotion within their current job. Although the importance of education is widely recognised and acknowledged, the motivation behind obtaining a specific qualification is not the same from one individual to another. Education also plays a significant role in the country's economy (Fazilah et al., 2012). Additionally, there are benefits associated with pursuing postgraduate studies. Mavundla (2021) states that postgraduate studies provide necessary skills and develop one's personal capacity. It further equips students with more knowledge in their field, create new relationships, and connections.

3.3. Apartheid influence on education

The differences in the system of education were created during the mid-20th century, they provide a background on the continuation of inequalities in South Africa, on the other hand South Africa is one of the countries with developed educational systems in the continent (McKeever, 2017). The differences in the educational system included divisions according to race and differences in distribution of resources. McKeever (2017) explains that the white population, which was the

minority, had better education and other benefits, while the majority which was the black population achieved quality education according to their parental background. For instance, Adams (2020) revealed that the government spent 10 times more on a White learner than a Black learner, for instance in 1960, the government spent R114, 50 on a White learner and R13,50 on a Black learner per year. South African History Online (SAHO) (2013) also states that in 1967 the apartheid government spent R644 per White student and R42 per Black student annually.

Apartheid system introduced the divisions between Bantu Education which was for Black people and White educational system, in addition, the educational system and the society in general were classified according to ethnic and racial groups (Thobejanea, 2013). Therefore, the significance of education has existed and been recognized for ages. According to Soudien (2008), when apartheid system took over in 1948, it introduced racial segregation in the higher learning institutions. Later it introduced the Extension University Education Act of 1959, which strictly indicated that student's enrolment in universities will be divided according to race and ethnic groups to fulfil the apartheid ideology (Soudien, 2008).

3.4 History of social work

Social work education and training programmes emerged internationally in the early 20th century, mostly focusing on skills, knowledge, and values, as the core foundations of the profession, particularly in the Atlantic regions (Vicary et al., 2018). In South Africa, social work education dates back to the 1930s, inspired by the British and American models, with the main focus being on clinical approaches (Kotze, 1998). As social work has been practiced for several years in South Africa, one may raise concerns about developments made then and now, as well as challenges hindering such developments.

In South Africa, social work was introduced through colonisation, which interfered and divided the traditional ways of social relations. Therefore, the social work profession was developed from welfare policies which often prioritised the Whites (Patel, 2005). The Dutch church in 1814 discovered that welfare primarily focused on White disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals (Smith, 2014). Perhaps the reason for introducing social work and the type of service delivery, had an influence on the options or opportunities available for social workers to develop themselves.

Social work in South Africa encounters challenges such as lack of resources and social workers leaving the profession (Smith, 2008).

3.5 Job satisfaction

According to Macia and Bustillo (2014), job satisfaction refers to an evaluation based on an employee's feelings and contentment about their job, either entirely or in specific areas. There are factors that influence job satisfaction, such as working conditions, management style, salary, benefits, working hours, and stress level (Dziuba et al., 2020). Hence, job satisfaction differs from one person to another. Social workers consider these factors when deciding to further their studies, either in social work or other fields. There are positive feelings associated with job satisfaction. However, negative feelings are involved when there is dissatisfaction. Both employees and employers are affected by job satisfaction, since it impacts the organisation and its productivity (Kumari, 2011).

3.6 Factors for further studies outside the social work field

Factors that have an influence in further studies outside the social work field will be discussed below and they are as follows, gender, finances, staff turnover and lack of recognition.

3.6.1 Gender

Wilson and McCrystal's (2007) study in Northern Ireland found that approximately 80% of social work master's students were females, 69% were aged 30 and below, while 30% were at the age of 35 and above. The dominance of women in this study suggests that they are considered more suitable for the profession. This may demotivate men from furthering their studies in social work.

In South Africa, most social workers are also women (Thobela, 2018). Hence, one may hypothesise that if the profession was male dominated, more developments and improvements would have occurred. Conversely, Hicks (2015) states that although there is a bigger number of women social workers, they do not necessarily hold dominant positions. Production in the workplace can be determined by the social backgrounds and skills produced by employees. Additionally, scholars observe dissimilarity between men and women employees regarding their success in the workplace. Men are reported to receive more privileges in the workplace compared to women (Wachs et al., 2017).

3.6.2 Finances

Finances, particularly low salaries are another challenge hindering social workers from pursuing their postgraduate studies (Mmadi, 2018). According to Business Tech (2024), Old Mutual data indicates that in 2023, average fees for postgraduate students in South African universities was R55 900 and expected to increase to R95 700 by 2030. Finances have constantly been a barrier for students who want to study social work. They also encounter challenges with employment after graduation, while left with fees debts to pay. Such a challenge influences students' decision about studying social work (Christie & Kruk, 1998).

Moreover, financial constraints, such as fees for studying and salaries when employed, affect both undergraduate and postgraduate social work students. Low salaries have been found to influence the social workers' decisions to leave the country and find work elsewhere. For instance, (de Jager, 2013) found that many social workers from South Africa, went to start a new career abroad due to stressful workspaces and a lack of verbal recognition from the management and the state.

3.6.3 Staff turnover

Another concern observed by Nonprofit Organisations (NPOs) in South Africa is the staff turnover of social workers. It affects the NPOs, and vulnerable individuals who receive services from social workers (Skhosana, 2020). Staff turnover refers to employees leaving the organisation for various reasons, which then affects the organisation's funds and its service delivery (Ndatshe et al., 2024). Employees leaving the organisation create a gap in the workplace, increasing the workload for the staff remaining behind. An increased workload may worsen staff turnover in the organisation, affecting its productivity.

High staff turnover leads to job vacancies, which are often hard to fill because organisations may struggle to find trained replacements who can continue managing existing caseloads. Resultantly, the burden falls on remaining employees, increasing their workload and stress (Skhosana, 2020). The challenges associated with staff turnover may influence social workers' decisions on pursuing further studies.

Previous studies have identified several factors contributing to high staff turnover of social workers, including increased service delivery demands, lack of support and resources, poor

compensation, and poor working conditions (Skhosana, 2020). These challenges affect the productivity, development, and well-being of social workers, potentially motivating them to seek career advancements outside the field of social work.

Social work is a highly emotionally and mentally demanding profession, while the social workers lack sufficient time and resources for self-care (Hamama, 2012). Hence, employed social workers are more likely to leave the profession compared to those not yet practicing (Wermeling, 2013). Therefore, some social workers may choose to leave the profession or not to practice at all. Furthermore, employees who are not satisfied with their working conditions often explore other jobs with better working conditions, resulting in staff turnover (Skhosana, 2020).

3.6.4 Lack of recognition

The social work profession shares similar skills and values with other professions, such as psychologists, although there are some concerns regarding different treatments between social work and these other professions. One may claim that such a difference in treatments undermines the social work profession. For instance, a study conducted by Miller and Ashcroft (2016) found that the power dynamics within the medical center revealed inequalities within the workspace in Canada. Medical social workers had to prove their worth in a team for them to be recognised. The team includes nurses, doctors, pharmacists, psychologists, and social workers. Since this concern has been identified, it may raise a question of how and when did the lack of recognition and undermining of social work profession begin. Other professions and individuals believe that the medical social work profile entails performing all tasks including those unrelated to their profession (Pandit et al., 2018). This leaves social workers questioning their dignity and role in the team.

3.7 Change of career

The change of careers has become a norm in social work. Career change can be referred to as a subsection of work role transitions that has to do with change of employer along with some degree of change in a particular job or work role and that can be viewed as a ‘career change” (Ibarra, 2006). One of the challenges faced by the discipline of social work in South Africa is the scarcity of resources and inability to retain social workers in the profession (Smith, 2008). Pursing studies outside the discipline of social work could be the beginning of career change.

There are factors that have been noted that push employees to other organisations, such as better salaries and other benefits (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). Such factors could influence social workers to pursue their studies outside the discipline of social work. In addition, a change of organisation might involve changing a course or field of study during the process, such as postgraduate social workers enrolling in different courses. In Zeng et al.'s (2016) study, social work graduates shared their concerns regarding lack of future developments, due to limited promotion opportunities. Whereas other professions allow one to gradually advance to another level (Zeng et al., 2016).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter considered previous studies that were relevant to this study. The studies address the importance of education, apartheid influence on education, history of social work, job satisfaction and factors for further studies outside social work field. Such as gender, finance, staff turnover, and lack of recognition. Change of career was also discussed. The following chapter will be discussing the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods utilised by the researcher to carry out the research study, which are the research approach, research design, sampling process, research instrument, pretesting of research instrument, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations of the study.

4.2 Research approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach focuses on capturing the lived experiences of participants and understanding human social interactions within natural settings (Hamersley, 2013). Through this approach, the researcher obtained primary and original experiences directly from participants, incorporating quotations from the interviews (Myers, 2013).

By interviewing postgraduate social workers, the study explored their experiences and motivations for pursuing further studies. Additionally, qualitative research enabled the researcher to analyse the responses to the "why" questions, facilitating a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives (Mohajan, 2018). Moreover, qualitative research offered a comprehensive exploration of the research topic, enhancing the study's overall depth and perspective (Guest et al., 2013). The approach offered the participants flexibility to express their thoughts and feelings openly (Maxhakana, 2021). Thus, postgraduate social workers were given freedom and space to reflect on their experiences and decision-making process.

4.3 Research designs

The researcher used a case study design to explore the concerns of postgraduate social workers. This enabled the researcher to analyse the data within specific frameworks (Zainal, 2007). During the interviews, the researcher asked "why" and "how" questions, to avoid misinterpreting and manipulating participants' responses (Yin, 2003). Participants were open to answering the "why" and "how" questions, allowing the researcher to gather more relevant data rather than misinterpreting what was shared by the participants.

The case study gave the researcher an opportunity to collect data from different platforms and sources, such as interviews (face-to-face and virtual), audio recordings, and observations (Rowley, 2002). During the interviews, the researcher also observed nonverbal communication from the participants. Therefore, the case study assisted the researcher to "understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context" (Punch, 2014, p.120).

4.4 Population, sample, and sampling procedures

Purposive sampling was used for recruiting participants. The sample involved postgraduate social workers that were identified and selected for the study, they had similar characteristics and experiences (Cresswell & Plano, 2011). Additionally, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to choose participants who volunteered to share their experiences with the researcher (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The researcher did not encounter any challenges regarding participants offering rich data.

The sample consisted of 12 social workers pursuing postgraduate studies outside the social work field at Gauteng Province. The inclusion criteria were, social workers with three years and above working experience in the field, as they had more information to share about their experiences. The researcher employed social media networks such as WhatsApp, and word of mouth to identify and invite social workers who were currently pursuing post graduate studies outside the social work discipline, as well as those who had completed their degrees within three years. However, this excluded postgraduate social workers who studied short courses. The study included both women and men participants aged between 25 to 50 years. Participants were sent an invitation email, which included the purpose of the study and consent forms. Participants read and signed the consent forms and emailed them back to the researcher before the interview.

To determine the sample size, the researcher utilized data saturation. This process happens when the researcher gets to a point whereby the required data has been researched, and the researcher is no longer receiving new information from participants, instead it is a repetition of information (Fusch et al., 2018). Therefore, data saturation was first detected on the 4th interview, and on the 12th interview the researcher had fully reached data saturation. Between the 9th and 17th interview the researchers reach their data saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

4.5 Research instrument

Semi-structured interviews were utilised for data collection for this study. These interviews are widely recognised for their flexible structure, allowing the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth through open-ended questions (Trigueros & Sandoval, 2017). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth or rich conversation to better understand the participants. The semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix C) enabled the researcher to probe further for additional insights, as the researcher employed communication skills to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe additional information, including sensitive issues (While, 1994). According to Trigueros and Sandoval (2017), one of the benefits of using semi-structured interviews is that they reveal concerns and challenges the researcher may not have anticipated. In this study, the researcher could identify several issues raised by participants that influenced them to study outside the social work field. However, semi-structured interviews also involve concerns over language barriers, potentially leading to the loss of original meaning during the translation process (Kakilla, 2021). The researcher also observed that few participants preferred using their mother-tongue at times, such as Sesotho and Sepedi, than English. Therefore, the researcher had to translate that information to English, as the researcher can speak and understand different South African official languages.

4.6 Pre-testing of the research instrument

The researcher conducted pre-testing with two participants who were not part of the study's actual sample. Pre-testing enabled the researcher to assess the relevance and clarity of the questions in the interview schedule before data collection. Hence, it is critical for the researcher to conduct pre-testing (Bowden et al., 2002). These pre-testing interviews allowed the researcher to identify the relevance, effectiveness, and validity of the research questions (Gregory, 2003). The researcher used semi-structured interviews as the research instrument. During the interviews, the researcher was able to obtain relevant and adequate information from the participants.

Furthermore, the aim of pre-testing was to identify potential misunderstandings of concepts and questions from participants without them picking it up. Pre-testing also allowed the researcher to note any miscommunications and language barriers (Collins, 2001). During the first pre-testing

interview, the researcher observed that question 5 from the interview schedule (Appendix C) required additional clarification, prompting the researcher to provide examples to enhance participants' understanding. Additionally, question 7 was introduced after the first pre-testing interview, to allow participants to contribute any relevant insights beyond the pre-determined questions. Participants were also given the option to omit any information they felt uncomfortable sharing.

4.7 Method of data collection

Data collection was conducted through individual in-depth interviews with postgraduate social workers. Participants were not forced to be part of the study, instead they volunteered (Strydom, 2011). The researcher conducted face-to-face and online interviews. Participants were emailed the consent forms (Appendix B) and (Appendix C) to read and sign for participating in the study and agreeing to be audio recorded.

Twelve interviews were conducted, eleven of them were 40-60 minutes long, while only one lasted close to 90 minutes. An audio tape was used to assist the interviewer with providing accurate data. It recorded the process and discussions that took place in the interviews (Barriball & While, 1994). Face-to-face interviews involved open-ended questioning and probing, allowing the researcher to gain in-depth insights of the participants. Participants were asked standardised open-ended questions which were prepared beforehand (see Appendix C). Though interviews were time consuming, considering recording and transcribing interviews (Monday, 2020). Therefore, these are some of the identified disadvantages of utilizing interviews as a method of data collection.

4.8 Method of data analysis

The researcher utilised qualitative content analysis (QCA), for data analysis. Data analysis refers to a process of interpreting the data. This process is conducted through consolidating data by paying attention to themes relating to research questions (Butina, 2015).

QCA enabled the researcher to understand the participants' experiences by interpretating either verbal or written communication, since there were large volumes of data (Shava et al., 2021). The data was obtained from 12 participants. Moreover, the researcher used the following steps for data analysis:

Step one, the researcher prepared the data and wrote it down in a form of transcripts before analysing it (Lindgren et al., 2020). The researcher transcribed and proofread the data before analysing it. **Step two,** the researcher defined the unit of analysis by condensing the original texts from the transcripts, removing the repeated words (Lindgren et al., 2020).

Step three, the researcher created the categories and the coding schemes from three sources, namely: data, relevant studies, and theories. In the **fourth step,** the researcher divided the data into units, with each unit allocated to the subcategory of the coding frame. Also, the researcher was able to analyse informative coding units in relation to subcategories (Flick, 2014). The **fifth step** was trial coding, whereby the researcher divided the frames according to the relevant categories (Aacharya, 2022).

During the sixth step, the researcher assessed the accuracy of the code frames, with the aim of checking and confirming the validity and consistency of the code testing outcomes (Flick, 2014). **The seventh step** was coding, for the researcher to identify errors. In t**he eighth step,** the researcher analysed the results and made conclusions from the data through creating codes. The researcher decided on either retaining, deleting, or re-encoding the data with no codes, after finalising the outcomes and findings (Aacharya, 2022).

QCA has its limitations. Hence, the messages obtained from participants were recorded for thorough analysis. Therefore, the researcher utilised both audio recording and written notes to ensure accuracy (Shava et al., 2021). Since QCA is considered time consuming, it requires significant effort, and the coding process can sometimes become complex (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

4.9 Trustworthiness

It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the study is aligned with the research findings. Additionally, trustworthiness revolves around developing authenticity, credibility, transferability, conformability, and dependability (Leung, 2015). Therefore, in the current study, trustworthiness was employed to ensure that the study and its findings were reliable (Nowell et al., 2017). The correlation between the results and the original data offers the readers an opportunity to analyse the trustworthiness of the results, according to their understanding (Elo et al., 2014). The

researcher enlisted an external individual to review the research process and procedure to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness.

4.9.1 Credibility

Credibility ensures that the findings accurately reflect reality by verifying that the study remains consistent and focused on its intended objectives. The researcher ensured that participation was entirely voluntary, allowing participants to make an informed decision to take part in the study (Shenton, 2004). To enhance credibility, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews and observed the participants to ensure sufficient engagement time with participants (Connelly, 2016). Each interview session lasted between 40-60 minutes, though one was more than 60 minutes. This approach facilitated the collection of rich and detailed data.

4.9.2 Dependability

The researcher ensured that the study process was thoroughly detailed, allowing future researchers to achieve similar results if they conduct the same study using similar methods and participants (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, the researcher conducted a study that is consistent and has stable data throughout the study process (Connelly, 2016). The data was collected through interviews and analysed using QCA.

4.9.3 Transferability

Transferability is concerned with whether the study's findings can be applied to other situations or populations (Shenton, 2004). To enhance transferability, the researcher provided rich description of the research context and participants' demographic information. Upon participants' consent, the researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews with the participants' consent. Furthermore, the researcher emphasised the importance of trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016).

4.9.4 Confirmability

The researcher ensured that the findings were the participants' views and experiences (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, the researcher included academic literature in the research report to meet the requirements of confirmability. Its aim was to support the findings and to ensure they were not biassed or influenced by the researcher's ideas (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Additionally, the supervisor had access to the draft and notes for guidance.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations that will be discussed below include, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, debriefing of participants and beneficence (no harm)

4.10.1 Informed consent

The purpose of obtaining informed consent was to acquire participants' permission to participate in the study while protecting their rights. It was crucial for the researcher to inform participants about the purpose and aim of the study. This included ensuring that participants understood the information provided to them regarding their participation in the study. This allowed participants to decide if they wanted to be part of the study or not (Arifin, 2018). The informed consent is viewed as a contract between the participant and the researcher. It includes the following: names for both parties, the research purpose, the data collection methods, as well as the potential risks and benefits of the study (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). This information is typically provided on a participant information sheet (Appendix A).

4.10.2 Confidentiality

Privacy is crucial when conducting a study. Confidentiality means the researcher is the only one who knows about the participants and their identity, including their interviews. Thus, protecting the participants' data (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). However, the researcher informed the participants about individuals, such as the supervisor, who were going to have access to their initial information and how it was going to be used (Sanjari et al., 2014).

Hence, the current study's data is protected and stored safely in a password accessible laptop (Gregory, 2003). Therefore, the researcher used pseudonyms to protect participants' rights and their identity, as they also provided sensitive and personal information (Bell & Bryman , 2006). However, it may be difficult for the researcher to be unable to identify the paricipants' information.

4.10.3 Anonymity

Anonymity involves ensuring that the names and identity of the participants are not revealed in the study or during data collection (Arifin, 2018). Therefore, the researcher did not reveal any of the participants' names on the current dissertation. However, it has been noted that anonymity can be a challenge if participants are willing to reveal their identity, with the aim of sharing their

experiences and stories with the public (Butina, 2015). However, none of the participants wished to reveal their identity.

4.10.4 Debriefing of participants

Debriefing is defined as a practice aimed at assisting individuals to express stressful and traumatic events. Therefore, debriefing sessions monitor and minimise the challenging experiences that might have occurred during the research process (Maritza & Jooste, 2011). Debriefing also involves discussions with participants around confidentiality, anonymity, and potential sensitive issues that might be identified, but were not ready to raise them during the interviews (Slim & Waterfield, 2019). By providing contact details of a therapist, researchers ensure that participants have the support they need if they experience any emotional or psychological harm during or after the study (Maritza & Jooste, 2011). In the current study, the researcher provided contact details of a social worker, who was accessible on WhatsApp, SMS, and direct phone calls for free. This information was included in the participant information sheet (Appendix A).

4.10.5 Beneficence- no harm

The researcher ought to consider the harm the study might have had on the participants. This included psychological, emotional, and physical harm, as well as loss of resources and reputation (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Participants were informed of the potential harm that the study might have had on them, although a conflict may take place between the right to know and the right to privacy (Sanjari, 2014). In addition, the aim was to reduce or eliminate the risks, as participants were informed of the study's risks (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). For instance, there are questions that researchers may ask and cause harm. Hence, the question is not whether the researcher believes the study might bring harm, but participants acknowledging that potential harm may occur (Sanjari, 2014).

4.11 Limitations and delimitations

Studies normally have limitations that should be considered by the researcher. Reactivity focuses on the researcher's attempt to gain trust from participants, to provide effective and satisfactory responses. (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2013). For the current study, the researcher attempted to develop trust from the beginning of each interview by explaining and ensuring confidentiality.

Another limitation for the study was that the study's process was time consuming and costly (Queiros et al., 2017). The researcher also had to travel to conduct some of the interviews.

The additional limitation of the current study is researcher's bias, as the researcher may have used their own experiences to make conclusions about the participants' experiences. This may have affected the study's findings (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2013). This is possible especially when the researcher is unaware of their potential bias. Additionally, it was a challenge to obtain research participants. Furthermore, participants should be chosen wisely to avoid biases (Queiros at al., 2017). In the current study, the researcher was able to recruit participants through word of mouth and social media networks.

Delimitations are the limitations the researcher is aware of and can control (Theofanidis & Fountouti, 2018). The current study was only limited to participants or postgraduate social workers with three and above work experience in the field of social work. The sample consisted of 12 Black social workers pursuing their postgraduate studies outside the field of social work at Ekurhuleni Region. The researcher contacted the participants through email invitations, excluding social workers studying short courses.

Some participants were somehow uncomfortable with audio recordings at the beginning of the interviews, potentially affecting data collection. Language barrier can be a limitation when participants use a different language from the researcher's (Holloway, 2005), which might have led to misunderstandings and confusion. The researcher experienced language barriers with some of the participants. Therefore, the researcher had to translate some the information to English, as the researcher can speak and understand different South African official languages

4.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher explained all steps and processes considered when conducting a research study, and that includes the challenges as well as changes that were picked up during the process. The next chapter will be discussing the findings and results of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the current study's findings. The data was analysed using QCA. The emerging themes from the data explore several thematic areas including undergraduate major courses (such as psychology, and criminology), desire to gain knowledge and skills, career progression, loss of interest in the profession, no desire to be a supervisor, provision of resources and programmes such as trainings, workshops, and seminars internally as well as externally. Furthermore, the findings explore the lack of self-development and growth, social workers being underpaid, a lack of recognition, working conditions, and work affecting mental health. Regarding concerns of mental health, participants shared the impact their work had on their mental health, resulting in stress and trauma. Before the presentation of these themes, the chapter starts by presenting the demographic information for the participants below.

5.2. Demographic information

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Demographic Factors	Sub-category	Number
Gender	Female	10
	Male	2
Race	Black	12
Qualification	Honors in Psychology	4
	Honors in Criminology	6
	Honors in Labour Policy	1
	Postgraduate Certificate in Education	1
University-Postgraduate Studies	University of South Africa	11
	Wits University	1
Age group	25-30 years	4
	31-40 years	6
	41-50 years	2
Experience	3-5 years	2
	6-10 years	7
	11-20 years	3

Table 1 describes the study's participants, which consisted of 12 social workers, pursuing their postgraduate studies outside the field of social work. There were 10 females and two male social workers. All participants were Black. Four participants were studying towards an honors in psychology, six towards honors in criminology, one participant honors in labor policy, and another one studied postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE).

Most participants (11) were enrolled at the University of South Africa, while only one was enrolled in the University of the Witwatersrand. The participants' ages were between 28 and 50 years. The participants had varying work experience as social workers. Two participants had 3-5 years of work experience, seven had 6-10 years, and three had 11-20 years.

5.3. Key themes arising from data collected

Table 2 describes the themes that emerged from data analysis. The three study objectives were used as a guideline to develop the main themes, which are; the motivation behind social workers' choices for postgraduate courses, reasons for further studies outside the social work field, and concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in social work field. These themes were further discussed using subthemes, that are described in table 2, below:

Table 2: Themes arising from the analysed data

Objective	Theme	Sub-theme
1. Motivation behind social workers' choices for postgraduate courses.	1. Undergraduate major courses.	1.1 Psychology 1.2 Criminology
	2. Desire to increase knowledge and skills	2.1 Open practice 2.2 Motivated by work
	3. Career Progression	3.1 Desire to study further, Master's or PhD

		3.2 Increasing job opportunities
2. Reasons for further studies outside the social work field	4. Losing interest in the profession 5. No desire to be supervisor	
3. Concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in the social work field	6. Provision of resources and programmes	6.1 Lack of resources 6.2 Delayed essential job training and ineffective programmes
	7. Lack of self-development and growth	7.1 Limiting structures and systems 7.2 Quantity over quality work
	8. Underpaid	
	9. Recognition of the profession	9.1 Lack of recognition of the profession and postgraduate qualification 9.2 Misconception and profession undermined
	10. Working conditions	10.1Poor working conditions

	11. Work affects mental health	

5.4. Discussion of objectives, themes, and subthemes

The following section discusses the themes and subthemes that are described in the above table. The names of participants were protected through the use of pseudonyms, which allowed greater confidentiality in the reporting process.

5.5. Motivation behind social workers' choices for postgraduate courses

In the current study, motivation was identified as one of the significant factors influencing an individual's behavior and performance (Yusoff et al., 2013). Therefore, the current objective sought to understand the participants' inspirations and motives associated with the choices they made when deciding to choose their postgraduate courses outside the social work discipline. Three themes and six subthemes emerged from this first objective.

5.5.1. Theme 1: Undergraduate major courses

When asked about the motive behind the choice of their study, four participants indicated that they were motivated by one of the major courses that they completed during their undergraduate studies. This means that they may have majored in psychology or criminology. The curriculum and structure of these two courses inspired the participants to explore more in those fields. Therefore, theme one is discussed further under two subthemes: psychology and criminology.

5.5.1.1.Subtheme 1.1: Psychology

Social work course falls under social sciences which includes sociology, community development, law, economics, psychology, and political science (Wachs et al., 2017). In Sweden, to become a qualified social worker a student has to meet at least 210 credits, the programme includes courses such as psychology, scientific methods, social policy, law, sociology and internship (Petersen, 2024).Therefore, psychology is one of the major courses in social work undergraduate studies. The current study's participants suggested that they chose to study psychology after their experience with the course during undergraduate classes. They seemed to have an interest in psychology; hence they decided to further their studies in it. Three participants stated that:

"…Then I decided that I have always liked psychology. Even when I was doing my degree, I used to perform better in psychology than social work. So, I decided that let me do this…" (Karabo, female, 34 years)

"…Along the way, when I was doing psychology, I was like ok this is actually what I always wanted, it is just that I didn't know about it. So, I thought to myself that maybe I was not really into accounting. I was just into working for the corporate..." (Masindi, female, 28 years)

*"…So, in university as I did social work, I had to major in something, and I realised from first year, I had three majors. So, from first year, it was psychology, criminology and sociology. But from first year, people used to complain about psychology a lot, and for some weird reasons, I didn't see the reason to complain, like I used to pass it so easily, and I enjoyed it, and I just loved what it's all about and how it actually incorporates into social wor*k…"(Ntombi, female, 28)

During the interviews, three of the six participants who studied honors in psychology reported that their choice of study was motivated by social work undergraduate major subjects, including psychology. This indicates that choosing a certain course or career can start at undergraduate level. This is where a comparison of major courses may take place based on the interest of an individual. One participant indicated that their academic performance also had an influence on their choice of study. Therefore, participants' academic performance motivated them on their choice of study. However, one may argue that this is a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

5.5.1.2.Subtheme 1.2: Criminology

Criminology is also one of the elective courses in social work undergraduate studies. During social work undergraduate studies, students may have different experiences and interests from major courses, which may lead them to consider careers related to those courses. The following quotation supports this:

"…When I was studying social work, I actually majored in criminology, so I actually enjoyed it because it explains the mindset of a criminal but also, I did not start at probation services…" (Lesedi, female, 40 years)

Of the four participants who studied honors in criminology, only one mentioned that the motivation and interest for criminology as a career started during their undergraduate studies, as criminology was one of their major courses. In addition, the above participant indicated that they enjoyed the major course, which is criminology, as it demonstrated the mindset of criminals further, since the participant worked in a court setting.

5.5.2. Theme 2: Desire to increase knowledge and skills

This theme played a significant role in learning about some of the participants' goals when asked about the motive behind their choice of study. The participants indicated that pursuing further studies motivated them to open a private practice for growth and development. While other participants highlighted that while conducting their duties, they found interest in learning more about the field. The aim was to attain more skills and knowledge. The theme is discussed using two subthemes, namely: open a private practice and motivated by work.

5.5.2.1.Subtheme 2.1: Open a private practice

The desire to open a private practice was highlighted by seven participants. They stated that one of their goals was to open a practice or an organisation, for either social work or psychology, or both. This indicates that as much as some participants wished to leave the profession, they still appreciated and considered making use of social work skills and experiences to provide social work-related services. Three participants' views are stated below.

> *"…Maybe start my own practice? Yes, I think starting my own practice as well, or my organization for social work. So, the organization is maybe a home, a children's home…"* (Zama, female, 29 years)

> *"…So even in the same practice, I would want to actually have social workers within the practice…"* (Karabo, female, 34 years).

> *"…My main goal is having my master's and maybe hopefully having my own practice for psychology…"* (Nomsa, female, 46 years)

As indicated above, most participants had the desire to work for the communities and change lives where they could. This is something they have been doing as part of their roles, although one

participant mentioned that they aspire to open a private practice for psychology. It appears that it is only possible to open a private practice after one has completed their postgraduate studies outside the field of social work, which raises concerns. Yet, opening a private practice mainly requires one's appropriate qualifications, including a social work degree, as well as attaining more skills and knowledge.

5.5.2.2.Subtheme 2.2: Motivated by work

Five participants reported that the setting of their current job as social workers motivated them to further their studies outside the field of social work. Their current work environment further motivated them to pursue more studies in areas such as criminology as stated by participants below:

> *"…I was motivated to study criminology, because it's part of social work assessment, it gives you more understanding while you are working with your offenders…"* (John, male, 40 years)

> *"…So, the course is developing me, it gives me a better chance to understand the people that we are working with, remember there are also reports that needs to be written. Sometimes you write a report to court, your report is sort of manipulated by the other professions, they feel they are superior to yours…"* (Lesedi, female, 40 years)

Another participant chose to study further in psychology, and she said:

> *"…And then I finally fell in love again with the profession, both the clinical side of the person's behavior and the person's mind. So that's why I just decided, let me just go back and do psychology…"* (Karabo, female, 34 years)

The above quote illustrates that when social workers perform their duties, they explore different parts of social work. During the process, they find more interest in some of the work duties they perform. This also indicates that participants still valued the profession, and they recognised its relevance in their career development.

5.5.3. Theme 3: Career progression

This theme discusses the participants' goals or desires regarding career progression, which was one of the questions they were asked during the face-to-face interviews. The theme discusses career development through two subthemes, namely: desire to further studies, Master's or PhD degree and increasing job opportunities. The subthemes are specific in terms of the path participants desire to explore outside the social work field.

5.5.3.1.Subtheme 3.1: Desire to further studies, Master's or PhD degree

This subtheme indicates that participants wished to further their studies in their chosen discipline as career development. They aimed to study further by obtaining either a Masters or a PhD degree. However, this required them to first obtain their social work honors degrees. There were six participants who were planning to further their studies by obtaining either a Masters or a PhD degree. The areas of interest for their postgraduate studies were distributed as follows: three in psychology, two in criminology, and one in labour policy. Of the six participants, one from labour policy and two from criminology studies stated below:

> "…*Yes, I want to do a master's in labour relations, and then maybe if I can get my master's because I do not want anything to do with social work, maybe I can go elsewhere…"* (Sandile, male, 37 years).
>
> *"…Now I want to become a better criminologist, I want this, which is my honors, and I want to register for master's too…"* (Sphiwe, female, 35 years)
>
> *"…My main goal is having my master's and maybe hopefully having my own practice…"* (Nomsa, female, 46 years)
>
> *"…I would say, if I can get to that level of a PhD, I would be happy, because after this honors degree, I want something like master's that is in conjunction with both social work and criminology…"*(Lerato, female, 43 years)

Sandile's quote above demonstrates the main goal the participant wanted to achieve by choosing to study for a degree in labour relations. This may indicate that they envisioned a future in their desired field of study, outside social work. Sandile, above, highlighted a lack of interest in pursuing social work-related professional activities

5.5.3.2.Subtheme 3.2: Increasing job opportunities

Some participants expressed that they wished to leave the profession and secure a new job. Of the 12 participants, eight indicated that they wished to leave their current job or profession and explore another one. In alignment with the current study's findings, due to unsatisfying salaries, lack of recognition from the public and government, these are reasons social workers would leave social services (Bruhn et al., 2020). The participants in the current study suggested their ambition to leave social work to focus on getting into another profession such as psychology, which they deemed as paying better than social work, participants below pursued their studies in psychology explained:

> *"…If opportunities come, yes, I will leave social work and then, yes, explore more on psychology… as I think I would earn a better salary there"* (Nomsa, female, 46 years)

> *"…I would rather just leave the field altogether and focus on psychology and become a psychologist, you know, make more money… at some point I would even get a PhD degree…"* (Ntombi, female, 28 years)

Several participants believed that a new job would offer better job opportunities and development. It was discovered that employees who felt the lack of growth in the workplace would consider leaving their current jobs for better opportunities and career growth (Ndatshe et al., 2024). The job opportunities that were indicated by participants were often related to their postgraduate studies outside social work. For example, becoming a psychologist, which required them to complete a psychology degree.

5.6. Reasons for further studies outside the social work field

This section addresses the second objective of the study. The objective was to explore personal reasons that motivated social workers to further their studies outside the field of social work. Findings for this section are discussed using the following themes.

5.6.1. Theme 4: Loss of interest in the profession

This theme explains personal reasons that led social workers to further their studies outside the field of social work. In some instances, change can be associated with career development. This was supported by seven participants who indicated that their aim was to leave the profession and secure another job related to what they had studied. A study conducted by Cock (2018) revealed

that six participants highlighted that due to the lack of value placed on the profession of social work, many social workers are leaving to other fields. Job dissatisfaction can be described as an unpleasant moment regarding work, which affects the behaviour of employees negatively, and may lead to some of the employees considering leaving their job (Huysse-Gaytandjieva et al., 2013). Therefore, one of the reasons for leaving the profession could be a desire for change. Below are the direct quotations from participants.

> "*...I want to leave the social work career completely, I am discouraged, it has been 10 years since I have been working in this department…"* (Sphiwe, female, 35 years).

Zama also reported the following:

> *"…I would like to see myself leaving the department, working in another company…"* (Zama, female, 29 years).

However, four participants stated that they were planning to leave their organisations and not the profession. As much as participants would choose to study outside the discipline of social work, some still had the desire to stay in the profession while considering growth in another organisation.

5.6.2. Theme 5: No desire to be supervisor

This theme discusses the reasons why participants did not wish to become social work supervisors. It can be argued that becoming a social work supervisor is another form of development since it is a promotion. However, participants had different perspectives about becoming social work supervisors, as part of career development. Six participants highlighted that they did not desire to become social work supervisors due to the operations and structures of their organisations, that have an influence on supervisors. Such as challenges that supervisors face in the workplace that are often not addressed, hence they remain unsolved (Baloyi, 2018). The following quotations from three participants explained:

> *"…Even if you can say you will apply for a post for a supervisor, personally I do not see anything that shows that these people are growing…"* (Sphiwe, female, 35 years)

> *"…If I were to talk about getting, you know, a promotion at social development, maybe be it a supervisor, I think I don't picture myself in that at all…"* (Ntombi, female, 28)

"…*Exactly, and for my growth, I do not want to be a supervisor…"* (Palesa, female, 30 years)

Half of the participants demonstrated a lack of interest in becoming a social work supervisor, stating various reasons. The researcher observed the confidence demonstrated by participants when raising this concern. One of the reasons that participants did not consider becoming social work supervisors is the lack of growth they observed from their supervisors. For instance, delegated supervisors from Giyani region did not feel bound to play a role of being a supervisor effectively as expected, as they are not rewarded and acknowledged for their services (Maluleke & Bhuda, 2024).

5.7. Concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in the social work field

The third objective of the current study was to explore the concerns or challenges that demotivated and hindered participants from choosing social work for their postgraduate studies. Findings for this section are discussed using the following subthemes.

5.7.1. Theme 6: Provision of resources and programmes

The researcher asked participants to share their experiences regarding the resources and programmes provided for development within their organisations. The provision of resources emerged as one of the concerns. Social workers in South Africa shared their concerns regarding resources in the workspace, such as lack of work phones, shortage and unroadworthy vehicles, not enough stationery, poor working conditions and lack of basic sanitation (Madibogo, 2016). Below are the subthemes that explain challenges in relation to the provision of resources and programmes. The theme will be discussed using two subthemes, which are; lack of resources such as motor vehicle, delayed essential job training, and ineffective programmes, such as trainings, workshops and seminars. The subthemes assist in better understanding the gaps in the organisations regarding resources and training.

5.7.1.1.Subtheme 6.1: Lack of resources

Part of a social worker's job is to work in the field, doing home visits or reporting to court. During data collection, participants were concerned about the shortage of cars (which are the tools of trade), highlighting the impact it has on service delivery. For instance, Phaswana and Erlank (2023)

discovered that lack of resources and funds had a negative impact on service delivery, especially by providing important specialized services to children who have behavioural problems. Therefore, the concern about lack of resources was raised by nine participants. Some of their experiences and concerns about the shortage of cars are stated below.

> *"…Sometimes you have to go to the communities to do the awareness, or you have to do home visits, there is a shortage of cars…"* (Nomsa, female, 46 years).
>
> *"…We do have cars to help us move around, but eish they are not enough…"*(Karabo, female, 34 years)
>
> *"…You want to go somewhere, you have made an appointment with a client, come the day where you are supposed to go there, there is no car to get there…"* (Lesedi, female, 40 years)

The quotations above illustrate the frustration experienced by social workers when performing their duties with a shortage of cars. This affects social workers, communities, and clients who are supposed to receive services. For instance, lack of resources made it difficult for social workers to conduct home visits to clients who survived natural disasters in rural areas (Matlakala et al., 2021). Another study conducted by Dlamini and Sewpau (2015) revealed that 37 social workers were allocated with only seven cars, at the same time they were expected to meet the expected target while facing shortage of resources. This concern has led to participants feeling demotivated and discouraged. Therefore, a lack of resources could lead to delays at work, affecting the image of social workers, by maybe being considered unreliable.

5.7.1.2.Subtheme 6.2: Delayed essential job training and ineffective programmes

Participants also raised concerns over delayed training. One can argue that delayed training may negatively affect productivity. Training is arranged and provided by management, which is a challenge since participants do not have full control. During the interviews, three participants raised concerns regarding delayed training, two of their responses are reported below:

> *"…You find that you only get your training after three years in Children's Act. So, all along, you have been just being guided by others…"* (Ntombi, female, 28 years).

"…And sometimes you are sent to training, let's say you have been in the department for three years, and after three years they send you to a Children's Act training, which is a core of your functions…" (Masindi).

The above responses explain how training was delayed. The delay is long enough for one to gather relevant information from other sources. The period in which participants waited for relevant training was similar for the above participants. This indicates that participants had similar experiences regarding training. If there is a delay in training, one may raise questions about the quality of work provided by social workers in specific areas while waiting for training.

Eight participants also complained about inadequate, irrelevant, and repetitive training programmes. Matlakala et al. (2021), discovered that when social workers experience lack of training, it limits them from developing and advancing their skills during service provision. Three of the eight participants stated below:

"…I think most of those seminars and workshops are rendered just to push time. I feel that when a person is supposed to be impowered there should be time invested, sometimes you find out that those workshops they only run for 2 or 3 days, then there is just too much information. It is not really for a person to grasp the information, it's just for the purpose of doing it, if I should put it like that…" (Lesedi, female, 40 years).

"…We have trainings that they take us to, although not all of them are relevant, if I say I've attended training like it's once a year…" (Zama, female, 29 years).

"…I think now it has been 4 or 5 years not attending training that is related to the job I am doing, just to develop me…" (Sphiwe, female, 35 years).

The above respondents shared their concerns about the frequency and type of training provided, such as seminars and workshops. One participant highlighted that at times training was provided inadequately. Hence, the researcher is concerned if participants were given the opportunity to evaluate training after completion. The evaluation would assist with improvement and quality of training programmes.

5.7.2. Theme 7: Lack of self-development and growth

When asked about their concerns about working as social workers, participants indicated a lack of self-development and growth as a barrier. This theme addresses the experiences of social workers in organisations regarding tools of trade. The theme has two subthemes namely, limiting structures and systems, and quantity over quality. The subthemes discuss how lack of development affected participants' development.

5.7.2.1.Subtheme 7.1: Limiting structures and systems

The limiting structures and systems are some of the reasons why participants decided to further their studies outside the field of social work. They were not created by participants, instead they were part of the organisation. These limiting structures and systems discouraged some participants from putting in extra effort. According to Sikhitha's (2018) findings, social workers with 6 to15 working experience at DSD remained at their entry level with no sign of growth. This is supported by nine participants who complained about a lack of development due to limiting structures and systems. Hence, they aimed to leave the profession by first undertaking their postgraduate studies outside the field of social work. The following quotations by three illustrate the concern:

> *"…You know when it comes to performance bonus motivation, with our office you can work as hard as you can but still when it comes to that time then it becomes an issue. Especially when you have to support, give evidence, this and that, explain and at the end of the day you end up not qualifying for that performance bonus, yet you feel that you gave your all…"* (Lesedi, female, 40 years).
>
> *"…Our structure is not fair. It focuses much on women. It empowers women…"* (John, female, 40 years)
>
> *"…Staying on the same position for long, there are no promotions, I think those are the things that also finish the love of being a social worker…"* (Zama, female, 29 years)

The above quotations demonstrate the frustration experienced by participants regarding development. One participant highlighted unfairness when it comes to the availability of opportunities in the workplace, which leads to development. Therefore, an individual would stay in the same position longer than anticipated, while others develop their skills. Employees leaving

their current jobs due to mental health concerns, limiting structures, and an environment that does not promote growth leads to discouragement (Håkansson, 2017). A participant indicated that some supervisors would limit the chances of development or getting incentives. This indicates unfairness in the workplace.

5.7.2.2.Subtheme 7.2: Quantity over quality work

To emphasise quantity over quality in the workplace, participants highlighted how statistical submissions, which are mandatory monthly reports, often prioritise numerical outputs over the actual quality of work. Organizations that mostly rely on government donations and subsidies pay more attention to statistics which is a report on work completed and interventions done, as it is a standard and requirement to maintain various sources of financial income (Ornellas & Engelbrecht, 2020). Four participants indicated that their organisations primarily valued the quantity of work completed rather than the quality produced, as exemplified in the following quotations:

> *"…Because the department believes in quantity rather than quality. Like the statistics reports, this duplicate of statistics, I feel like the department believes in the quantity. So I want to do quality work, like spend most of my time seeing clients, assisting clients, and not this admin…"* (Precious, female, 35 years).

> *"…And also, I feel that I cannot implement what I feel is right, and then mostly the fact that the department is like stats driven. It is also very discouraging, because now it's like in the community, you are seen as someone who just wants people's signatures, and at times, even though you want to go an extra mile, it will not count in your assessment…"* (Masindi, female, 28 years)

> *"…There is nothing frustrating as working under substance abuse, because they want to push the numbers, and they want to push this thing on the media of saying, this is what we are doing…"* (Karabo, female, 34 years)

The above quotations explain the concern raised by participants regarding the quality of work they provided. It seems as if clients' actual needs were not prioritised, instead priority was placed on the quantity of work undertaken. Such a system may limit the growth of social workers, resulting in the desire to change a career.

5.7.3. Theme 8: Underpaid

Being underpaid was one of the major concerns that were reported by the participants in the current study and it motivated social workers to further their studies outside the field of social work. Job satisfaction is associated with salary, incentives, growth and opportunities, work operations and organisational atmosphere, therefore, job satisfaction is vital for consistent service delivery (Gad et al., 2022). Therefore, being underpaid can be associated with dissatisfiers, in alignment with Herberg's motivation theory. In addition, Adam's equity theory also claims that employees do not only desire and focus on financial growth, but they are also motivated by their beliefs regarding their work (Mugwagwa, 2011).

According to DPSA (2018), the annual salary for social work as a 4-year degree is R242 553. Conversely, Ryder (2008) found that social workers employed in NGOs within South Africa, earn 40.37% less compared to those in private sectors, and they also earn 22.06% less than employees working in International NGOs. Therefore, participants expressed that their salary is inadequate. There were 10 participants who shared their concerns about being underpaid in social work. Thus, they were unable to meet their needs and wants. The respondents indicated the following:

> *"…The money I am earning is from the pocket to the mouth, yes, so it is so discouraging, money in our profession is a problem…"* (Sphiwe, female, 35 years).
>
> *"…Because, it will be difficult, as I'm speaking now, I'm working and earning salary every month, but I'm not able to fulfill all my financial responsibilities…"* (Nomsa, female, 46 years).
>
> *"…I feel like salaries are not enough, not enough resources for us to render services…"*(Lesedi, female, 40 years)

The above quotations by participants highlight the monthly struggles that were endured by participants, with more responsibilities surpassing their salary. The participants were not satisfied with their lack of financial growth. This concern affected them and those who depended on them, such as their families. One participant expressed the discouragement that came with financial constraints as social workers. These constraints led them to pursue their postgraduate studies

outside the field of social work, as well as leaving the profession. And according to Herzbery, when employees are not satisfied with their salary, they consider leaving their jobs (Nelson, 2019).

5.7.4. Theme 9: Lack of Recognition

This theme outlines the image, understanding, and ideas organisations and the public may have about social workers and the profession generally. This includes the impact it may have on the value of services provided by social workers. The subtheme below discusses different ways that participants felt as their profession lacked recognition. The subthemes that are discussed are as follows: (1) lack of recognition of the profession and postgraduate qualification, as well as (2) misconception and profession undermined.

5.7.4.1.Subtheme 9.1: Lack of recognition of the profession and postgraduate qualification

Lack of recognition of the profession compared to other professions has been one of the concerns raised by social workers (Mmadi, 2018). This concern has been consistent in the profession, with little or no change. Participants' views highlight that they had frequently experienced their profession not being sufficiently or fairly recognised. A study conducted by Poopedi and Bila (2023), found that lack of recognition of social workers compared to other professions in the mental healthcare facility is the reason social workers feel demotivated and demoralized when providing services. Naude (2008) also explains that social workers who have been experiencing lack of appreciation and teamwork, and the idea that the practice does not value social workers, have led to low job satisfaction in South Africa.

Five participants were not pleased about the lack of recognition of the profession in organisations and by the public. Some of their views are reported below:

> *"…I think the challenges I have observed working as a social worker is that the profession is not taken seriously, it is not taken seriously by the social workers themselves. What I find strange is that people who are not even in the profession tend to be experts on the profession and you find it strange…"* (Sandile, male, 37 years).

> *"…Management does not care about our profession, they just want numbers*, *remember I did not study politics at school, I studied social work, so this is a problem in social work profession…"* (Sphiwe, female, 35 years).

"…I'm just disappointed that the department does not recognize the social work profession…" (Lesedi, female, 40 years)

Based on the above quotations, the profession is not receiving the recognition it deserves. Hence, people who are not associated with the profession and with no experience want to make decisions about the operations of social work, such as politicians. Surprisingly, one participant indicated that even social workers at times do not regard the profession as they should, which is a concern as they are expected to protect the image of the profession.

Four participants complained about social work postgraduate qualification not being recognised, thus, limiting their growth. The views on lack of recognition of social work qualification have been shared by the participants below pursuing their studies in psychology:

"…I wouldn't leave social work, if maybe our systems valued a person who's studying further in social work, I wouldn't leave social work…" (Ntombi, female, 28 years).

"…I wanted to do my master's in social work, but I didn't appreciate that the department that is hiring me doesn't recognize my master's…" (Karabo, female, 34 years).

"…Lack of recognition for social workers who maybe have developed their careers, like, for example, some of my colleagues who acquired their honors three years back, like there is no recognition within our department…" (Nomsa, female, 46 years).

One participant indicated that if postgraduate qualification for social work was recognised they would have stayed within the profession. This indicates the desire and hunger for growth from the participants. After completing, for instance, a master's degree in social work, they still remained in the same position earning the same salary. Therefore, based on the participants, social work postgraduate qualifications do not bring any professional changes or growth.

5.7.4.2.Subtheme 9.2: Misconception and profession undermined

People, and communities, including some of the clients that participants provided services to, were reported to have their own understanding of the profession, which, sometimes, is incorrect. Three participants raised concerns about misconceptions people had on the profession, which possibly led to social workers being undermined:

"…The one (misconception) about social workers is that they take children away from parents or families. It is a misconception, because it lacks the essence of the reasons children are being taken, ok, so we take children, yes, which is how people look at it…" (Ntombi, female, 28 years).

"…Then people come to us already with a wrong perception of what is supposed to be done for them. So, when they come, they already have a negative attitude…" (Karabo, female, 34 years).

The above narratives illustrate the lack of information some community members have about the profession. The lack of information or knowledge about the profession may mislead individuals who may need assistance from social workers. One participant also stated that some clients would visit their office with certain expectations based on their knowledge about the profession.

During the interviews, three participants said they observed how the social work profession is being undermined. Some of their views are stated below:

"…It's being undermined. You cannot say there will be people at a stadium, you need to go there and do the assessments outside, where is confidentiality there?" (Sphiwe, female, 35 years).

"...We are not being represented correctly by even our social work board, which is the SACSSP, and even our ministers. They are not really doing justice to the profession on its own. As a result, we end up being undermined…" (Ntombi, female, 28 years).

The above quotations report on the impact of the profession being undermined, and how it has interfered with social workers' roles. Another participant highlighted the lack of representation from the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and leadership of the profession, including the ministers. In Chibonore and Chikadzi's (2017) study, participants felt that the SACSSP focused more on subscription fees instead of protecting the interests of the profession and social workers.

In addition, five participants indicated that the profession is used for political benefits and not for the clients' needs. Therefore, the views of social workers are not sufficiently taken into

consideration. The education and profession of social work has long been associated with political ideas and structures (Petersen, 2024) .Below are the participants' concerns:

> *"…Because if someone or our department does not fall under any political party, maybe it was going to be better, because here, it is about politics. Politics here, politics there, they politicize our profession…"* (Sphiwe, female, 35 years).

> *"…Our jobs become like politicised, our jobs and politics, I feel that sometimes it affects our job…"* (Karabo, female, 34 years).

The concerns over the politicisation of the profession were raised several times. Participants were concerned and unhappy about how social work is used for political agendas. Hence, they chose not to further their studies in social work. In Cock's (2008) study, participants were concerned about political benefits being more recognised than addressing the clients' needs, pushing social workers to leave South Africa.

5.7.5. Theme 10: Working Conditions

Working space was considered a critical influence of the productivity of employees, as several participants shared unpleasant working conditions. Hence, any working environment that is considered a good working space plays a vital role when deciding to leave or remain in the profession (Mugwagwa, 2011).This theme also meets objective three of the current study, which explores concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in the field of social work. Poor working conditions as a subtheme will also be discussed below.

5.7.5.1.Subtheme 10.1: Poor working conditions

Inconducive working conditions may interfere with work productivity and employees' health, including social workers. Poor working conditions can be defined in several ways, including the type of work conducted by social workers. During the interviews, three participants complained about unfriendly working conditions, which affected their productivity and health. They highlighted the following concerns:

"…The working environment is not conducive, we have got a lot of issues with the building, number one which is affecting my health as well, so yes…" (Palesa, female, 30 years).

"…Look at what is happening in the NGOs with social workers. The environment under which they work, the working conditions, the lack of resources, the number of caseloads…" (Ntombi, female, 28 years).

"…It is not even conducive, look at this boardroom how miserable it is. You are sitting with the client looking around, looking at the chairs there, you see how dirty this thing is, but you say that you are a professional social worker, you know it is so sad with our profession..." (Sphiwe, female, 35 years)

The concerns mentioned by the above participants directly affected them, with one of them highlighting that inappropriate work infrastructure affected their well-being. A study conducted by Dlamini and Sewpau (2015), discovered that social workers were not satisfied with the working conditions as it affected their productivity, others indicated that their work offices did not bring feeling of hope to service users. One may argue that these findings show that some organisations have not taken care of social workers. In addition, during the interviews five participants highlighted being concerned about their safety due to the type of work they did and the clients they met, putting their lives at risk at times. This concern was raised especially by those working with offenders. Their concerns are stated below:

"…Safety in correctional services is one of the major concerns. Because you are trying to rehabilitate people whom tomorrow, may become your enemy..." (John, male, 40 years).

"…When I left court, I realized there were two or three gentlemen who were following me and I guess they were with the accused, and maybe they didn't like how I presented the case on stand. I just saw them on my tail. Remember, our office is not far from court.." (Lerato, female, 43 years)

'…Safety first and foremost is a huge issue, with the work line that I am doing, I meet up with different kind of offenders. Some are actually still in prison, yet we meet with them, at court we meet with them, we write reports and sometimes those reports are actually

reporting against them. So, you can just imagine how risky that may be…"(Lesedi, female, 40 years)

The above quotations show that social workers work with various people and facilities, which some may impose danger on their lives. These are some of the reasons why participants decided to further their studies outside the social work field.

Other participants raised concerns about outdated work policies, or some policies not being taken into consideration. Their concerns about work policies are stated below:

"…Because we have social workers that are specializing in social policy, I believe they know better. They are trying to change those policies, but the implementation goes in vain…" (Ntombi, female, 28 years).

"…I think it goes back to the policies that we work under, they do not speak to the needs of people…" (Masindi, female, 28 years).

Policies can be viewed as the core and foundation of an organisation. They define the organisations and their operations, including employees and the work duties. According to the participants, the work policies existed in their organisations, but they were concerned about their purpose and effectiveness. Similarly, in Bassett-Jones and Lloyd's (2005) study, strong dissatisfaction was expressed by employees who were not pleased with the company policy and administration, working conditions, supervision, and financial rewards. This concern may also have an impact on working conditions. The role that policies are supposed to play in the organisations seemed not to be identified by participants, rather the policies were perceived as non-existence. One participant also stated that the policies did not speak to the needs of the clients to whom participants render services. Skhosana (2020) found that majority of the participants were not pleased with the lack of consultation by social workers concerning the policy implementation by the government, as it affects the provision of services to clients. Therefore, the need for effective greater consultation regarding implementation of policies was identified.

5.7.6. Theme 11: Work affects mental health

When participants were asked about concerns relating to their job as social workers, they highlighted mental health concerns, which they experienced when performing work duties. This

theme addresses the impact of mental health problems on social workers. Support structures and strategies for self-care are necessary to deal with mental health challenges that come with working environment (Phaswana & Erlank, 2023). Therefore, the theme also reveals the availability of resources and programmes in organisations when it comes to addressing mental health problems. This theme discusses how mental health affects social workers in the workplace, in relation to the type of duties they perform. Three participants expressed their concern about the trauma they experienced at work or when on duty, which are often caused by the cases that they attend to.

> *"…I think it was just me getting overwhelmed with people's case, we deal with traumatizing cases every day in our workplace and at most, the department doesn't really give that much support and supporting you on how to deal with the aftermath of dealing with such cases…"* (Karabo, female, 34 years).

> *"…Also, trauma, the cases that we do are very traumatic, at the beginning, it was not easy, hearing maybe the victim saying, this accused person is my father or my stepfather, and he did this to me, you know..."*(Lerato, female, 43 years)

The above quotations explain the type of work social workers do and the trauma that comes with it. Conversely, the participant expressed that there is inadequate support to assist them in dealing with the trauma caused by their work. Thus, if one does not have resources or means to deal with the trauma, their well-being is at risk. Phaswana and Erlank (2023) also explain that a demanding job may influence an individual's personal life. Such as mental health. The other two participants mentioned that at times, work comes with stress, which affects their mental health and productivity. One of their experiences is illustrated below;

> *"…And because you are working with social problems, it affects you. So, I felt like, no, I just feel overwhelmed by this social work, these social problems where you get a child who has been raped and I just felt like, no, I don't think that I want to do this long because it's stressful…"* (Zama, female, 29 years).

Based on the above-mentioned challenge, stress is also part of mental health problems, and according to Chao et al., (2015) stress in a workplace is viewed as a mental health challenge that affects job satisfaction, performance and staff turnover ideas. Hence, some participants desire to leave the profession to protect their well-being.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the study's findings. Interviews were used to collect data from the 12 participants. The three objectives were used to develop themes and subthemes. Each objective had themes and subthemes that helped to analyse and discuss the findings. The next chapter summarises the findings, share recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1.Introduction

This study explores the views of social workers pursuing postgraduate studies outside the social work discipline at Gauteng Province. This chapter discusses and analyse the study's findings. The objectives of the study are used to synthesise the findings. The chapter also discusses the recommendations emerging from the study. The researcher employed a qualitative approach and a case study as a research method. The researcher further utilised purposive sampling procedure for data collection, with the sample consisting of 12 postgraduate social workers at Gauteng Province. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, and the interview schedule was pre-tested with two participants. The two participants used for pre-testing were not part of the actual sample. The researcher also utilised face-to-face and online interviews for data collection. The QCA was used for data analysis.

6.2.Aim of the study

To explore the views of social workers pursuing postgraduate studies outside the social work discipline, at Gauteng Province.

6.3.Objectives of the Study

i. To explore the motivation behind social workers' choice for postgraduate courses.
ii. To explore the reasons for pursuing further studies outside the social work field.
iii. To explore concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in the social work field.

6.3.1. Motivation behind social workers' choices for postgraduate courses.

The study found several motivators for participants' choice of further study. Four participants indicated being motivated by one of the undergraduate major subjects on their choice of study, which was either psychology or criminology. Three participants highlighted finding interest in psychology, while one participant indicated being interested in criminology, hence they decided to explore more on those courses.

Some participants stated that they had a desire to expand their knowledge and skills. Seven participants expressed a desire to open a private practice. One of the seven participants argued that although they wished to leave the profession, they would like to include social work services in their private practices. Additionally, five participants stated that their work motivated them on their choice of study. Therefore, they found interest in the type of work they did. Participants also desired career development, with six participants stating that they were planning to further their studies in their choice of study, either for Master's or PhD degree. Out of twelve participants, eight stated that they wished to increase job opportunities by leaving the profession. It has been discovered that some employees would leave their jobs to search for better opportunities or to retire (Mugwagwa, 2011). One of the reasons stated by participants was unsatisfying salaries within the profession.

6.3.2. Reasons for further studies outside the social work field

This objective explores the personal reasons for social workers choosing to pursue their studies outside the field of social work. One of the reasons was a loss of interest in the profession, with seven participants highlighting that they would like to leave the profession and secure another job. According to Bruhn et al. (2020), it has been noted that after five years of graduation, social workers tend to look for other jobs in the market while working as social workers, and only one-fifth would continue working on their first job. However, four participants indicated planning to leave their organisations and not the profession. One may argue that some participants saw a future in the profession, hence they were planning to continue working as social workers in other organisations. Some of the participants did not desire to become social work supervisors due to the lack of development that they observed from their supervisors. Another concern pointed out by Gumbi (2021) is that the lack of resources at DSD affects and interferes with the provision of supervision to social workers, according to a supervision contract.

6.3.3. Concerns that hinder social workers from furthering their studies in the social work field

The study explored factors that hindered social workers from furthering their studies in the field of social work. Most participants reported similar concerns, including accessibility to resources and progrmmes. Particularly, nine participants highlighted the shortage of cars as a challenge, which negatively impacted service delivery. A study conducted by Poopedi and Bila (2023),

revealed that the issue of resources has been one of the major challenges experienced by social workers.

Participants also reported delayed essential training and ineffective programmes as an additional constraint. Three participants complained about receiving training late. Therefore, they would sometimes rely on personal information and colleagues for guidance. Conversely, eight participants reported not receiving enough. Others received irrelevant or repetitive training, and programmes. Therefore, one may argue that the quality of training is compromised.

The lack of self-development and growth was highlighted by participants as a concern. It appears that majority of the participants are not pleased with their operational environment conditions, which has affected their desire for personal growth, as development seems to be lacking (Mmadi & Sithole, 2019). Nine of them stated that the lack of growth within the profession discouraged them from studying further in the field of social work and from going an extra mile when performing their duties. Prioritising quantity over quality of work was highlighted by four participants, whereby they were required to submit a monthly report which outlines the work they would have done. Participants expressed that their organisations mostly recognise the number of monthly reports for their work, compared to the quality of work produced. This system affected clients too.

Furthermore, participants reported on low salaries within the profession. They stated that they were underpaid, pushing them to study outside the field of social work. This is one of the concerns that made 10 participants feel less recognised as social workers due to low salaries. Market-related salaries are found to have an influence on better performances at work (Rynes et al., 2004). Therefore, participants also considered the amount of work they did and expectations that came with it.

Another concern raised by the participants was the lack of recognition of the profession. This concern was indicated by five participants. Therefore, according to Herzberg theory, recognition can be used as one of the effective strategies to motivate employees, whereby management acknowledges the valued contributions of employees (Nelson, 2019). According to the participants, lack of recognition may be due to a lack of representation of the profession. Four participants further shared their concerns about the lack of recognition of the postgraduate

qualification in social work. Moreover, they complained about limited growth in the profession, since pursuing further studies in Social Work is not recognised.

The misconception of the profession and being undermined has been experienced by social workers, whereby four participants indicated that people or communities have their own incorrect understanding of what the profession entails. However, three participants mentioned that they observed that the profession is being undermined. This lack of recognition may imply that the profession is not given the recognition it deserves. Participants illustrated this by comparing with other professions that receive recognition. Furthermore, five participants expressed concerns that the profession has been used for political benefits, a sentiment the researcher observed as dissatisfaction. Social workers raised complaints about being involved in political dilemmas, especially during voting campaigns, their views are not taken into account, therefore, this affects the work quality they provide (Dlamini & Sewpau, 2015). According to Herzberg's theory, employee satisfaction is influenced by how individuals are utilised in their roles, while dissatisfaction often stems from the treatment they experience in the workplace (Haque et al., 2014).

Poor working conditions were also highlighted by two participants. They explained that unfavourable working conditions affected their health and productivity. Therefore, organisations are advised to provide a professional working environment that considers the mental health needs of employees in order for social workers to be productive and effective at work (Mugwagwa, 2011). As a positive working environment can be associated with Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory (Nelson, 2019). Furthermore, five participants expressed concerns about their safety, which was compromised by the type of work they perform, and the people they provide services to, such as the offenders. Outdated policies were also mentioned by participants, whereby they felt that policies were not effective, and their significance was not identified. Therefore, they perceived those policies as non-existent. This concern about ineffective policies may refer to the concerns about working conditions raised by participants.

Participants also reported on the nature of their work, as often had significantly impacted their mental health, particularly due to the cases they dealt with daily. For instance, stress and trauma were identified, with five participants acknowledging experiences of psychological distress either during or after dealing with difficult cases. Three participants shared the traumas they experienced,

while two others highlighted the stress associated with their roles. In addition, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of adequate support programmes to address mental health challenges. According to Herzberg's theory, individuals are unique, therefore they have different needs, which is their primary motivation, hence it is recommended that employers be familiar with the needs of their employees (Mugwagwa, 2011). Therefore, one may argue that addressing and considering the mental health of social workers is part of identifying and meeting the needs of employees.

6.4.Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested, to improve the structures, systems, and setting of social work, as these influence the participants' choice of study for their postgraduate outside the field of social work. The recommendations are as follows.

6.4.1. South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) representation

The study recommends a review of social workers' salaries considering the type and amount of work they undertake. This has been one of the regular concerns discovered even in other studies. The council is known for representing the profession. Thus, SACSSP is an umbrella body for the profession, playing a significant role in representing social workers and protecting their interest (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017). Therefore, reviewing and representation of the council regarding salaries is recommended, including other relevant departments such as the DSD.

In addition, the study recommends employing media platforms and programmes to educate the public about the roles of social workers, including the services they provide. This will also address the lack of recognition of social workers, and avoid misconceptions, as one of the concerns raised by participants. Nilsson et al. (2025), supports that media can be used as an effective platform to educate the public about social work profession.

6.4.2. Organisational change

The study further recommends consistent reviews of programmes and training provided to social workers within the organisations. The aim would be to identify the effectiveness and accuracy of the programmes and training. As participants reported ineffective and inconsistent training, and programmes provided by their organisations.

Addressing mental health challenges can be achieved by implementing accessible and user-friendly support programmes and systems for all social workers, with consistent evaluation to ensure their effectiveness. Employing Occupational Social Workers can be particularly beneficial, as they also promote the health and wellbeing of employees within organisations. There is a view that social work can be stressful and emotionally challenging, which makes it almost impossible to be effective and productive at work (Nilsson et al., 2025).

The study also recommends recognition and incentivising postgraduate qualifications for social work. This may have a positive influence on social workers. It would also address the concerns raised by participants regarding a lack of recognition of social work postgraduate qualification.

Increasing the budget for resources may improve service delivery as participants mentioned a shortage of cars or transportation when conducting home visits, which affects their productivity. Moreover, this may reduce the strains from social workers associated with shortage of resources. A supportive working environment will ensure that employees are provided with transport, time, and resources. A disadvantage of working in a limiting environment includes a lack of access to resources which may prevent social workers from effectively representing their clients (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017).

6.4.3. Curriculum amendments in the institution

The study recommends a revisit of the curriculum of social work to improve and close gaps identified in undertaking work in social work. This could be achieved through utilising the study's findings. Turton and Schmid (2020) discovered that students felt that the current curriculum does not speak to their values, and their indigenous knowledge and lifestyle are not recognized, therefore, these aspects of the person culture and identity are seen as less important. While social work educators who were part of the study by Turton and Schmid (2020), indicated that the content does not reflect the local literature and familiar traditions.

6.5.Study conclusion

The study explores the motives for social workers choosing to further their studies outside the field of social work. Different motives influenced the participants' choice of study. Conversely, the concerns shared by participants about the profession and their organization, pushed them to study outside the field of social work. However, the desire for change and growth was an overall goal

for all participants. The study found that as much as participants desired change, some still acknowledged and found interest in social work. They indicated that they would still like to provide social work services even after leaving their current jobs. Hence, some participants indicated planning to leave their organisations and not the profession.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL WORK

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

Title of the study: Exploring social workers' views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside social work field: Gauteng Province.

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Nokwanda Zulu. I am a master's student in social work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Pillay. I am conducting a research study on postgraduate social workers and further studies. The study title is **exploring social workers' views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside social work field: Gauteng Province**. I am inviting you to take part in the interview, if you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 40-60 minutes. I will arrange the interview with the time and place that is suitable for you. You will have an opportunity to choose between face to face and online interview.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in computer or laptop with a password for 5 years. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data. During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including your name, gender, occupation, working experience. Interview is not anonymous; however, confidentiality will be maintained. Any report from the study will have pseudonym and the name of the participant will not be revealed. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study.

You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. OR Some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Department of Social Development. The name of the counsellor is Nokuthula Ndhlovu and the contact details for the counselling service are 0662914799 (social worker).

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me (Nokwanda Zulu) on 0724246621/1112543@students.wits.ac.za or my supervisor Dr. Roshini Pillay on 0117174486/Roshini.Pillay@wits.ac.za. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Nokwanda Zulu

Appendix B: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL WORK

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Title: Exploring social workers' views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside social work field: Gauteng Province.

Name of researcher: Nokwanda Zulu

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below) The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES/NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES/NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES/NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report/ manuscript/book chapter	YES/NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter)	YES/NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES/NO

…… …..(signature)
……..(name of participant)
…… …..(date)

…… ….(signature)
…….. (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
……(date)

Appendix C: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL WORK

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: MAIN PARTICIPANTS

Identifying Details:

Pseudonym/Code……..

Age……...

Educational/Training background:……..

University cost…….

Duration of study …….....

Work setting…….

Years of work experience: ……

Title of the study: Exploring social workers' views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside social work field: Gauteng Province.

1. Can you please tell me more about your job as a social worker?

   (Roles and responsibilities, tenure, wage, etc.)
2. Tell me more on how you ended up becoming a social worker?
   (Poverty, unemployment, finance)
3. Can you tell me about the resources and programmes provided for employees for development in your organization?
   (workshops, seminars, training, etc.).
4. Can you share more about the motivate behind your choice of study?
5. Can you share more about your desires or goals when it comes to career development?
   (Promotion, new job, etc.).
6. What concerns do you have about the job that you are doing as a social worker?
   (Safety, growth, salary, trauma, health, etc.)
7. Any further question or sensitive information you would like to be omitted?

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: SW23/07/07**
PROJECT TITLE	Exploring Social workers' views on pursuing postgraduate studies outside social work field: Gauteng Province
INVESTIGATOR	**ZULU N**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SOCIAL WORK
DATE CONSIDERED	20 OCTOBER 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	MINIMAL RISK
EXPIRY DATE	20 OCTOBER 2026

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 24 OCTOBER 2023 **CHAIRPERSON**
(DR L PETERSEN)

cc: Supervisor: DR R PILLAY

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature **Date** 25/10/2023

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES