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ABSTRACT

Investigating social service assistance provision to adult victims of human trafficking: Perspectives of social workers in Gauteng and Western Cape provinces

Human trafficking has been called modern day slavery, and is affecting numerous countries worldwide. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2012), there are approximately more than 20 million people classified as victims of human trafficking. Thus, it is evident to see that this is a global social problem that needs a collective inter-sectoral response involving social workers as well. This research aimed to investigate social service provision to adult victims of human trafficking.

The research approach of the study was qualitative. The research design applied was a case study. Non probability purposive sampling was used to select eight participants for the study. Data was collected using one-on-one in depth interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis.

The study found that social workers, employed at shelters that provide services to adult human trafficking victims, have a good understanding of what human trafficking entails. The services at the shelter addresses basic needs like safe accommodation, food and clothing, and also access to health services. Court support to the victims of human trafficking, and skills development to empower victims with a skill to facilitate economic empowerment, are also provided. The social worker further provides therapeutic support to victims, as well as facilitates reintegration back into society. The research identified the following challenges: security concerns for the victim as well as the shelter, complicated trauma symptoms presented by the rescued human trafficking victim and lastly the lengthy court case subsequently impacting on service delivery.

Social development at its core refers to the well-being of the most vulnerable in our communities, by addressing both social and economic development (Midgley, 1995). The research study attempted to understand how social workers, as part of the social service professions, assist vulnerable adult victims of trafficking in their journey to restoration and healing.

Keywords: Social work, human trafficking, social services, assistance provision, adult victims