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Perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision within the Department of Social Development in the Limpopo province, South Africa

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This study aimed at exploring the perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision within the employment of the Department of Social Development (DSD). All participants were employed at DSD, Waterberg District in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. This chapter outlines the following aspects of the study: introduction to the study, statement of the problem and rationale for the study, the research question, the aim and objectives of the study, relevance of the study to occupational social work practice, and brief summaries of the literature review, methodology and limitations of the study; it also includes definitions of concepts used.

1.2 Statement of the problem and rationale for the study

Supervision is considered a crucial activity for professional learning and development within the practice of social work. In a study conducted in Hong Kong revealed that many social work supervisors had no training in social work supervision (Tsui, 2004a), even though supervision is an important aspect of social work practice. Similarly in South Africa, another study conducted within the Department of Social Development (DSD), Western Cape, showed that lack of formal training for supervisors in social work supervision has had a negative impact on the execution of the supervision process (Cloete, 2012). Furthermore, the South African Department of Social Development embarked upon the Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2009, p.11) which highlighted "a decline in the productivity and quality of services rendered due to lack of supervision". In response to the latter, the Supervision Framework of the social work profession in South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) was

adopted to respond to the aforementioned challenge. The Framework is "intended to enhance the effectiveness of supervision within the social work profession in order to improve the quality of social work services offered to service users" (DSD & SACSSP, 2012, p.13).

Despite these provisions intended to arrest and revise the decline in the productivity and quality of services rendered to service users, gaps and persistent challenges continue to face structured supervision of newly qualified social workers, which breeds perceptions about the profession. A need to conduct this study comes from the researcher's experience of having worked at Waterberg District DSD in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The researcher, who was an employee at the DSD in Limpopo Province, has observed that there is a shortage of social work supervisors within the DSD. In January 2014, the number of appointed social work supervisors in the DSD, Waterberg District was as follows: Mogalakwana Municipality (2); Lephalale Municipality (2); Bela-bela Municipality (1); Thabazimbi Municipality (1); Mookgopong Municipality (1); and Modimolle Municipality (1), totalling eight supervisors in the district who are expected to supervise 125 newly qualified social workers. This constitutes an average of 15 supervisees per supervisor. However, according to the norms and standards for supervision, the ratio between the social workers and supervisors should be as follows: one supervisor for ten social workers, provided that the supervisor provides supervision as the only key performance area in his or her job description, and one supervisor for six social workers if the supervisor also has duties other than supervision (DSD, 2012). The number of supervisees allocated per supervisor in Limpopo Waterberg District is therefore too high, given that they have other duties beyond supervision. The researcher has observed how frequently supervisors are required to attend district meetings and court case flow meetings, or monitor Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which sometimes allows them little time with their supervisees.

The researcher is of the opinion that the ratio of supervisees to supervisors will impact negatively on the quality of supervision provided to newly qualified social workers. The research conducted by Engelbrencht (2012) shows that structural and organisational issues such as working conditions between the supervisors and the supervisees affect the quality of supervision.

The geographical location of South Africa has a contributing role in the quality of supervision, especially with regard to issues of distance between newly qualified social workers and the supervisors (Engelbrencht, 2012). This becomes a challenge as it affects the consistency and/or frequency of monitoring and immediate remedial intervention for appraising the performance of the newly qualified social workers, especially during their probation period. The newly qualified social workers are important to the profession in that they are in a transition from obtaining their qualification and entering the field of practice. Their perception about the profession matters, not only given the amount of time invested in studies, but equally their expectation with regard to supervision, mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, limited research on social work supervision has been done in South Africa specifically within the rural areas such as the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province (Engelbrencht, 2010; 2013; 2015).

The occupational social workers provide intervention at four positions namely restorative, promotive, work-person and workplace intervention. The restorative intervention views the employee firstly as a person, and secondly as an employee. The functioning of workplace supervision has a potential to influence the employee's performance at work. Supervision is identified with support functions where the aim is to provide a safe space to listen and support workers in relation to their work (Jenkinson, 2010). Creating this safe space in

occupational social work entails the provision of counselling to employees and their family members when there are personal and work related challenges.

1.3. Research question

What are the perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision within the Department of Social Development, Limpopo Province?

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study

1.4.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to explore perceptions of newly qualified social workers regarding supervision within the employment of the Department of Social Development (DSD).

1.4.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

- To explore challenges encountered by newly qualified social workers regarding supervision.
- To elicit the views of newly qualified social workers regarding the perceived strengths of the DSD Framework for Supervision.
- To explore the newly qualified social workers' perceptions of factors that affects the quality of supervision within the DSD.
- To elicit newly qualified social workers' views on how supervision can be enhanced.

1.5 Literature review

The literature review comprises of material relevant to the critical components of this study. The topics included are based on the research questions and objectives. Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen

and Walker (2013, p.64) contend that "reviewing related literature helps the researcher to limit their research question, clarify and define the components of the study". Aspects covered in the literature review include social work supervision, the purpose of social work supervision, components of supervision, models of supervision, ethical issues in supervision, training of supervisors, and attributes of a supervisor.

1.6 Overview of research design and methodology

1.6.1 Research methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach and a single case study as its research design (Willing & Stainton-Roger, 2008). A qualitative approach is appropriate for the study as the researcher wanted to explore the rich meanings that the newly qualified social workers give to the process of supervision within the DSD in Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province. Creswell (2009) contends that the qualitative approach is a means of exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The single case study design enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of newly qualified social workers on supervision in the workplace (Bryman, 2012).

1.6.2 Research instrument

The researcher conducted semi-structured, in-depth, face to face interviews as a method of data collection (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Wengraf, 2001). A semi-structured interview allowed the participants to be flexible during the interview. Furthermore, it assisted the researcher to probe participant's views in greater depth (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

1.6.3 Population, sample and sampling procedure

The population is defined as the "individuals, groups, organisations, human products and events, or conditions that the researcher is interested in studying" (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005, p.52).The population in this study was made up of 20 newly qualified social workers. The participants were purposively selected from the DSD, Mogalakwena and Lephalale Municipalities in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province. The criteria for inclusion were that the participants should have less than three years of working experience and be employed by DSD, Waterberg District in the Limpopo Province as social workers. Non-probability, purposive sampling was considered to be appropriate for the study (Gatimu, 2007). The participants were interviewed at their respective workplaces during working hours. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were also informed that their identifying information would be kept confidential.

1.7 Data analysis strategy

For the purpose of this study, Thematic Content Analysis was employed and the researcher followed the steps of data analysis outlined by Creswell (2009, p.185) as a guideline. The advantage of using Thematic Content Analysis is that it assisted the researcher to identify different themes and involved the examination of the text for the presence of themes (Brandt, Dawes, Africa & Swartz, 2004; Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011).

1.8 Limitations of the study

A limitation of the study was that the participants might have given socially desirable answers, as they might have feared being victimised by the employer. However, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of their contributions. Since the study was

exploratory and used a small sample size, the results of the findings cannot be generalised to the broader population. Furthermore, the data collected from the study were open to interpretation by the researcher; the findings might have been influenced by the researcher's subjectivity as she was employed at DSD at the point at which the research was conducted. .

1.9 Definition of major concepts

1.9.1 Newly qualified social workers

For the purpose of the study, newly qualified social workers refer to social workers with less than three years of work experience, registered with SACSSP, currently employed in the DSD in Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province, South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012).

1.9.2 Supervision

The definition of supervision used in this study is defined as"an interactional and interminable process within the context of a positive, anti-discriminatory relationship, based on the distinct theories, models and perspectives on supervision whereby a social work supervisor supervises a social work practitioner by performing educational, supportive and administrative functions in order to promote effective and professional rendering of social work services" (DSD& SACSSP, 2012, p.18).

1.9.3 Social development

For the purpose of this study, Social Development refers to the government structure in the DSD Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province (DSD, 2009).

1.10 Organisation of the study

This research report is divided into five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction to the study, which explains the problem statement and the rationale to the study, the aim and objectives of the study and the overall research methodology. Chapter Two reviews the literature on social work supervision and presents the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology used in the study. Chapter Four presents the data and discusses the findings in terms of the literature and the objectives of the study. Chapter Five presents a summary of the main findings, the conclusions and recommendations to the Department on experiences and challenges faced by newly qualified social workers.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter provided the overview the study by highlighting the problem statement and the rationale of the study. The chapter also introduced the research question, the aim and objectives and the brief research methodology and the limitation of the study were discussed. The chapter concluded by defining the key major concept used throughout the study. The next chapter presents literature review.