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Social workers' experiences of occupational stress : a study in the Department of Social Development, Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga Province

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of occupational stress among social workers employed by the Department of Social Development in Mpumalanga Province, Ehlanzeni District. Mpumalanga Province is predominantly rural and the assumption is that work-related challenges for social workers in rural areas are different from urban areas. There are theoretical basis suggesting that people view and respond to stress differently thus their coping strategies even in identical situations are different. The study has therefore focused on the experiences of occupational stress among social workers, the contributory factors that led to occupational stress, the impact of occupational stress, the social workers' coping strategies with occupational stress; and the availability and effectiveness of organisational support offered to employees experiencing occupational stress as perceived by social workers. The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The researcher utilised a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions, together with the Work-Related Quality of Life scale consisting of closed questions that measured work stress, administered to 40 social workers employed at Ehlanzeni District offices. One year's working experience as a social worker in the Department of Social Development was a qualifying criterion in the study. Thematic content analysis and descriptive statistical analysis were used to analyse data. The findings of the study suggested that unsatisfactory salaries, working conditions, high workload, lack of recognition and a lack of support were the main stressors for social workers in this study. The research concluded with recommendations that will hopefully assist in improving the quality of work-life of the sound workers and facilitate a balanced understanding between the employees and the employer.

KEYWORDS

Occupational social work, social work, stress, occupational stress**,** employee assistance programme