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**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**An investigation of the factors which motivate social workers in child welfare to remain in the same job for more than three years**

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Social Science in Social Policy and Management

By

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**May 2011**

## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

University of Cape Town

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to thank God for making this study possible for me. Thanks to his grace, I overcame the many obstacles I faced during this period of research.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my brother in-law Adiel and my sister Privilege for their unfailing support during my years of study at the University of Cape Town.

Special thanks to Associate Professor Andre Smit, for his encouragement, commitment and guidance. Thank you for your assistance and going beyond the call of duty in helping me to finalize my dissertation.

I would like to thank the staff of the Department of Social Development at University of Cape Town for their support and financial assistance.

My sincere appreciation to my friends and family: Judith, Avhashoni, Rafael, Anna, Kim, Kelina, Kate, Hilda and Zoe. Thank you for the emotional support and words of encouragement on those highly stressful and tearful days.

Lastly, I would like to thank Tafara, Yeukai and Knowledge Commons staff; Dianne Steele Nuroo and Jaydene for helping me with formatting and word processing.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the perspectives of social workers in the child welfare field and to ascertain what motivates them to remain in their jobs for longer than three years, instead of pursuing less demanding and more lucrative career paths.

Data was collected from the three biggest welfare organizations in Cape Town, namely, BADISA, Child Welfare and ACVV. The researcher used non-probability purposive sampling in selecting the participants. Sixteen employees and two managers were interviewed, using in-depth face-to-face interviews. An interview schedule was used as a guideline. Data was electronically recorded, transcribed and analysed, using Tesch's (1990) method of analysis.

The findings show that the participants were motivated by for various reasons. Some stayed because of their religious beliefs. Many believed that it was their calling from God to be a social worker, and this had a major influence on their decision to serve in the child welfare field. Working experience and support from their colleagues and supervisors was another major influence on the decision to remain in their jobs. Many of the participants remarked on their experience of peer support and supervisory guidance in the workplace as an important motivating factor.

Other factors, such as, working conditions and environment, salary and benefits, facing and overcoming challenges, communication, motivation, age and responsibility were also frequently mentioned as influencing factors when deciding whether to remain in or leave a particular job.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION .....	I
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	II
ABSTRACT.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	IV
LIST OF TABLES .....	VIII
LIST OF GRAPHS .....	VIII
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND .....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 INTRODUCTION TO PROBLEM TO BE RESEARCHED.....	1
1.3 RATIONALE .....	3
1.4 RESEARCH TOPIC .....	4
1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	4
1.6 MAIN OBJECTIVES .....	4
1.7 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION .....	5
1.7.1 <i>Social work</i> .....	5
1.7.2 <i>Child</i> .....	5
1.7.3 <i>Turnover</i> .....	5
1.7.4 <i>Cape Town</i> .....	5
1.8 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION .....	6
1.9 CONCLUSION.....	6
CHAPTER 2.....	7
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	7
2.2 RETAINING SOCIAL WORKERS AS A CHALLENGE .....	7
2.3 TURNOVER AND EFFECT OF TURNOVER.....	9
2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	11
2.5 WHY EMPLOYEES LEAVE .....	13
2.5.1 <i>Salary and benefits</i> .....	14
2.5.2 <i>Organizational factors</i> .....	16
2.5.1.1 Work environment.....	17
2.5.1.2 Working conditions .....	17

2.6 MOTIVATION .....	19
2.6.1 <i>Social support</i> .....	19
2.6.2 <i>Supervision</i> .....	20
2.7 CONCLUSION.....	21
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	23
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	23
3.3 SAMPLING .....	24
3.4 SAMPLING APPROACH .....	24
3.4.1 <i>Purposive sampling</i> .....	24
3.4.2 <i>Snowballing</i> .....	24
3.4.3 <i>The sample</i> .....	25
3.4.3.1 Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV).....	25
3.4.3.2 Child Welfare .....	26
3.4.3.3 Barmhartige Dienste Saam (BADISA) .....	26
3.5 DATA COLLECTION.....	27
3.6. DATA ANALYSIS.....	28
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	29
3.7.1 <i>Harm to experimental subjects or respondents</i> .....	29
3.7.2 <i>Informed consent</i> .....	30
3.7.3 <i>Debriefing of respondents</i> .....	30
3.7.4 <i>Violation of privacy and confidentiality</i> .....	30
3.7.5 <i>Reflexivity</i> .....	31
3.8 POTENTIAL LIMITATION .....	32
3.8.1 <i>The research design</i> .....	32
3.8.2 <i>The sampling method</i> .....	32
3.8.3 <i>The data collection method</i> .....	32
3.8.4 <i>Limitation to validity of findings</i> .....	33
3.9 CONCLUSION.....	33
<b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	34
4.2 BIOGRAPHIC PROFILE .....	34
4.3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS ACCORDING TO THEMES.....	36
4.3.1 <i>Organization</i> .....	36

4.3.1.1 Working environment .....	41
4.3.1.2 Salary and benefits.....	43
4.3.1.3 Working conditions .....	46
4.3.1.4 Challenges and overcoming challenges .....	49
4.3.1.5 Communication.....	54
<b>4.3.2 Individuals .....</b>	<b>56</b>
4.3.2.1 Motivation.....	56
4.3.2.2 Responsibility .....	59
4.3.2.3 Work experience .....	60
4.3.2.5 Age .....	63
<b>4.3.3 Support.....</b>	<b>65</b>
4.3.3.1 Internal (Organizational) Support .....	65
4.3.3.2 External (Individual) Support .....	67
<b>4.3.4 Suggestions .....</b>	<b>67</b>
4.3.4.1 Individuals .....	68
4.3.4.2 Organization.....	68
<b>4.3.5 Manager's Perceptions .....</b>	<b>69</b>
4.3.5.1 Turnover.....	69
4.3.5.2 Communication.....	70
4.3.5.3 Summary .....	70
<b>4.4 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5 .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>73</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION .....	73
5.2 CONCLUSION.....	73
5.2.1 Organization.....	73
5.2.1.1 Working environment .....	73
5.2.1.2 Salaries .....	74
5.2.1.3 Working conditions .....	74
5.2.1.4 Communication.....	74
5.2.15 Challenges and overcoming challenges .....	74
5.2.2 Individual issues .....	75
5.2.2.1 Motivation.....	75
5.2.2.2 Responsibility .....	75
5.2.2.3 Work Experience .....	75
5.2.2.4 Religious Reasons.....	75
5.2.2.5 Support .....	76
5.2.3 Perceptions of managers.....	76
5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	76

5.3.1 Organization.....	76
5.3.2 Government .....	78
5.4 CONCLUSION.....	79
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1 .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2 .....</b>	<b>92</b>

University of Cape Town

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1: SOCIAL WORKERS AND YEARS OF WORKING EXPERIENCE.....	27
TABLE 4.1: RESPONDENT PROFILES.....	34
TABLE 4.2: FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS.....	35

## LIST OF GRAPHS

GRAPH 4.1 NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE THREE ORGANIZATIONS.....	37
GRAPH 4.2: NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS AT CHILD WELFARE.....	38
GRAPH 4.3 NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS AT BADISA.....	39
GRAPH 4.4: NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS AT ACVV.....	40
GRAPH 4.5 AGE AND LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS.....	61

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher will introduce the research problem, the research questions, the main objectives and the unique circumstances of social workers in child welfare in South Africa. Additionally, Chapter 1 will highlight the importance of research in this area. In this chapter, the researcher clarifies and defines some of the research concepts.

### **1.2 Introduction to problem to be researched**

Social work as a profession, as it evolved in the Western world during the 1950s and 1960s, was an extension of previous missionary activities and efforts to assuage problems of urbanisation and industrialisation (Brown & Neku, 2005). Social work in South Africa started as an expression of religious compassion meant to benefit the poor white farmers whose crops had failed (Brown, 2005). The Dutch Reformed Church and the Dutch East Indian Company offered their services to the poor white people as the main beneficiaries of these programmes.

Over the years, social work in South Africa has become a profession carried by the state and other voluntary sectors (Earle, 2008). Social workers' role in child welfare is to provide social services to children and young people whose parents are unable to fulfil their child rearing responsibilities or whose communities fail to provide the resources and protection that children and families require (Kadushin, 1988). Social workers follow the guidelines contained in policies and structures such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the White Paper for social welfare, both of which were introduced at the end of Apartheid. The state had developed the RDP and the White Paper in an effort to rectify the harm done by Apartheid social welfare systems that were both residual and selective (Brown, 2005). These were replaced with a social development model, characterised in the White Paper as a 'delivery approach', which engages communities in finding solutions to problems.

Social work has been integral to society's struggle to deal with poverty. However, "it is apparent that difficulties in recruiting and retaining social workers and social care staff in both the public and the independent sectors of the personal social services industry are threatening the implementation of Government policies" (Eborall & Garmeson, 2001:5). It is evident that social workers in South Africa and internationally, are in short supply and facing many challenges. This shortage is globally slowing down the ability of organizations and governments to build the institutional capacity needed to deliver high quality services (Child Welfare League of America [CLWA], 2001).

"Current difficulties in child welfare agencies in the areas of staff recruitment and retention are becoming an increasingly critical concern of agencies responsible for the mental health and wellbeing of our children and youth" (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:3). Although agencies vary widely, "both experts and service providers report a current general shortage of child welfare workers" (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:3).

In the South African context, in 2006, the Deputy-Minister of Social Development, Jean Benjamin, indicated that the country was facing a shortage of social workers. She stated that "the country is facing critical socio-economic challenges, which require a concerted effort and commitment by all to meet the basic services and improve the livelihood of the vulnerable, through interventions that have sustainable outcomes" (Dlamini, 2006:1).

A local Cape Town newspaper states that South Africa faces a shortage of social workers. It explained that the country only has 10,000 registered social workers, of which less than 1,000 work in the Western Cape (Siphokazi, 2006:3).

The chief executive of Cape Town Child Welfare, Niresh Ramklass, said "the shortage was worrying, and the country could run out of social workers in the next few years if nothing were done to increase their numbers" (Siphokazi, 2006:3).

Other government departments that require the services of social workers, including the departments of Health, Correctional Services and the South African Police Service, as well as Social Services and Population Development, have experienced difficulties because of this shortage. In addition, the private sectors as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

are also feeling the impact of a shortage of experts in the field (Dlamini, 2006). The escalating demand is outstripping the small numbers of social workers entering the market.

### **1.3 Rationale**

Several reasons have led to the selection of this area of study. Firstly, this field of study is of personal interest to the researcher because the researcher is a social worker and some of her colleagues have left the country to work overseas. Recently, there have been numerous reports on high staff turnover in the child welfare profession. For example, Govender (2007) reported that staff turnover in South African welfare organizations is still exceptionally high, mainly because people emigrate and their jobs remain vacant.

Secondly, it is generally understood that social workers are paid meagre salaries, take on a heavy workload and experience a high rate of stress and mental burnout (Landsman, 2007). In view of this, the researcher was interested in finding out what motivates these employees to remain in such types of jobs instead of pursuing less demanding and more lucrative career paths.

Unfortunately, all signs point to the fact that the human services workforce is under strain. In some cases, poor remuneration adds to the excessive turnover rate (National Council on Crime and Delinquency [NCCD], 2006). In other circumstances, excessive workload and paperwork result in the staff being ineffective (Westbrook, Ellis & Ellet, 2006). However, the purpose of this study was to explore the challenges of retaining those who are already employed in child welfare as social workers.

The bulk of the research available on the topic focuses on staff burnout, the high turnover rate and job satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Very little work has been done on the issue of retaining the surviving social workers in the field. The researcher aimed to contribute to this field of academia by conducting in-depth interviews with social workers that have been in the field for at least three years. The researcher hoped to address the problems of high turnover and gain insight into the personal experiences of staff that have defied the odds and chosen to stay in their jobs.

The researcher hopes that, after the research has been completed, it will help the social work field retain workers. The researcher hopes to present the findings to the Department of Social Development (DSD), organizations and to the social workers so that it may shed some light on the challenges that social workers face and on how the Department of Social Development and NGOs address the relevant issues.

## **1.4 Research topic**

The topic of this research is to investigate the factors that motivate social workers in child welfare to remain in their jobs for more than three years.

## **1.5 Main research questions**

Four research questions were formulated;

- i. What are social workers' perceptions of what influences the levels of motivation among child welfare workers?
- ii. What are social workers' perceptions of the consequences of the high turnover rate among the remaining social workers?
- iii. How do personal and organizational factors affect the long-term employment of child welfare workers?
- iv. What motivates committed child welfare workers to remain in long-term employment despite these challenges?

## **1.6 Main objectives**

There are four research objectives;

- i. To explore the social workers' perceptions of what influences the level of motivation;
- ii. To investigate social workers' perceptions on the consequences of the high turnover rate on the remaining social workers;

- iii. To explore organizational and personal factors that affect the long-term employment of child welfare workers;
- iv. To explore how committed child welfare workers have achieved long-term employment in this challenging working setting.

## **1.7 Concept clarification**

### **1.7.1 Social work**

Social work is defined as the “profession that promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being” (Hare, 2004:409). This definition of social work was agreed upon by the International Federation of Social Workers in July 2000 (Hare, 2004).

### **1.7.2 Child**

The legal definition of a "child" generally refers to a young human being below the age of full physical development (Soanes, 2001). According to Chapter 1 of the Child Care Act no 38 of (2005), a child refers to any person under the age of 18 years (Government Gazette, 2006).

### **1.7.3 Turnover**

Turnover is defined as the number of workers leaving their place of employment during any given period and for any number of reasons (Kleinbeck, 1990).

### **1.7.4 Cape Town**

The City of Cape Town is one of South Africa’s five metropolitan municipalities. It is the capital of the Western Cape, as well as the legislative capital of South Africa, where the National Parliament and many government offices are located. Cape Town lies on the southern peninsula of the Western Cape Province. It covers a geographical area of 2 479 km<sup>2</sup>.

The population of Cape Town has increased by 1.6 % annually, from 2.9 million in 2001, to 3.2 million in 2006 (Provincial Government of the Western Cape, 2006:3).

## **1.8 Outline of the dissertation**

The thesis consists of this introduction and four chapters, which are briefly summarised below.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature. This focuses on issues such as turnover, motivation and the retention of workers.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in carrying out the study. It also focuses on the potential limitations of the study and on how they were overcome. The ethical considerations of the study and the researcher's reflexivity were also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the research findings, following the framework for the analysis.

Chapter 5 discusses the main conclusions and recommendations of the study.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the background to the research problem and its significance in the South African context. It has also highlighted the research topic, the main questions and the objectives, as well as clarifying the key concepts used in the study. In the next chapter, the literature review will be presented.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher discusses and explores what motivates social workers in child welfare to remain in their field for three or more years. The researcher starts by focusing on the literature and studies that have been done on the factors that cause workers to seek employment elsewhere. The second part of the literature review looks at those factors that motivate workers to remain in a specific position or career.

Many scholars have done research on issues in social work, yet very little analysis has been done on what motivates workers to remain in their jobs. The researcher is optimistic that the information gathered through this research process will contribute to the retention of more social workers in child welfare.

### **2.2 Retaining social workers as a challenge**

“Inadequate supervision, low pay and heavy workloads are cited as the key reasons for the worker turnover in child welfare” (Renner, Porter & Prester, 2009:110). Research has started shifting from focusing on turnover to focusing on employee retention instead (Landsman, 2007). Child welfare staff members that remain in their jobs are often the targets of public, judicial, media and government criticism. The criticism is often serious, especially when it involves child fatality cases.

This criticism is made without any understanding that child welfare employees are working hard in a system that is under-funded and under-staffed. Most agencies have established that their staff frequently has inadequate credentials to carry out this vital work (Landsman, 2001).

There are limited opportunities for promotion of child welfare staff, which leads them into dead-end jobs rather than into a career or a profession (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1994). High rates of

employee turnover exacerbate these challenges for workers who remain employed (Ellett, Ellett & Rugutt, 2003). Even though, as confirmed by research, social workers are working under difficult conditions, many have remained dedicated to their jobs for longer periods.

“Despite the lack of comprehensive data on the nature and extent of the shortage of social workers, this is expected to become a pressing issue, as the demand for child welfare workers shows no sign of decreasing” (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:3). This is proving to be a global trend (Westbrook, Ellis & Ellet 2006).

South Africa is following a global trend that sees a shrinking pool of new workers available to replace the retiring employees. In South Africa, this does not stem from an aging population but rather from migration of social workers to other countries (Govender, 2007).

In addition, numerous studies report decreasing levels of job satisfaction among both direct service and supervisory staff (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002). This leads to the possibility that these valuable personnel may decide to pursue other occupations in less-traditional workplaces, such as information technology and other growth sectors (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002). On the same note, Earle (2008) states that, in South Africa, social work skills were in fact transferable out of the profession, in other words, social workers could use their skills and training in other professions too.

The former Minister of Social Development, Mr Skweyiya, has highlighted the fact that the lack of social workers is one of the reasons why his department has launched a Recruitment and Retention Strategy (Skweyiya, 2007). This strategy was designed to respond to the shortage of social workers. It stipulates that bursaries will be offered to student social workers with the hope of increasing the number of social workers in the field. The Department of Social Development (DSD, 2009:32) reported that the “National Treasury approved an initial amount of R105 million for this purpose and a total number of 2,900 students benefited from this initiative”. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy was designed with the aim of improving the working conditions and remuneration for social workers (DSD, 2009).

## 2.3 Turnover and Effect of Turnover

Turnover can be defined as the number of workers leaving their place of employment during any given period for any number of reasons (Kleinbeck, 1990). Reasons for turnover vary from people furthering their career opportunities, to them retiring or being discharged (Barak, Nissly & Levin 2001). Other reasons for social work turnover cited by Westbrook, Ellis and Ellet (2006:38) were “challenging working conditions, inadequate compensation, issues of personal safety, inadequate training and supervision, lack of adequate resources to serve clients, lack of promotional opportunity and negative public opinion”. Due to the economic recession, job turnover has become a particularly important topic in business, as businesses continue to restructure and to retrench workers (Baum, 2005).

There are many negative consequences of high staff turnover, for example, unhappy clients and heavy caseload for the remaining social workers (Ellett, Ellett & Rugutt, 2003). This affects the quality of the services being delivered. One of the most critical issues in connection with this problem is the delay of placement and monitoring within the foster care system (Hansung & Stoner, 2008).

Research on turnover and work attitudes shows that employment benefits have a strong influence on an employee’s decision to remain in or leave their job (Baum, 2005). A review done in America by Heshizer (1994) on turnover rates showed that measures of job satisfaction are strongly correlated to turnover intent and actual turnover behaviour. “Social worker turnover not only causes psychological distress in the remaining staff members, but also in new and inexperienced workers who fill the vacated positions” (Hansung & Stoner, 2008:5).

South Africa faces the same problem. “Seventy-two percent of South Africa organizations surveyed indicated that their level of staff turnover had increased and sixty percent showed that they were unable to recruit and retain social workers” (Naude, 2008:12). In line with this shortage, Brink (2007) suggested that South African organizations were also experiencing a poor response to recruitment efforts with posts remaining vacant for lengthy periods, high caseloads and a lack of interest in working for NGOs. High staff turnover also leads to client mistrust of the system and financial problems for the organization (Hansung & Stoner, 2008).

Financial problems caused by staff turnover vary from one organization to another. Potential costs range from the time spent recruiting and orientating the new workers to the system, to losing money on administrative expenses rather than on service-related expenses. Thus, placing undue pressure on the existing workforce and leading to the deterioration of the service being provide (NCCD, 2006). Although some turnover is beyond the control of administration, an examination of the reasons for high turnover in social services may point to ways in which administrators can create the organizational conditions needed to retain staff and foster the morale that leads to quality service (Weaver, Chang, Clark & Rhee, 2007).

Moreover, resources channelled to filling in the vacancies instead of improving services being provided are negatively affecting the recipients of such services, namely, the children and families in need (NCCD, 2006; Shim, 2010). Though it may seem logical to conclude that a high turnover rate is the main reason for an under-performing child welfare system, no research has proven this hypothesis (Hansung & Stoner, 2008).

The issue of high staff turnover has been documented as a problem that is growing globally, in nearly all areas of social work. In a study done in California, results showed that public child welfare organisations in that state are experiencing a shortage of social work personnel, and that this trend is expected to worsen (Weaver et al, 2007).

“The annual turnover rates in child welfare in the U.S. were reported to range from 30 to 40 per cent” (Weaver et al, 2007:6). In South Africa, where social work is already a scarce skill, the high rate of turnover of social workers is a huge problem. Brink (2007:18) presents recent research done in the Western Cape, where the social worker turnover rate was as high as 50 per cent in child welfare organizations. The findings of his research showed one organization having to appoint 10 social workers in one position over a period of four years (Brink, 2007:18).

Staff turnover is not always a response to a negative situation; people often leave their place of employment to look for better opportunities or to retire. Staff turnover can be associated with how valued employees feel at the particular institution for which they work and the level of satisfaction they experience in their jobs (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008).

## 2.4 Theoretical framework

The researcher will discuss Herzberg's theory and Adam's equity theory as the theoretical framework. Although both of these theories have their shortcomings, combining them makes it possible to identify a good blend of factors, which together contribute to the creation of a stimulating, challenging, supportive and rewarding work environment. Both theories focus on the factors within individuals that energise, direct, sustain or curb their behaviour.

Herzberg's theory explains people's behaviour in a work setting in terms of their levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Gibson, 2000). It argues that job satisfaction stems from the presence of intrinsic motivators, while job dissatisfaction stems from the absence of extrinsic factors (Gibson, 2000). The theory suggests that factors that lead to job satisfaction are separate and distinct from factors that lead to job dissatisfaction.

Extrinsic conditions of job satisfaction include the job context. This in turn includes pay, social benefits, type of management in which the employee must work and the actual working conditions. Extrinsic motivation is needed to maintain, at least, a level of satisfaction (Gibson, 2000).

Intrinsic conditions of job satisfaction revolve around the job content itself. These include the feeling of achievement, increased responsibility and recognition (Gibson, 2000). Research done by Freund (2005) showed that child welfare staff tends to remain in their jobs in order to experience intrinsic rewards, such as appreciation for the value of their work.

Although the absence of these intrinsic conditions does not mean that a job will be highly unsatisfactory, their presence builds a high level of motivation, which results in good performance (Freund, 2005). Wier (1976) suggested a strategy for developing methods of fitting the worker to the job in terms of selecting the people whose skills, abilities and personalities make them suited to a particular job. Wier (1976) believes that people adjust their expectations according to their jobs and argues that they may not make use of their full potential in any particular job situation.

Job satisfaction can be divided into several aspects. These include satisfaction with different elements in the job situation (Shim, 2010). These aspects may relate in different ways with other job factors, such as commitment to the job or career (Shim, 2010). Some preliminary evidence suggests that a positive relationship between the levels of individuals' belief in their ability to complete tasks specific to the job and their plan to remain in the child welfare job are crucial (Westbrook, Ellis & Ellet, 2006).

“Variables, such as heavy workloads, low salaries, low agency morale, few opportunities for advancement, are all closely related to a desire to change jobs” (Shim, 2010:248). A good working environment plays a significant role in the worker's decision to remain in their field. Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001) concluded that salary is not always the overriding factor in affecting the turnover rate, but some studies have shown that higher salaries result in higher retention of workers.

Adam's equity theory describes the relationship between how fairly an employee perceives he/she is treated and how hard he/she is motivated (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). The theory state that employees are not just motivated by money but by their perceptions around their work. Adam's equity theory is based on the belief that employees are demotivated in relation to their job and their employer if inputs are greater than outputs. Inputs include effort, hard work, commitment, skills, ability, support from colleagues and enthusiasm (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). Outputs include financial rewards (such as an increase in salary or benefits) and intangible rewards (such as recognition at work) (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008).

Siegel, Schraeder and Morrison (2008) believe that a highly motivated employee is one who perceives that his/her rewards are equal to his/her contributions. If people feel that they are working and being rewarded at about the same level as their peers, then they will feel as though they are being treated fairly. This does not mean that a manager should treat every employees the same. For example, flexible working hours might motivate a single mother even more than a pay rise might. A manager needs to recognise the individual needs of employees and thus the specific rewards that will most motivate them (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008).

## 2.5 Why employees leave

In these periods of economic uncertainty, many firms have experienced higher than usual turnover rates (Baum, 2005). The turnover is due to cost cutting and the need for the company to survive. Although most organizations in child welfare regard poor levels of remuneration and low salaries as the major reason for higher turnover rates, they overlook other reasons for employees seeking employment elsewhere (Baum, 2005). Majority of employees leave their place of employment because they do not feel appreciated and are not happy with the working condition (Baum, 2005).

On the same note, “surveys consistently show that more than 40 percent of people who quit do so because they feel they are not being appreciated for the contribution they are making” (Baum, 2005:37). In social work, particularly, lack of appreciation, lack of teamwork and the perception that the practice does not care about employees have proven to be the highest-rated reasons for low job satisfaction in South Africa (Naude, 2008). It appears as though social workers are under strain. Although the causes vary from case to case, in many cases, inadequate remuneration has led to a large number changing jobs to other social work organisations hence adding to the high turnover rate, whilst in other cases excessive paperwork frustrates the efforts of the otherwise competent staff (NCCD, 2006). In addition, it is difficult to sustain staff morale; it is quite surprising that so many remain diligent year after year (NCCD, 2006).

The most common complaint amongst workers is that they feel generally undervalued and isolated (Alwon & Reitz, 2000a). Agencies that make promises, but fail to live up to their own values and philosophies, are blamed for creating real disappointment among employees (Alwon & Reitz, 2000b). One of the reasons for this discouragement appears to be a conflict between the theory and practice of social work (Ryecraft, 1994).

“Numerous young, inexperienced and idealistic workers are coming into the profession, with insufficient or inadequate training in direct child welfare services” (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:4). These social workers are faced with the reality of social work industries, which consist of high case load and poor working condition and this leads to resignations and so-called job hopping. Anderson & Gobeil (2002:4) also noted that, in addition to new social

workers being young and inexperienced, “weak leadership is strongly linked to feelings of isolation, frustration, stress and burnout in social workers and at supervisory levels”. Furthermore “there is strong evidence that suggests that open and caring relationships, guidance, partnerships and the empowerment of staff are important elements in the retention of employees” (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:4).

In the following discussion, the researcher focuses on some of the factors that influence staff turnover, namely, salary and benefits, as well as organizational factors, such as working conditions and the working environment.

### **2.5.1 Salary and benefits**

Salary is sometimes seen as an indicator of importance, since it presents the value of the employee within an organization (Landsman, 2001). However, findings on this subject, especially in the social work literature are mixed. Landsman (2001) ascertained that salary was one of the major factors that contributed to a negative organizational climate and to workers’ intention to leave. However, many reports on child welfare tends to mention salary as a factor contributing to job satisfaction (Robbins, 2001; Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2001).

Other studies found no significant relationship between salary and job satisfaction when other variables were taken into account (Landsman, 2001). “This concurs with Canadian research that identifies salaries as being secondary to overall job satisfaction, and clearly less important in retention than is the case in other organizational issues” (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:6).

Baum (2005:38) argues that “employee compensation is not the only relevant factor in employee retention but it is certainly one of the most important”. He indicated that one must offer salaries that are competitive with similar fields within the community (Baum, 2005). This concurs with Adam’s equity theory that states that an employee will feel fairly treated and motivated if he/she feels that he/she is working and being rewarded at about the same rate as his/her peers (Siegel Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). Furthermore, Kaye and Jordan-Evans (1999) discovered that fair pay and benefits are some of the reasons why some employees remain in an organization. However, studies of this subject have obtained mixed

results. According to Kela (2006), several theorists have expressed different views when it comes to salary, benefits, and the roles they play in staff turnover. “American literature points to salaries as an important element in the recruitment and retention of staff” (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:6).

Heshizer (1994:85) explained that “differences in age, education, tenure and the degree of family responsibility are some of the reasons that influence employees’ levels of satisfaction”. Some theorists believe that financial benefits influence work attitudes and outcomes. They believe that high job satisfaction and commitment may result when the benefits produce a better match between an individual’s needs and the benefits he/she receives (Baum, 2005).

This concurs with the findings of Locke (1969, quoted by Heshizer, 1994:85) “who suggested that by satisfying important individual needs, such as benefits, employees may respond with higher levels of satisfaction and commitment to the organization”. Lastly, adequate benefits may also make employees more aware of the nature and value of their jobs, thereby influencing their morale, increasing their job satisfaction and affecting their decision to remain in their job.

Providing high quality services within the constraints of current payment and reimbursement policies is another concern for social work professionals. “Task varieties, relations with co-workers, financial rewards and age all have significant positive effects on job satisfaction” (Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2001:237). In a modern society in which financial gain is imperative for survival, as well as being a sign of self-worth, financial gains or rewards contribute significantly to one’s level of satisfaction within one’s employment (Robbins, 2001; Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2001).

The greater the financial reward, the less worried the typical worker will be about his/her financial state (Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2001:237). Findings from this suggest that, as most workers age, their job satisfaction increases (Kleinbeck, 1990; Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2001). According to McCullough (2002), age is seen as a significant factor that influences job turnover. He noted that “the longer the employee stays, the more the turnover risk goes down, similarly older employees are less likely to quit than the younger one because

the older employees enjoy employment stability whilst the younger ones are more likely to take employment risk” (McCullough, 2002:1).

Viljoen (2009) reported that high staff turnover in South African NGOs was due to the government’s failure to provide enough funds to support the NGOs that are under financial strain, which results in the provision of an inadequate service. In the Eastern Cape, the subsidy has remained stagnant for the past two years, whilst auxiliary workers have been on the same pay scale for at least six years (Viljoen, 2009).

The South African government pays its social workers, on average, 37 per cent higher salaries than private or community-based organizations (Earle, 2008:30). The starting salaries for the social workers in the government ranges between R8 000 and R10 000 whilst starting salaries for social workers in NGOs ranges from R4 000 to R6 000 (Earle, 2008:30). Such salary differences are definitely a factor leading social workers moving from these organizations to work for the government instead. This has a negative impact on NGOs because they are left understaffed and struggling to sustain social workers or to replace them.

### **2.5.2 Organizational factors**

“An organization is an entity that enables society to pursue accomplishments that cannot be achieved by individuals acting alone” (Dahl, 2000:30). There are many factors to consider when it comes to turnover among social workers in child welfare; these are both organizational and personal. Organizational factors will be, for example, “how many problems are caused by factors that could be changed by the organization or the administration” (Weaver et al, 2007:7).

A study done by Schwartz, Tiarniyu & Dwyer (2007) also found that personal and organizational factors contribute to high levels of stress. Personal factors include a person’s coping skills and their ability to be firm and assertive when interacting with people (Schwartz, Tiarniyu & Dwyer, 2007). “Organizational factors include working relationships with colleagues, lack of resources, the setting in which one works, and the workload” (Schwartz, Tiarniyu & Dwyer 2007:104). The organizational factors will now be discussed in detail.

### **2.5.1.1 Work environment**

Having a pleasant and conducive environment that improves employee satisfaction and motivation is seen as the key to a successful employee retention strategy (Kaye, 1999). Overall, the social work profession is viewed as an overwhelming and often stressful choice of career. In order for the social workers to carry out their tasks efficiently and effectively, agencies should be able to provide a pleasant working environment. The objective reality is that, due to high factor mobility, organizations have to develop a good administrative support system in order to hire and retain staff (Westbrook Ellis & Ellet, 2006).

Several studies done on the subject have shown that most social work organizations have a high staff turnover rate. This adds to the workload for the remainder of the social workers. The increased workload is partially a result of insufficient resources. Furthermore, new employees do not always receive proper training (CLWA, 2001). For instance, when a social worker has an excessive case load, they may not know where to turn to for help (Andersson & Lundberg, 2008). This can be overwhelming for the new social worker and can delay productivity. When assessing these circumstances, it was found that support from the worker's supervisor was not always consistent or easily accessible.

Moreover, research has revealed that many social workers had difficulties prioritising their tasks when they had particularly heavy workloads (Andersson & Lundberg, 2008). Furthermore, such difficulties increased the frequency of sickness among workers, which further compounded the workload amongst the remaining employees (Andersson & Lundberg, 2008).

### **2.5.1.2 Working conditions**

Jaskyte (2005:70) says that "the initial phase of employment is known to be a critical time in the formation of newcomers' attitudes towards an organization and the development of a person-to-environment fit". This is the time where the individual settles in and assesses whether they will indeed fit in and the level of support they will enjoy. It generally sets the tone of the organization for the individual employee. The organization must facilitate the integration of the new employee through orientation and modelling so that the employee is fully aware of what is expected of them and the role they play (Jaskyte, 2005).

Jaskyte (2005:70) argued that, “if orientation and training are successfully completed, the process of organizational socialisation can have a major influence on the performance of individual employees and can thus affect the organization’s accomplishments”. “The effectiveness of these issues will determine organizational stability, the potential for innovations, employee loyalty, job satisfaction, commitment, turnover and employee retention” (Jaskyte, 2005:70).

Another important factor cited in the literature is the lack of perceived or real options for promotion or internal movement (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1994). Moreover, Vinokur-Kaplan (1994) states that devoted and diligent staff need to see that their abilities are aligned with their current job description because high factor mobility ensures a better fit. This line of thought concurs with the findings of Westbrook, Ellis & Ellet (2006), in which it was noted that there was a significant relationship between retention and opportunities for promotion. In other words, employees are likely to stay longer in their jobs if they can see that there are potential promotion opportunities.

The research in the field points to NGOs focusing on creating opportunities for career growth, learning and development as a way of retaining social workers. “A lack of training opportunities on the job at front line and management levels leaves employees feeling trapped and increases movement out of the agency” (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002:4). This is common in small companies where there are limited positions and expansion. Employees work in the same position with no hope of promotion. Kaye and Jordan-Evans (1999) reported that organizations could improve their retention rates if there were training and career opportunities.

In South Africa, the lack of adequate resources, especially in NGOs, is generally seen as the key factor that leads to high staff turnover (Dlamini, 2006). Lack of adequate resources includes a lack of support for social work, particularly in terms of the failure to implement panel decisions, late reports and the lack of attendance at hearings. Only proper resources can improve retention (Dlamini, 2006).

## **2.6 Motivation**

Gibson (1995) defines motivation as the forces that act on or within an individual to initiate and direct behaviours. Many scholars believe that the solution to staff turnover is motivation. “Factors, such as heavy caseloads, low agency morale and few opportunities for advancement, are all closely related to change of jobs” (Weaver et al, 2006:9).

Motivation is an important factor in generating high levels of performance, but it is not the only factor (Gibson, 1995). Performance levels are also influenced by variables, such as ability, previous experience and level of aspiration, as well as personal factors, such as age, education and family background (Gibson, 1995). Managers thus need to adopt motivation theories to satisfy their staff needs.

### **2.6.1 Social support**

“Social support can generally be defined as the supportive interactions or exchanges of resources between people in both formal and informal relationships” (Hansung & Stoner, 2008:9). In the context of job settings, “social support has been found to be a working condition that reduces the negative effects of job-related stress” (Jay, 1998:128). At the same time, Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001:631) indicated that “there is evidence that psychological and emotional support from friends and family outside the working environment can serve as buffers against the harmful effects of job stress and can generally reduce turnover”. Evidence shows that employees will stay if they believe that they are getting social support (Barak Nissly & Levin, 2001).

The findings by Anderson and Gobeil (2002:4) indicated that “there is strong evidence that open and caring relationships, guidance, partnerships and empowerment of staff are important elements in retention”. The feeling of belonging to a community, connectedness and having a solid peer support network at work reduces burnout at management and front line levels. Such a feeling of being part of a community is usually lacking in agencies, as there is too little value placed on communication, support and recognition. This is in line with the research of Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001) who accumulated evidence suggesting that support from co-workers and the supervisor are instrumental in worker retention.

Furthermore, Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001:632) highlighted the fact that “most studies found that workers who remain in child welfare reported significantly higher levels of support from work peers in terms of listening to work-related problems and helping workers to get their jobs done.” Support from supervisor also contributed to the reasons why social workers would stay in their jobs. “Workers who remain, believed that their supervisors were willing to listen to work-related problems when things get tough” (Barak, Nissly & Levin, 2001:632).

This subject of social support in social worker seemed to have received mixed responses. Chenot, Benton and Hansung (2009), Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001) and Jay (1998) found that peer support is very important for the retention of employees. Weaver, et al., (2006) and Jacquet et al. (2008) found no significant relationship between retention and peer support. In light of the discussion above, it can be concluded that factors that work for one employee may not necessarily work for another. It is thus important for supervisors and managers to ascertain each worker’s individual needs.

### **2.6.2 Supervision**

Education, support and administration are three key functions of supervision (Kadushin, 1992). According to Kadushin (1992), these functions should be performed within a positive relationship with the ultimate objective of being able to deliver the best possible service to clients. According to Jacquet et al (2008) the goal of supervision is to produce knowledgeable and skilled social work professionals who are able to benefit from and develop the client system served by the agency. A supervisor achieves this goal through his/her relationship with the person being supervised (Jacquet et al, 2008).

New social work in the field can benefit and learn from their supervisor through modelling. Research done by Cearley (2004:316) found that “many scholars agree that role modelling is the most effective way to teach human service attitudes and skills, particularly for beginning supervisees”. Cearley (2004) thus gives an example of a supervisor praising employees when they succeed, so that they can build on their strengths.

This is in line with the work of Kadushin (1992), who ascertained that workers do respond to supportive supervision. Kadushin (1992:331) indicated that, “when a supervisor is perceived as supportive, workers are more likely to be more understanding of the pressure on them”. Supervisor support is seen as the key factor that determines workers’ intention to leave or stay (Renner Porter & Prester, 2009).

If an agency or organization seeks to improve retention rates, in other words, it should put in place proper structure of supervision and train supervisors to guide, support and educate employees (Renner, Porter & Prester, 2009).

Renner, Porter and Prester (2009:111) suggested that “turnover in child welfare is preventable; and supervision has been named as the component linked to retaining social workers”. They alluded to the fact that offering quality supervision and consultative supervision is vital to ensuring worker satisfaction and retention. “Other ideas suggested for strengthening child welfare supervision, were expanding the opportunity for supervisors to network with other professionals, to learn from peers and participate in conference and other training opportunities” (Renner Porter & Prester, 2009:111).

Supervision was identified as being one of the main factors in retention (Rycraft, 1994). Rycraft (1994) carried out a comprehensive study where he found that workers tended to focus on the importance of supervision in creating jobs that were both bearable and manageable. Studies have also suggested that it is important for organizations to define the supervisory role as being one of teacher and mentor, rather than only one as a monitor or administrator (Cearley, 2004).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter looked at the literature around aspects of turnover and retention of staff. From the literature discussed above, it can be concluded that, in most cases, supervision and peer support have a positive influence on retention of staff, although some authors disagreed with this. It was also discussed why employees leave their jobs and what effects turnover has on the organisation as well as on the workers who remain behind. Another subject that received mixed responses in the literature was that of remuneration, with many scholars pointed out that remuneration was an important reason why employees left their

jobs, while others arguing that remuneration was not an important factor. The next chapter will discuss the methodology employed in this research project.

University of Cape Town

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology followed in carrying out the research, by describing the aims, methods and procedures used in this study. It looks at the sampling process and any decisions surrounding this process, as well as at the data collection procedure. It addresses some of the ethical dilemmas that the researcher faced while conducting this research. It also looks at how the data was analysed. The chapter ends with a description of the research limitations.

#### **3.2 Research design**

This research is an exploratory, qualitative study in which the aim was to gain information from social workers who had been working in child welfare for longer than three years. Exploratory studies are normally used to make initial investigations into unknown areas of research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Qualitative research is defined as “the study of people in their natural environments as they go about their daily lives. It tries to understand how people live, how they talk and behave and what captivates and distresses them. More importantly, it strives to understand the meanings people’s words and behaviours have for them” (Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996:4).

This approach is appropriate for this study, as the individuals being studied can be best understood within their natural setting, rather than in any artificial setting of surveys or experiments (Babbie & Mouton, 2005).

The researcher decided to conduct a qualitative research study, as this focused on the subjective views and perspectives of the respondents, with the data being based exclusively on their individual experiences and the meanings these had for the respondents.

### **3.3 Sampling**

Sampling is the procedure used to select cases to include in a research study (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Specific sampling techniques are used to determine and control the likelihood of specific individuals being selected for the study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2005), there are two types of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

The researcher decided to use non-probability purposive sampling, as this method creates a sample based entirely on the researcher's judgment. The sample is made up of elements that have the most characteristics and are considered to be representative of the population to be researched (Strydom, 2005). In other words, it purposefully and specifically targeted social workers in the field of child welfare that had stayed in their jobs for longer than three years.

### **3.4 Sampling approach**

#### **3.4.1 Purposive sampling**

A non-random sample is one, in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods, to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population (Newman, 2006). The researcher thus selects or chooses individuals on purpose, because they are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied (Newman, 2006).

#### **3.4.2 Snowballing**

Snowballing is also known as chain referral sampling. It is a method used in locating someone who is willing to participate in the study, and then asking him to refer you to someone else who is also a part of the population being researched. This is an individual who might be willing to participate in the study (Newman, 2006). Once participants had identified other possible respondents and confirmed their availability or willingness, the researcher contacted them telephonically. Participation was voluntary. The researcher chose this sampling approach because of the specific focus of the study, namely, social workers who had worked in child welfare settings in the same organization for three or more years within the area of Cape Town.

### **3.4.3 The sample**

The three largest child welfare organizations in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area to employ social workers are Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging (ACVV), Child Welfare and Barmhartige Dienste Saam (BADISA). These were chosen because their offices were in the Cape Town area. The sample consisted of 16 social workers from these three organizations. All social workers were registered in terms of the Social Work Act 110 of 1978. Moreover, they were individuals who had worked in the same organization for three or more years

Stroebe and Stroebe (1989) stated that participation in a research study is higher when a trusted individual vouches for the validity or importance of the research. Such recommendations can take the form of personal referrals from religious groups, former participants or medical professionals. The researcher thus approached the managers of the three organizations mentioned above. The managers contacted the potential participants to establish whether they would be interested in taking part in the study, or not.

After establishing how many social workers were interested in participating in the study, the researcher then asked the managers whether they were interested in sharing their views on what motivated their workers to stay longer. Unfortunately, one manager refused, which meant that only two managers participated in the study. Social workers were employed by the three biggest child welfare organizations in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area. Moreover, they were individuals who had worked in the same organization for three or more years.

#### **3.4.3.1 Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV)**

The ACVV is one of the oldest welfare organizations to render comprehensive welfare services. It has many offices, but the researcher concentrated only on the two branches in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area, namely, the Maitland office and the Mitchell's Plain office (Van Greuneum, 2009).

The researcher submitted and presented a proposal to the ACVV board members, which was approved on 25 June 2009. The names of those who were willing to participate in the study were emailed to the researcher. Only two social workers declined to participate. Interviews

were completed within a period of one week. As the managing director was not available, the researcher interviewed the regional manager instead.

#### **3.4.3.2 Child Welfare**

Child Welfare is also one of the oldest welfare organizations in South Africa, having been founded in 1908. Cape Town Child Welfare has a proud history of caring for vulnerable children (Vermeulen, 2009). It has two main offices, namely, in Athlone and Manenberg. The researcher also approached the satellite offices at Lotus River, Du Noon, Hanover Park, Khayelitsha and Gugulethu. The manager indicated that they had 40 posts for social workers. In the end, however, the researcher only interviewed two social workers from Manenberg and Lotus River, as well as the managing director of the organisation.

The researcher has been in contact with the director for a long time. The manager indicated that they had 40 posts for social workers. The researcher managed to interview two social workers and the managing director of Child Welfare.

#### **3.4.3.3 Barmhartige Dienste Saam (BADISA)**

BADISA is a church-based NGO working in the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape. BADISA has three branches in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area. The three branches are at Bellville, Wynberg and Elsies River (Pretorius, 2009).

Following the same protocol used in 3.3.1, the researcher had no difficulties in interviewing the Elsies River and Bellville were interviewed, although one respondent in Elsies River did not wish to be recorded. The Wynberg social workers repeatedly changed the scheduled meeting dates, and the researcher only managed to interview one social worker who met the criteria.

**Table 3.1** lists the social workers who were interviewed, the name of their organization and the duration of their stay in the same job in that organization.

**Table 3.1: Social workers and years of working experience**

<b>Name of organization</b>	<b>Name of the employee</b>	<b>Experience</b>
ACVV (Mitchells Plain)	A1	5 years
ACVV (Mitchells Plain)	A2	5 years
ACVV (Mitchells Plain)	A3	8 years
ACVV (Maitland)	A4	21years
ACVV (Brooklyn)	A5	18 years
BADISA (Elsies River)	B1	5 years
BADISA (Elsies River)	B2	3 years
BADISA (Elsies River)	B3	4 years
BADISA (Elsies River)	B4	7 years
BADISA (Elsies River)	B5	7 years
BABISA (Bellville)	B6	8years
BADISA (Bellville)	B7	19years
BADISA (Bellville)	B8	4 years
BADISA (Bellville)	B9	4 years
Child Welfare (Lotus River)	C1	4 years
Child Welfare (Manenberg)	C2	3years

### **3.5 Data collection**

The data collection approach used was a semi-structured one-on-one interviewing method, also known as in-depth interviewing. This approach is dominant in the qualitative methodology (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2005). The data collection instrument used was a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 1), which guided rather than dictated the interview.

The flexibility of this method of data collection allows the interviewer to question areas of interest in order to gain an in-depth view of the participants' perspective on a particular matter and to expand on the data obtained. In this approach, the participants are perceived as

the experts on the subject, and are given the opportunity to tell their own story (De Vos et al, 2005).

The various questions in the interview were divided into six sections. Section A focused on gathering identification information in order to place them in context; Section B related to their personal profile and Section C identified the organization. Section D focused on current circumstances pertaining to the; Section E explored the consequences of the rapid turnover rate, whilst Section F looked at service delivery. Lastly, Section G contained general questions used for gathering the data (see Appendix 1).

A tape recorder was used to record the interview, if the interviewees granted permission. The tape recorder was used as inconspicuously as possible to limit distraction. Interviews were conducted at the participants' place of work. This saved time because most of the social workers were extremely busy with work and they did not wish to conduct interviews after working hours.

### **3.6. Data analysis**

The data was analysed in the following steps, according to Tesch's Method of 1990 (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 1998).

- i. The interviews were transcribed from the tape recorder to the computer.
- ii. Each transcript was printed and carefully proofread to make sense of the respondents' replies.
- iii. Margin notes, memos, reflections and comments were made on the text.
- iv. Once the transcript had been completely read through for understanding, it was read through again to start the first level of analysis by searching for the broad themes that could be linked to the objectives. All the scripts were read through carefully, searching for themes and categories, and making notes in the margins.

- v. Once manual analysis had been completed, the researcher used the NVIVO computer program to refine the themes and categories further, by incorporating sub-categories.
- vi. All the transcriptions were imported into the NVIVO software program to do a first-level analysis on the computer.
- vii. Once all the themes and categories were clearly identified, a table was drawn up as a framework for discussing the findings and for further analysis.
- viii. Further analysis in writing up the findings included the use of selected quotes to highlight various themes and categories, while also linking quotes to the authors in the literature review. It was important to use these quotes as well as those that did not confirm the original assumptions, so that critical appraisals of the findings could be represented.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

When conducting a research project, the researcher must consider various ethical considerations. “Ethics is a set of moral principles, which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students” (Strydom, 2005: 57).

Some of the ethical considerations that were important in this research are discussed below.

#### **3.7.1 Harm to experimental subjects or respondents**

Given the personal nature of the topic being studied, there was some amount of risk that the respondents might be harmed emotionally. Revealing information about themselves, about their experiences in their current employment, and about their family or community circumstances could be emotionally harmful if sensitive information were to be revealed, thereby leaving the respondents vulnerable (De Vos et al, 2005). It was thus the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that all the respondents left the research setting in a positive emotional state.

The researcher felt that most of the interviews ended on a positive note, with respondents realising that they could make a difference in other people's lives and that their efforts were being recognised.

### **3.7.2 Informed consent**

Participants had to be provided with adequate information to allow them to make an informed decision on whether to participate or to withdraw. They were made aware of all the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers of the study before their individual interviews commenced. De Vos et al ( 2005) noted that it is the responsibility of the interviewer to ensure that this is upheld. It was explained to the participants how the data collected would be used; how they would have access to data; and how the results would be written in the research report. All the respondents participated voluntarily, after it was explained that they could freely decline to participate or that they could refuse to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable. They were not obliged to answer all the questions.

### **3.7.3 Debriefing of respondents**

Debriefing of participants after the interviews is important for helping them to deal with any feelings that may have resulted from the research study. One way of doing so was to discuss their feelings about an interview immediately after the session. However, it is important to note that this is not a counselling session, and where necessary the appropriate referrals were made (DeVos et al, 2005). Respondents were given an opportunity at the end of the interviews to ask questions or to highlight areas on which they needed clarification. The respondents were also asked to comment on their experience of the interview. This gave them some closure about their participation in the research process.

### **3.7.4 Violation of privacy and confidentiality**

The researcher has an ethical obligation to protect and respect the participants' right to privacy, to inform the participants of this right and to promise to respect such right. The respondents were duly informed that their responses would be analysed and available to other

parties, but they were also made to understand that their identity would not be revealed under any circumstances (De Vos et al, 2005).

To ensure that this principle was upheld, the researcher made a contract with the respondents that their identities would remain confidential, and requested their permission to publish their responses and use these to make recommendations to the DSD regarding their needs.

### **3.7.5 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is “the ability to formulate an integrated understanding of one’s own cognitive world, especially understanding one’s influence or role in a set of human relations” (De Vos, 2005: 363). The researcher has a two year work experience in the field of social work. This study was enjoyable because it allowed the researcher to put into practice her skills of being able to engage with people as well as to utilise her assessment skills. The researcher knew from her personal experience that social workers with whom she had studied had left South Africa to pursue better working conditions overseas. As a result, the researcher had chosen a topic that was very relevant to the current climate in South Africa, since many organizations are indeed faced with high turnover rates, particularly in the field of social work and development.

Consequently, the researcher felt that the issue was an important one in order to prevent or at least reduce the loss of skilled, trained and experienced social workers. There is limited literature available on the subject of motivating social workers to remain in their employment for longer, and this is also an area of great concern for the government. As a result, the results of this study are valuable and relevant.

However, the researcher faced some challenges during the research. For instance, the first two participants from the ACVV were predominantly Afrikaans speaking; this proved to be a limitation because English was their second language as well as the researcher’s second language. The researcher tried to overcome these challenges by paraphrasing and speaking slowly to make sure that the participants understood the questions.

Secondly, possible respondents frequently cancelled appointments because of time constraints, in some cases others did not wish to take part in the study. This proved to be difficult for the researcher, because she had to travel to Mitchell's Plain to conduct the interviews, only to find that participants cancelled their appointments after she had waited for two hours because they had changed their minds. Patience and persistence proved to be essential in these situations.

### **3.8 Potential limitation**

#### **3.8.1 The research design**

A limitation of this qualitative research design is that the respondents' behaviour is not open to a precise explanation, prediction or control (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). This would have been evident in this study, although this particular approach suits the goal of the investigation, which is exploratory.

#### **3.8.2 The sampling method**

Although the size of the sample in this study does not allow for generalisations, it does encourage an in-depth exploration of sensitive personal issues pertaining to the participants' aspirations. However, the small sample size could also be a source of bias error. This was overcome by strict supervision throughout the research process. The fact that two social workers from Child Welfare participated helped to increase the representativity of the results.

The fact that the diversion workers were targeted ensured a high degree of representativity of the participants in the social work field.

#### **3.8.3 The data collection method**

In-depth interviews are time-consuming, but the face-to-face method provides the opportunity to develop the right kind of rapport to bring much-needed sensitive information to the surface. This would not have been the case if structured questionnaires had been used.

The validity of the research instrument was increased by using predominantly open-ended questions and leaving time for interviewees to contribute further information.

#### **3.8.4 Limitation to validity of findings**

Rapport building can be complicated. It involves putting the respondent at ease, so that they feel comfortable with the researcher and invest a degree of trust. However, the nature of the relationship, which in this setting was the short time spent with the participants, and the personal nature of some of the questions, could mean that this level of comfort might be beyond the researcher's reach. This might have led to the participants providing limited or false data. Alternatively, participants might also have developed a too close rapport with the researcher and therefore give responses that they felt the researcher was looking for, or that might impress the researcher (De Vos et al, 2005).

Also, tape-recording the interviews might have created self-consciousness or it might have intimidated respondents, or reduced spontaneity. As tape recorders can be a distraction, it is important to agree on its use before starting the interview, and then to place the recording device as inconspicuously as possible (De Vos et al, 2005).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

A qualitative research design with an evaluation focus was used in this study. The sampling of the targeted population, the research instruments used and the processes followed were described in this chapter, including the collection and analysis of the data.

Possible sources of error, the ethical considerations, limitations and difficulties of the study were identified too. While these factors were taken into account and steps to overcome or manage these factors were taken, they could not be completely alleviated, and thus the objectivity of the study may be compromised to some extent. The research process and the resulting amount of data show, however, that the design utilized was able to extract the required information. The data will be described and analysed in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 4

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research and discusses these findings in the light of the research done previously in this field. The first part of the chapter will detail the results collected. The framework of analysis table (Table 4.2) sets out the main themes, categories and sub-categories that arose from analysing the interviews, which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter, supported by quotations from the interviews.

### 4.2 Biographic profile

The research was conducted in three of the biggest welfare organizations in Cape Town. Sixteen social workers and two managing directors were interviewed (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Respondent Profiles**

Respondents	Organization	Age	Experience	Duration in Current job	Marital status
A1	ACVV (Mitchells Plain)	30	9 years	5	married
A2	ACVV (Mitchells Plain)	30	7 years	5	married
A3	ACVV (Mitchells Plain)	35	9 years	8	married
A4	ACVV (Maitland)	55	21 years	21	divorced
A5	ACVV (Brooklyn)	47	23 years	18	married
B1	BADISA (Elsies River)	27	5 years	5	married
B2	BADISA (Elsies River)	25	3years	3	single
B3	BADISA (Elsies River)	26	4 years	4	single
B4	BADISA (Elsies River)	43	18 years	7	married
B5	BADISA (Elsies River)	42	13 years	7	married
B6	BADISA (Bellville)	42	19years	8	married
B7	BADISA (Bellville)	50	23years	19	divorced
B8	BADISA (Bellville)	27	5years	4	married
B9	BADISA (Bellville)	47	17years	4	divorced
C1	Child Welfare (Lotus River)	33	10 years	4	married
C2	Child Welfare (Manenberg)	25	3years	3	single
CM	<b>Child welfare manager</b>	43	20years	6	single
AM	<b>ACVV manager</b>	53	25years	5	married

*NB: All the managers had originally worked as social workers in their respective organizations.*

The framework used to analyse the data gathered during the interviews is summarised in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Framework of analysis**

Themes	Categories	Sub-categories
4.3.1 Organization	4.3.1.1 Working environment	4.3.1.1.1 Workload 4.3.1.1.2 Reason for turnover
	4.2.1.2 Salary and benefits	
	4.2.1.3 Working conditions	4.2.1.1.3 Future growth 4.2.1.1.3 Job satisfaction
	4.3.1.4 Challenges and solutions	
	4.3.1.5 Communication	
4.3.2 Individual	4.3.2.1 Motivation	
	4.3.2.2 Responsibility	4.3.2.2.1 Financial situation 4.3.2.2.2 Family/dependants
	4.3.2.3 Working Experience	
	4.3.2.4 Religious/Faith	
	4.3.2.5 Age	
4.3.3 Support	4.3.3.1 Internal (organization)	4.3.3.1.1 Colleagues 4.3.3.1.2 Supervisor
	4.3.3.2 External (individual)	4.3.3.2.1 Family 4.3.3.2.2 Friends
4.3.4 Suggestion	4.3.4.1 Improvement to the organization	
4.3.5 Manager's perspective	4.3.5.1 Turnover	
	4.3.5.2 Communication	
	4.3.5.3 Summary of managers	

*\*NB: Respondents are quoted verbatim and grammatical errors have not been corrected.*

The main aim of the research was to ascertain what motivates social workers in the child welfare field to remain in their jobs in the same organization for three years or longer. The data revealed that all the social workers experienced similar problems, although their intensity or complexity differed from one organization to another and from one individual to another. However, the most important aspect of the research was to concentrate on how they managed to deal with and overcome their problems.

The findings are discussed according to the themes and categories identified. Sometimes these overlapped. The first part of the analysis highlights and acknowledges the problems faced in the social work sector, and questions revolved around their day-to-day experiences. All these problems were discussed under the theme 'Organization' (see Section 4.3.1).

The second part of the analysis aims to shed light on why some social workers have remained in their jobs in the same organization for three years or longer. The answers were drawn from individuals' experiences and were discussed under the theme 'Individual'

### **4.3 Analysis and discussion of the findings according to themes**

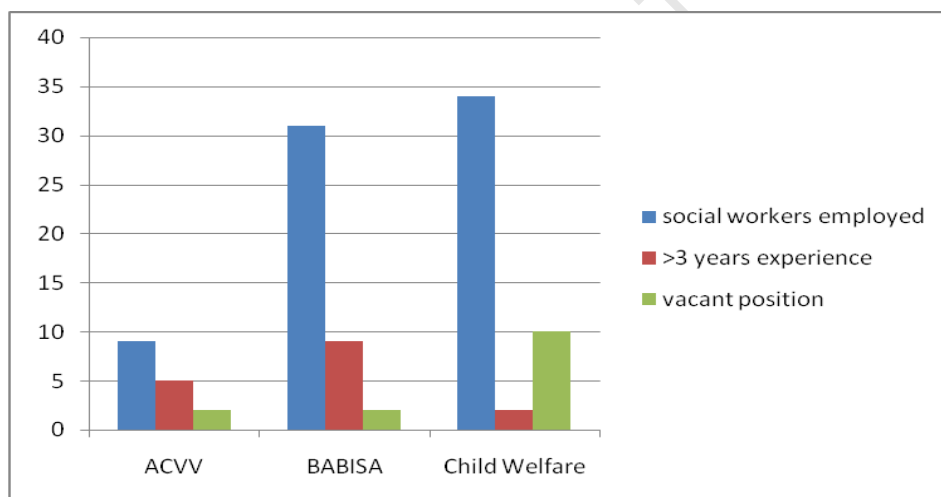
#### **4.3.1 Organization**

An organisation is defined as "an entity that enables society to pursue accomplishments that cannot be achieved by the individual acting alone" (Dahl, 2002:30). Research was carried out in three of the biggest welfare organizations in Cape Town, namely: Child Welfare, BADISA and ACVV.

When identifying possible participants in the study, the researcher discovered that very few social workers remained in their jobs for longer than three years. As a result, the study only looked at the experiences of 18 respondents. The sample was heterogeneous in race (7 whites, 8 coloureds and 1 black), ranging in age from 25 to 55 years. Even though all participants spoke English during the interviews, this was not always their first language; some participants were multilingual (Xhosa, Afrikaans and English speaking).

The retention of social workers is becoming a major concern within organizations. When comparing the number of social workers in the three organizations (see Graph 4.1 below), the researcher can see that, even though there are large numbers of social workers, very few have remained in the same job for longer than three years. For example, according to the Child Welfare website, the majority of its employees (61%) have less than five years' experience as social workers. Although Child Welfare employs 34 social workers, only two have stayed in the organisation for longer than three years. In the Cape Town Metropolitan area, BADISA, where nine social workers have stayed for longer than 3 years, appeared to have a better retention rate of social workers than ACVV (who only had five) and Child Welfare (who only had two). As a result, the majority of the workforce is relatively inexperienced

**Graph 4.1 Number of social workers in the three organizations**



*Graph 4.1 illustrate number of social workers in the three organization*

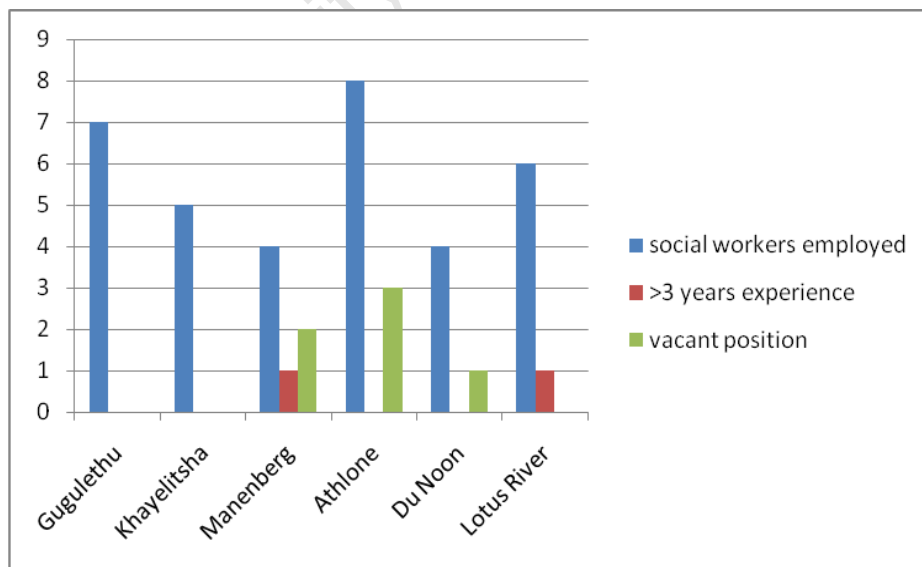
As explained, at Child Welfare offices in the Cape Town Metropolitan area, only two social workers have remained in their positions for longer than three years. It must be noted, though, that social workers in this organisation become line managers when they work there for longer than five years. This might be one of the reasons, why only two social workers with three years experience in the same job could be identified. The researcher did not interview social workers who had become line managers because the focus was on social workers in the field who were in direct service practice.

When questioning the manager about the rate of turnover in Child Welfare, it emerged that social workers changed jobs more quickly nowadays than in previous years. Social auxiliary workers, however, stayed longer than ordinary social workers did. According to the manager at Child Welfare, their rate of turnover was almost 80% per year, whereas the ACVV manager stated that their rate of turnover was 50%.

*CM: Usually ... a period has become shorter, you have your social worker that remains and you have ones that leave after 4 years, but on average that period has become six months or one year .... It's very interesting that our social auxiliary stays longer than the social workers ... they stays like until pension. So I would say the rate is about 80%.*

Child Welfare has several branches and satellite offices within the Cape Town Metropolitan area. According to the manager, there were 44 social worker posts, of which only 34 positions were filled and 10 positions were vacant. Of these 34 social workers, only 2 had stayed for longer than 3 years (see Graph 4.2 below).

**Graph 4.2: Number of social workers at Child Welfare**



Graph 4.2 illustrate the number of social workers in different branches of Child Welfare.

Of the three organisations interviewed, BADISA had the most social workers that had remained in employment for longer than 3 years. Badisa has only three branches (namely

Wynberg, Elsies River and Bellville), situated in the Cape Town Metropolitan area they employ a total number of 31 social workers, 9 of whom had been working there for longer than three years; only one position was vacant (see Graph 4.3 below).

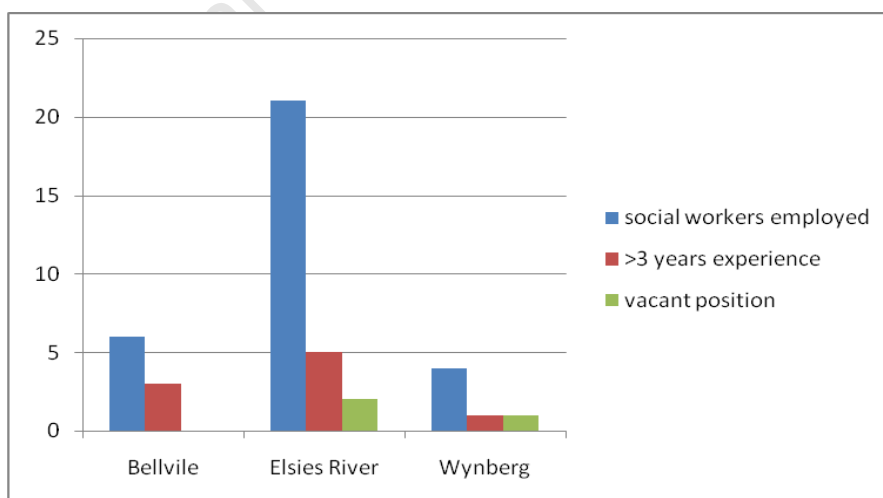
It emerged from the interviews that 9 out of 16 of the social workers interviewed had studied at Huguenot College in Wellington. Further probing revealed that this college had a good working relationship with BADISA. When the participants were asked about this connection, some indicated that BADISA recruited students at Huguenot College every year. Others emphasised that they were drawn to BADISA because it is Christian-based. Below are some of the responses:

*B3: This organization go to Huguenot College every year ... and ask for students who are about to finish their degree. And then they phone the student themselves and invite them for interviews.*

*B6: Because we are Christians, so that attracts them to us.*

*B7: Yes, they advertise together with the social development. I worked for the social development.*

**Graph 4.3 Number of social workers at BADISA**



*Graph 4.3 above illustrates the different branches of the BADISA*

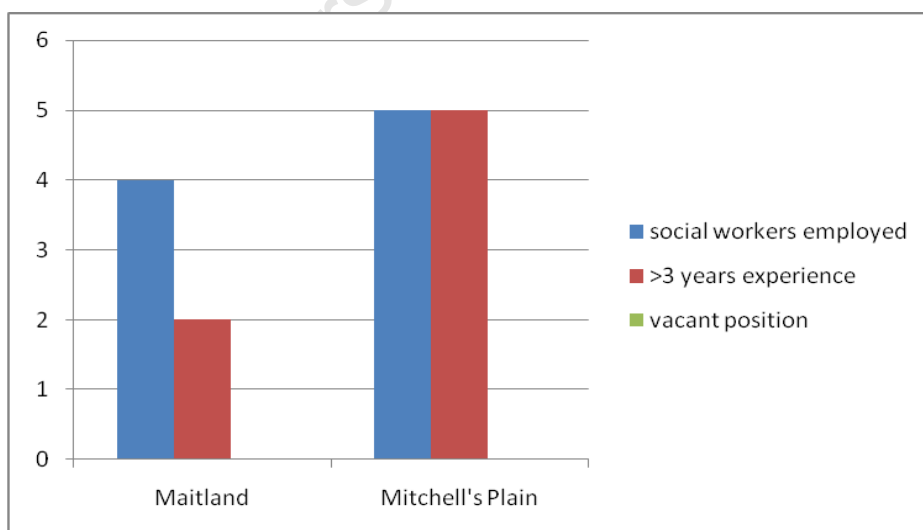
Of the 9 social workers at BADISA who fell into the relevant category, 7 had remained in their current employment for longer than three years. However, the researcher managed to interview only 5, because 2 of the social workers had declined to participate. From this small sample interviewed, the researcher found out that only 5 ACVV social workers had stayed for more for than 3 years, 9 from BADISA and 2 from Child Welfare.

BADISA and the ACVV are both Christian-based organizations and this could be one of the reasons why they have a better retention rate than Child Welfare. Social workers from these christian based organization indicated that their faith helped them to stay in their jobs because they believe its their calling and duty to give back to the community.

Findings also showed that ACVV has fewer social workers in Maitland because of a lack of funding. When questioned about the number of social workers present in the Maitland branch, one of the respondents replied:

*A5: It's a sad story; we were once seven social workers, but due to financial difficulties, we had to close some posts, so at the present moment we are only four.*

**Graph 4.4: Number of social workers at ACVV**



*Graph 4.4 illustrate the number of social workers at ACVV*

#### 4.3.1.1 Working environment

This category was divided into three sub-categories, namely: workload, reason for turnover rate, and roles and accountability. The researcher thus asked questions on how the respondents prioritised their workload, what reasons existed for the high turnover rate, how this affected them and whether they felt as if they were a part of the organization.

The researcher found that the workload was a major problem for the social workers and that this was increased by a high rate of turnover. Some of the respondents indicated that they occasionally took work home, and some indicated that they used to take work home initially, but no longer did so. On being asked how they dealt with the workload, some of the participants pointed out that they managed their workload by prioritising it according to the urgency of the crisis; others planned the work they needed to do for the day, and some just worked without a plan.

*A1: I just look at what is most important and what should be done. So I normally have a daily list of what I should do and at the end of the day, I look at what I did and what I didn't do.*

*B7: Yes! I prioritise in order of crisis, you know most of them are crises and you just have to deal with them: in this work place you can't really work with a structured time table coz something always comes up that is urgent; so you end up prioritising it.*

*B9: I am very good at planning when I am doing lots of work; and I do write my reports at home. I prioritise my work by the due date that the court made.*

*C2: I don't... these days I see myself as a fire fighter ... where the fire is I then go...*

The quotations above show that most of the social workers interviewed were experiencing heavy workloads, but that they managed to find ways of dealing with this. As found by Hansung and Stoner (2008) in their study, most organizations with high staff turnover rates experienced an increase in workload for the remaining employees. Such increased workload was partially a result of insufficient resources and because new employees were not being properly trained.

On issues of high turnover, most participants emphasised that they were aware of the reasons why some of their colleagues were leaving their jobs and that they respected these reasons. Fifteen out of the 16 respondents mentioned money as the first reason. Other factors listed were working conditions, change in life circumstances, better prospects by working for the government, high caseload, not feeling safe and lack of opportunities for growth and development. However, all these reasons were based on respondents' perceptions, as most organizations did not conduct exit interviews with employees who were leaving.

This confirms what Westbrook, Ellis and Ellet (2005) cited as the reasons for the high turnover rate in Chapter 2. Some of these aspects were covered in other sections of the interview schedules (see Appendix 1). The researcher found it very interesting that the participants mentioned money in most of their responses to the different section of the interviews. The researcher found it interesting because although they mentioned money as the main reason for social workers leaving their jobs, they (the remaining social workers) did not consider money as reason for themselves because they believed it was their calling to work as a social work. In other words they were doing God work so money became secondary.

*A3: Money first.... (laughs).... working conditions and limited resources*

*A4: Money, high caseloads and working conditions.*

*A5: Money, working conditions and limited resources.*

*B1: I think of salary.*

*B5: Money.*

*B7: Money.*

*C2: Salary, but I knew that social work is not a good paying job, but let's face it ... the economy is changing but the salary is still the same ... salary increase is unfortunately for the managers not for the staff on the ground.*

Other reasons mentioned were:

*A4: With us, a lot of people are leaving us, not because of money to other welfare organizations. I recently had a colleague who had to leave because she couldn't cope.*

*B6: High case loads, not being motivated.*

*C2: It all comes down to your personal reasons for leaving ... like my colleague, I understood that he had to leave. And I usually ask their reasons for leaving so that maybe we can retain more staff.. well, he was the only guy in Manenberg; he left because he had to support his family not that he was frustrated by the work.*

Respondents were asked to describe their working environment, for example with regard to team spirit and morale. The different responses showed that participants had adjusted to the changes, but they highlighted the fact that there was a need for improvement in terms being updated on what's going on. They also needed to be involved in decision making and do things like outings as a team. Some of the participants were happy with the way things were. These respondents' were happy with the morale and the way they interacted with each other. They felt that the managers treated them well and always included them in decision making.

Most of the respondents mentioned the problems that they were facing, but they emphasised that these problems would not ultimately affect why people left, although they did contribute.

*B1: It's more about the money like I said to you ... no matter how good it is, it won't make you stay if you are not happy with your salary.*

#### **4.3.1.2 Salary and benefits**

Although salary was mentioned as one of the reasons for high turnover rates in the discussion, the researcher discovered that salary was not the only major motivational factor, even though it normally represented the starting point for any tactical plan to retain the best employee. Respondents had mixed reactions to this matter.

Some said that they hoped for a salary improvement. Others regarded their job as a calling and so the issue of the salary was secondary. This agreed with the studies done by Alwon and Reitz (2000b) and CWLA (2001).

Research done by CWLA (2005) showed that there are different views when it comes to salary and benefits, and the role these issues play in staff turnover. This literature supports the researcher's finding because some participants cited money as the most important factor, while others cited it as secondary because they viewed their job as a calling from God.

The research that was conducted by Alwon and Reitz (2000b) in Canada identifies salaries as being secondary to overall job satisfaction and clearly less important in retention than other organizational issues. Herzberg's theory and Adam equity theory, presented in Chapter 2, showed that financial benefits do influence work attitudes and outcomes. They believe that high job satisfaction and commitment may result if flexible benefits produce a better match between an individual employee's particular needs and the benefits he/she receives. If employees feel that they are working and being rewarded at about the same as their peers then they will judge that they are treated fairly (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). This concurs with the researcher's findings, where some participants were happy with their salaries, but when they compared these with those earned by their peers from the government, they were not happy.

*B1: I am happy with my salary now ... neh. But if I see or compare my salary with the people that did the same degree as me, but are working for the government, it makes me very upset ... and very sad. Because they are getting paid twice my amount.*

One participant, who was a single mother, revealed that she had stayed longer in her position because the manager granted her flexible hours, which allowed her to fetch her children from school. This is in line with Adam's equity theory, which states that flexible working hours might motivate an employee for an example a mother even more than a pay raise would.

When the respondents were asked about their salaries and benefits, they responded as follows:

*A2: No, before I used to be very passionate and it was more than just a job, but when I started having financial problem, it just became a job ... salary matters*

*A3: No the salary is bad.*

*A5: I think usually it's more than money; it's better prospects and better working condition and maybe better resources.*

*B2: No; I am not happy with the salary; I think they can also give us a state salary.*

*B6: It's not that money is not important to me but ... this job is definitely a calling, because if it was only a job, I wouldn't be going an extra mile ah I go an extra mile because God is still using me and ah coz I could also have gone and worked for the department and earned a better salary.*

*C1: No, I don't consider my salary to be adequate.*

The above quotes show that almost all of the respondents 15 out of the 16 respondents did not consider their salaries adequate and were not happy about it. Only one said that she was happy. However, only one out of 16 said that, because she was unhappy about the salary earned, she was willing to change jobs. The other respondents 15 out of the 16 respondents were not happy about the salary, but they showed no intention of leaving their job.

*A1: I am actually leaving (we chuckle) ... For something different and better salary.*

The difference in response on the issue of salary shows that the things that matter to people differ from one individual to another, depending on their stage of life. This agrees with Herzberg's theory and Adam's equity theory. They emphasize that individuals have different needs, which become their primary motivation, and thus it is important for managers to know their employees' needs. From the interviews, the researcher could see that money was sufficiently important to some individuals so that they were willing to find another job.

On the issue of salary and benefits, the researcher discovered that some social workers prefer to work as contract workers so that they can avoid deductions on benefits. Respondent A3 stated, for instance, that she had worked for eight years as a contract worker and had avoided deductions from her salary; this gave her a better net income. This is an advantage in the short run because she will earn more money every month, but it is a disadvantage in the long term, because she will have no benefits when she resigns.

Despite acknowledging the fact that money was not the only aspect to take into consideration, most respondents still felt that social workers' dissatisfaction was largely related to money issues (Kela, 2006). In summary, then, the subject of salaries and benefits received mixed responses because all the respondents highlighted the fact that money was the reason why many people were leaving their jobs. The respondents also acknowledged that there were other reasons contributing to why people left their jobs.

When asked to discuss the issue of benefits, a few of the participants showed some interest, but the other participants showed less interest. Most participants seemed to have accepted their low salaries. This will be discussed in other categories in which money is a secondary issue.

#### **4.3.1.3 Working conditions**

This category has two sub-categories, namely: job satisfaction and future growth. The research touched on the working relationships of the participants within the organization. Questions were asked about job satisfaction, the perception of future growth and issues of orientation and training. Vinokur-Kaplan (1994) explained that it is imperative that employees are certain that their skills and areas of interests are closely linked to their job. They also need to have a degree of job mobility to ensure the quality of such fit.

The research points to lack opportunities for career growth, learning and development as leading factors influencing the issue of staff retention. Most participants did not feel that they would be promoted or that they had any opportunity for career growth because the branches in which they worked were too small. There was thus little opportunity for upward mobility. This is in line with the findings of Anderson and Gobeil (2002). In Canada, these authors found that opportunities for career growth, learning and development were prime factors

influencing staff retention. Anderson and Gobeil (2002) indicated that a lack of training opportunities on the job leaves employees feeling trapped and promotes movement outside the agency.

Respondents also reported that promotions were rare, due to flat structures and favouritism within their respective organizations. This affected some of the participants, because it added to other problems that already existed in the organization. For example, at BADISA (Elsies River), there was a major problem with favouritism and people not being treated the same. Most participants did not see any chance of promotion in their current job.

*A3: There is nothing like that here ... you work as social workers until you get out.*

*A4: No, there is no future promotion; that's what's bad about this job.*

*B4: (laughs) I don't any promotion here, maybe a salary increase.*

However, participants from ACVV (Mitchell's Plain) felt excluded and not involved in the organization's decisions. The researcher asked if the participants felt included or heard in the organization. Most participants indicated that they were involved, but few mentioned that this was not always the case. Below are some of the responses:

*A1: Well, we do have meetings like the one we just had now. My supervisor discusses issues with us, and ask us to come up with solutions. We do have meetings with the manager. One social worker can sit in and also inform them about what she does ... So, Yeah!*

*A2: No!*

*A3: Not always ... Sometimes you are involved and sometimes we hear about the changes, or we are told about the changes ... so not always!*

*A5: Yes, definitely.*

*B9: In a certain way, I do feel as part of the organization's decision-making process.*

*C2: Yes!*

Involving employees in an organization's decision-making makes them feel part of the organization, which will increase their sense of commitment and belonging. From the interviews, the research found that some of the participants felt that the organization was like a family on which they could depend because of the friendship and the support they received. This subject will be discussed further under the heading of support.

Meanwhile, Child Welfare participants complained about heavy case loads, but were excited about opportunities for career growth. At Child Welfare, if you work for five years, you become a line manager. This automatically means a better salary. The quotations below show that there is indeed room for career growth at Child Welfare

*B8: There is opportunity for you to grow.*

*C1: There is definitely room for growth.*

Brink (2007) highlighted the fact that in the social work field, career growth tends to be limited. It is evident from the quotes above that career growth varies across the organizations. For example, respondents at Child Welfare were excited about possible future prospects, but there was little hope for employees of BADISA and ACVV unless they were prepared to change jobs to other organizations.

When asked questions around job satisfaction, some participants' responses showed that they enjoyed their jobs and felt that their work gave them a sense of accomplishment. Some participants indicated that their efforts were acknowledged and recognised, whilst others thought there was a lack of acknowledgement. When asked about job description, all the respondents indicated that they were aware of what was expected of them, but when it came to task allocation, most of the respondents highlighted the fact that they were doing more than they had agreed to in their contract, largely because of high staff turnover and the fact that the work needed to be reallocated to them, thus increasing their own high workloads.

From the discussions and quotations, one can see that the participants felt that orientation helped them to settle into their jobs and they considered this a necessity. When asked what could be done, some participants were happy with the way things are, while some gave various suggestions, as seen from the quotation before. The researcher also asked participants if sending employees for training would help to retain workers. The researcher received mixed responses. Some participants felt that it would help to retain workers if they could go for training, while some thought that more money was the only way to retain workers. When asked about their views on orientation and training, these were their responses:

*A2: The orientation was very good; they showed me how to do the work.*

*B2: When I got here, I thought they could have done more ... I was disappointed.*

*B3: It was good; it prepared me; and it told me a little about the organization and ah ... about the people that are working here, and what's expected of me, what I should do and what I shouldn't do. I feel like the orientation should be a week for you to settle in and I was ... when I came into this organization, everything happened so fast ... there was a day I had orientation and on the ... two days ... like I started on a Monday and the Wednesday was my crisis day, people were phoning me.*

*B7: I feel that a person should have a week's orientation where he is going with the other social workers and getting to know the organization and knowing what you should do and what is expected of you.*

*B8: It was very good.*

#### **4.3.1.4 Challenges and overcoming challenges**

In this category, the researcher asked the participants about the challenges that they were facing every day and how they dealt with them. This gave the researcher a better understanding of the work, strengths and skills that the participants needed.

The support system (colleagues' and supervisors' guidance) was crucial in helping participants to deal with the challenges they were facing. This is in agreement with a study done by Rycraft (1994), which showed that support from one's supervisors is related to job

satisfaction. Such support influences the decisions to stay or leave the organization. Supervision was identified as being one of the main factors in retention. This suggests that agencies seeking to improve retention rates would do well to place the highest priority on the development of supervisors with the knowledge and necessary skills required to guide and support staff in carrying out their duties.

Networking was another mechanism used by participants to deal with their challenges. Other challenges ranged from scarce resources to not being treated equally and clients not showing up for their appointments. When asked how they dealt with disappointment, some participants admitted that they did not have any such mechanisms. But some stated that as long as they did their best it did not bother them, since they knew that they had done their best within their abilities. Responses varied from one individual to another. However, one could see a pattern of similar problems being faced. Below are some of the responses:

*A3: I think it's my main challenge is financial ... the money is not good ... the salary is bad ... What other choice do I have? ... I cannot just leave the job and sit at home. And how do you overcome these challenges? OK .. you should be patient. Neh ... maybe one day things will change.*

*B3: You get used to these difficult client and utilize your supervisor.*

*B9: The ... the main challenge is the lack of resources e.g. lack of placement, lack of long-term placement facilities. I manage because I net-working ... a lot.*

*C1: The biggest challenge really besides the admin and keeping up to date with what's expected with the admin state of view, I think it's the emotional aspect when it comes to moving children ... being a mother myself ... I do relate to what they are going through, and that's is challenging on an emotional level. How do you overcome these? ... I look at what is in the best interests of the child and keep on pursuing in that regard.*

*C2: The work pressure is very, very high ... the lack of workers; there is not enough manpower, social workers which means that you double up ... so the workload is*

*very, very high. And how do you overcome these challenges? ... What I have started to do is ... with my supervisor, it's an open-door policy, and we try to sit down and work on the case as much as we can do ... So basically, I utilise my support system (smiles).*

When participants were asked about the problems facing social workers in South Africa, responses included a lack of resources, money and high case loads. Participants highlighted the issue that some social workers were leaving South Africa because of the money. Other participants indicated that the government should help by offering bursaries to address the problem of the paucity of social workers. Some participants felt that if the government subsidized the salary, this would help the NGOs to retain social workers. One can see a pattern; money seems to be the first response in respect of all the questions.

Below are some of the responses:

*A1: I think us just few social workers and the money issue. I definitely think bursaries could help ... not just bursaries, but social workers are being undermined ... and people have very low opinions of social workers.*

*A2: Money... (laughs).*

*B1: Money firstly, and secondly the environment ... I think the government should pay as a way of helping out NGOs.*

*B4: High case loads...and limited resources to deal with our clients... try to work with what you have.*

Problems faced in the social work field range from not being taken seriously (for instance, being seen as an aunt with a parcel giving presents. This is in line with Adam's equity theory and Herzberg's theory. Adam's equity theory states that employees are demotivated in relation to their job and employer if inputs are greater than outputs (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). In this case, inputs include effort, hard work, commitment, skills, ability, colleague support and enthusiasm, whereas outputs will be intangible, like recognition, which they are not getting (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory's intrinsic condition also applies to this line of thought discussed above. Intrinsic

conditions include recognition, and the participants were not always getting that from the people they help and the organisation.

Although all the respondents highlighted the problems faced by social workers in the industry, they had different ways of dealing with the challenges, depending on each individual's personality. For example, one would talk about knowing oneself so that one could avoid cases that might affect their objectivity, while others mentioned what one has to do, as well as what one can do.

The respondents did not refer to external help (from the organization or from supervisors); they focused on themselves in dealing with problems. When other social workers left their employment, dealing with the caseload became a challenge to the remaining social workers, because they then had to take on additional work. As the participants often had to deal with clients who were not happy about the level of service delivery, the additional work load became even more difficult. When asked about the main challenges, they responded as follows:

*A1: I think being motivated. coz sometimes you faces this cases where you worked hard and then boom ... you think I have put so much effort ... and the results do get me down at times.*

*A1: And how do you overcome these challenges? Well, I think it's basically knowing yourself and telling yourself what your role is, and knowing that those people also have a responsibility towards themselves.*

*C1: Our clients: they expect miracles of us, but our role is to help clients help themselves ... but they expect to take all the responsibility, and they don't meet you half way.*

*C1: One need to acknowledge the problems and address them. For example, if a client wants to shift the responsibility, one needs to tell the client that it's their responsibility.*

Dealing with the public can be very challenging. Some respondents felt that people tend to have little respect for the social work profession. This lack of respect comes from people in the community and from the clients too. It was mentioned that working in negative environments makes one feel negative. Naude (2008) states that improving the career's reputation could be used as a retention strategy. Communities frequently perceive social workers negatively, which makes working conditions more difficult. The following responses show that the respondents have found a way of dealing with this and that they have made peace with this issue. The researcher asked the participants how they dealt with the general negativity around their profession:

*A1: I think social workers are undermined ... and people have very low opinions about social workers. Ah! But if you know who you are and what motivates you and you feel good about yourself and you know what you are doing coz clients always complain.*

*A2: I ask them to speak to another person in the organization if they are not happy with me.*

*B9: I try to let them understand that I understand their feelings of frustration; and I will give them a bit of time to talk about their negativity.*

*C1: At the end of the day, I treat them professionally. OK, I treat them professionally and try to ignore the false comments made, but if I was in the wrong, then I will apologize, but if I was unclear you know I would clarify the issue.*

*A2: I ask them to speak to another person in the organization if they are not happy with me.*

*B9: I try to let them understand that I understand their feelings of frustration; and I will give them a bit of time to talk about their negativity.*

After discussing the challenges that the participants were facing, the researcher asked the participants what they liked least about their organization and their job. Most of the answers were similar to the problems and complaints that they had previously highlighted. The problems differed depending on the organization. One respondent highlighted the fact that

she was concerned by the financial situation because the organization was unstable. This had affected the number of social workers hired and she felt that her job was not secure.

The quotations above highlighted problems that related to salaries, relationship and communication and working conditions. Money was mentioned in almost every section discussed. The pressure of meeting deadlines was mentioned as a further challenge because the social workers had high caseloads due to the staff turnover rate.

One respondent explained that their office conditions needed improvement, especially with regard to the lack of sanitation facilities. These had to cater for both genders. They also mentioned the unsafe working environment within the areas where they worked. However, the respondents highlighted the fact that they had accepted that these risks were associated with the profession of the social worker.

#### **4.3.1.5 Communication**

Participants indicated that they were not properly consulted; there was poor communication between managers and social workers. One respondent indicated that one of the problems was poor management skills and that social workers were not treated equally. This led to a lack of any sense of belonging. Consequently, participants expressed their discontent with the situation and it became clear that these issues could have been contributing to the high staff turnover rate.

This is in agreement with the literature, which indicates that there is strong evidence that open and caring relationships, guidance, partnerships and empowerment of staff are all important elements in retention of staff. The feeling of belonging to a community and having a solid peer support network at work reduces burnout at management and front-line levels. Too often this feeling of community is absent in agencies, where communication, support and recognition are undervalued (Anderson & Gobeil, 2002). When asked about the levels of communications in the organization, below are some of the responses.

*A2: I don't like the communication between the managers and social workers.*

*C1: I think within the organization, there is a lack of communication. So, umm ... that really hampers the progress of the agency...*

*C2: What I don't like about the job is communication; they can improve on that.*

One of the main reasons why people leave their place of employment is burnout. It is believed that stress leads to burnout. The researcher asked the participants if they had experienced stress and all the participants indicated that they had experienced stress. This question was answered with mixed emotions, some laughed first and some gave a strong “yes”, while some could not believe I was asking the question, because everyone in child welfare experiences stress.

It emerged that participants were dealing with stress in many different ways. The important aspect the researcher noted was that every participant acknowledged it and was doing something about it. Supervision and colleague support were highlighted as being one of the most helpful ways of dealing with stress and stressful cases. Some mentioned exercising, jogging or listening to music. When asked how they dealt with the stress, below are some of the answers:

*A4: Oh yes... (chuckles). I go to the gym and take long walks.*

*B3: To do things for myself and to just relax and spend some time with me. And I also like reading books and a novel or something...*

*B7: Oh yes! How do i cope with a stressful case? Smoking (laughs), but in this office there is good communication; we talk and try to support each other... so there is a good supportive system...*

*C2: Yes ... (A strong yes). To be honest, I don't have a coping mechanism. I basically move on and on. But I have supporting colleagues and a very supporting supervisor.*

To conclude the theme of organization, the researcher has highlighted the issues faced by participants at work. The participants indicated how they are dealing with the problems and challenges that they are facing. It also emerged that money was one of the most important factors, with participants expressing the wish that their salaries could be reviewed. Working environment and working conditions were also highlighted as important aspects that contribute to the retention of workers.

### **4.3.2 Individuals**

In the next part of the discussion, the researcher will focus on the individual level. The researcher will look at the factors that influence the employees to stay in their jobs, using five categories, namely: motivation, religion, age, responsibility and working experience.

#### **4.3.2.1 Motivation**

Motivation refers to the forces acting on or within an individual to initiate and direct one's behaviour (Gibson, 1995). Individuals have goals that they aim to achieve in life, and they also have needs that they seek to fulfil. These needs can be satisfied by either intrinsic or extrinsic conditions depending on the individual, as stated by Herzberg's theory (Gibson, 2000). Other factors too will influence the individual's motivation in achieving certain goals or needs. Some of these factors will emerge during the discussion.

The researcher asked participants what had motivated them to be social workers and what they liked most about their profession. Some of them grew up in a family of social workers; some had been exposed to a community in which social workers were active, and were therefore keen to give something back to the community. One participant indicated that she grew up in foster care and had realised the good work that they did there. This had motivated her to become a social worker. A few indicated that they initially wanted to do something different, but wanted to learn about social work by the time they arrived at university.

Regardless of their specific reasons for becoming social workers, all the participants highlighted the fact that they loved working with people and making a change. The researcher could sense their passion and dedication from the way they expressed themselves

through body language and gestures. The researcher could see that this was something they had really wanted to do.

Most of them were also motivated by their background as Christians, or because they had strong religious beliefs. Others indicated that they were motivated by the influence from their community and their family. The conditions in which they had grown up were their main formative influences.

As many as 12 out of the 16 respondents indicated that it was their calling (in other words, it was a calling from God to do His work). They said it was their passion to work with people and make a difference.

One respondent indicated that she grew up in a foster-care home, so she felt that she wanted to give other people the opportunity that she had received when she was growing up. Some of the other respondents highlighted the fact that their parents were foster parents, so they also wanted to do the same.

On the issue of motivation, in general, many authors and people indicated that we all have a particular driving force. This also depends on the stage in which you are in life. Not everyone seemed to like the same thing or have the same goal, but in the case of social workers, the respondents seemed to have similar goals, namely, to make a difference in other people's lives. For example, one social worker indicated that working with abused children or a child in need allowed her to give children an opportunity to live a normal life. Below are some of the responses:

*B1: Because I was a foster child...*

*B2: My parents. I think my parents, they were foster parents for years, and I think I just saw what they did, and I also like working with people.*

*B4: My love to care for other people.*

*B5: My family ... they are social workers.*

*B7: My love for people ... and I love to work with people and finding interesting things about people.*

*C2: I think it comes down to ... I don't see social work as work. I see it as a calling and it's my calling.*

*C11: I believe it's my calling ...*

Although almost all the respondents were unhappy about their salaries, they continued to do their good work. This leads to the next question that the researcher asked and discussed with the respondents. When the researcher asked the respondents what they liked most about being social workers, the researcher got a better understanding of why participants were still working when they had indicated that they are not happy with the salary.

One of the participants above emphasized that they were most driven by acknowledgement from their clients. This concurs with Adam's equity theory, which emphasizes that employees are demotivated in relation to their job and employer if inputs are greater than the output (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008). In this case, the output is was the recognition they received from clients. In the interviews, some social workers stated that they were happy when they saw results and when they had helped someone. They spoke about the feeling of accomplishment and knowing that they could make a difference. This could also explain why money was usually a secondary concern.

*A2: To help others, especially children.*

*A3: Ah ... laughs ... I have to think about it ... what I like ... (Silence) Ah ... I am just happy. Sometimes when even one client is satisfied when they say: Thank you.*

*B2: Helping people...*

*B4: (laughs)... ah ... to see that you try your best in interest ... you do your work in the best interests of the children... And to see that the families are happy.*

*B8: Inspiring people.*

*B9: To help other people to find their potential and help children to be safe and secure and to give them wings to fly.*

*C1: Umm ... silence .... (laughs)... One thing I like about being in this profession, not necessarily working with child welfare, is the diversity. The work is always changing and it's never boring; every case is different and it's like a learning curve.*

In terms of Herzberg's theory, a participant who focuses on intrinsic conditions will tend to look at the job content itself. These conditions include the feeling of achievement, increased responsibility and recognition, which had previously been highlighted by the respondents. From the discussion above, it is clear that their work seemed to fulfil these intrinsic conditions, despite the challenges facing social workers.

#### **4.3.2 2 Responsibility**

Responsibility was defined as the responsibilities faced by the participants that motivated or forced them to remain in their jobs. These responsibilities were subdivided into two subcategories, family and financial. Family responsibility meant that they had to support their dependants; ten of the participants indicated that they had children. Of these ten participants, seven were married and three were divorced. They indicated that they had to support their family financially.

Most participants emphasised the fact that they had to work and provide for their families, so that their children could have a secure future. On the issue of family responsibility, one participant indicated that she was the sole breadwinner. Other respondents highlighted the fact that because they had the responsibility of taking care of the family, they were restrained from moving from one job to another. This can be viewed as a fear of the

unknown and the risks of job insecurity, since people are being retrenched because of economic instability.

When asked about family responsibilities, these were the responses obtained:

*A3: What other choice do I have? ... I cannot just leave the job and sit at home; I have to feed my family.*

*B7: Yaah, I do have a good support system, but I am not a person who moves from one job to another quickly. I have family responsibilities.*

*C2: I think it will help, but if you come into the organization knowing what to expect, then you can survive, but if you work for two years, get married and have children, learning and developing won't do much ... maybe salary in this case, because I have a responsibility to provide for my family, so things change.*

On the issue of financial responsibility, some participants indicated that they were working because they had to pay bills. Three participants stated that they were still paying back their study loans.

*A2: Yes ... I am almost done (chuckles).*

*B2: I am still paying back monthly.*

*B7: Ah... I think in circumstances; it's more than a job, but then also I must be honest with you that I am here because of the money ... I need to pay my bills.*

*C2: Yes, I am still paying (laughs).*

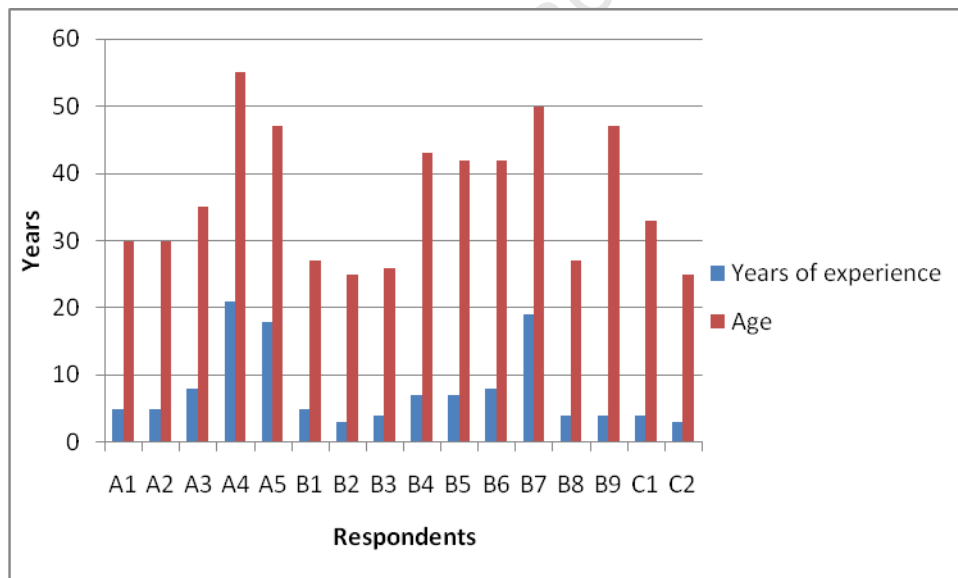
#### **4.3.2.3 Work experience**

In this category, participants were asked how they have managed to survive in the field, and how they had managed to separate work and family. Most respondents indicated that they used to take work home, but over time had managed to separate the two, so that work and

family life do not interfere with each other. They mentioned that work gets better with experience, especially when it comes to managing the workload and handling cases. B2 indicated that it was becoming easier for her to deal with cases, for example, when she was removing children from difficult family situations.

Findings showed that, for 13 out of the 16 of the respondents indicated that their work in the child welfare field had become easier over time, the longer they had been working in this field. Furthermore, the older social workers tended to stay longer in their jobs. For example, B7 is 50 years old and has stayed in her current job for 19 years, having worked as a social worker for 23 years. However, B2 is 24 years old and has only worked for 3 years, primarily to pay off her student loan. Graph 4.5 below shows the age distribution of all the respondents; it is clear that the majority are 30 years or older.

**Graph 4.5 Years in current job.**



Here are some of the responses that the researcher received pertaining to the participants’ work experience and their experiences as social workers.

*A4: I think when you are so long in a field, like myself, you learn that you leave your work at work, and when you are at home you focus on your family and also leave your problems at home. ... I think it comes with experience.*

*B6: I have worked for 8 years. I try to be positive and it is very important to me that our senior social workers stay as role models for the students; and that's why I am also a student manager. I have 8 years of experience now. I love this job; and I am positive and that keeps me going.*

#### **4.3.2.4 Religious beliefs and faith**

Most respondents who did not intend to leave their job had explained that they wanted to be a social worker because they believed that it was their calling and they were doing God's work. In other words, they got fulfilment from helping others, although they indicated that a salary increase would also be welcome. When asked how they managed to survive, respondents maintained that being a Christian helped them to accept their situation, and praying helped them in difficult times.

The quotations below show that 12 out of the 16 respondents believed that this career was their calling and that God had helped them to overcome all the obstacles in their work situation. They strongly believed that it was their faith that had kept them going. The other 4 respondents maintained that they were Christians but viewed their job just as they would any other job. One indicated that she used to believe that it was her calling, until she started having financial problems.

*A5: Yes, I am a Christian and I believe this is my calling.*

*B3: Yes ... Like God will never put something in your path that He knows you are not capable: because I believe in God and He brings us to places He thinks you can do best in.*

*B6: Yes, definitely a calling ... it is clear to me that there is a reason why I am still here and God is using me. So, that's why I am still here.*

*B7: It is my beliefs and my passion too.*

*B8: Ah, my faith is the one thing in my life that I have constantly and everything that I have, especially I my job, is not constant, there is a lot pain and hurt emotion; so my faith keeps me going and grounded.*

*C1: Yes, it's more like a calling ... I like the work that I am doing. I believe being a Christian helped me a lot in this line of work.*

*C2: It goes back to the idea that I have realised that social work is not just a job. I am there to do God's job. That's my motivation ... and the motivation is what keeps people going.*

*C2: I don't know ... I have been saying this ... only God helps me.*

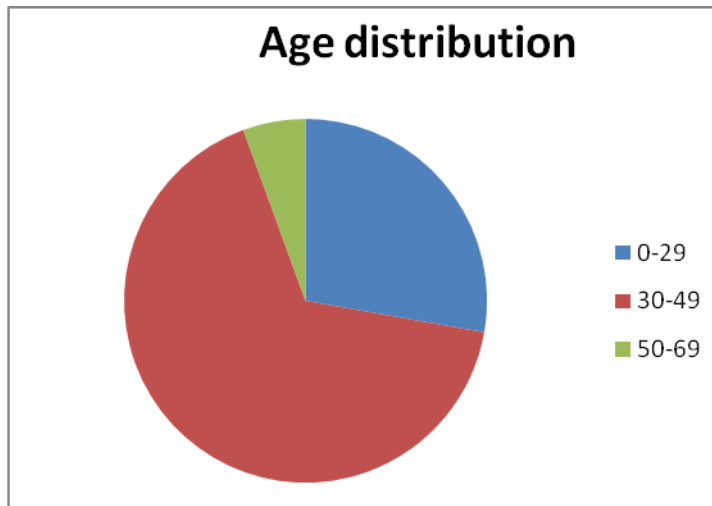
*C4: Coz when u have worked all day with sexually abused children is something that you can't shake off, but my Christianity helps a lot, I pray about these things.*

From these responses, it is evident that some respondents had a strong belief that it was their duty as a Christian to work as a social worker. Furthermore, they believe that God has put them here for a reason and that reason is being a social worker; hence, they view it as a calling.

#### **4.3.2.5 Age**

The researcher noticed that most social workers that participated were in the age range of 25-55 years old. It was found out that most social workers had stayed in the same job for an average of 8 years (see Graph 4.5). The researcher believes that when people are older, they are able to stay longer because they can budget with the income they receive and they are much wiser. This is in line with the findings of McCullough (2002) which state that older employees are less likely to quit than younger one, because they enjoy stability whilst the younger one are more likely to take risks.

**Graph 4.6 Age distribution**



*Graph 4.6 illustrates the distribution in the three organizations combined*

One of the managers explained that younger social workers tend to have high expectations; and they are used to the life style provided by their parents before they started to work. When their salary fails to meet the same standards, it results in workers jumping from one job to another.

*CM: In my opinion, I think you get social workers that are social workers at heart and they are social workers that have studied and now have seen things differently. For example, they want to stay in suburbs, have a car on a social worker's salary so that does not work well with their budget hence, the movement.*

In conclusion, then, it is evident from Table 4.1, Graph 4.5 and Graph 4.6, that the older generation tends to stay in a position longer than the younger generation who is just coming out of university. The researcher needs to take into account that not all the young social workers are necessarily “on the move”. This was reflected in the interviews, where they explained that the work they were doing constituted a service for God. Having looked at the organisations in general and at the individuals in particular, the researcher now looks at issues around support.

### 4.3.3 Support

Social support can generally be defined as the supportive interactions or exchanges of resources between people in both formal and informal relationships (Barak, Nissly & Levin, 2001). Support is seen as an important tool for survival in any situation. The researcher has divided this theme into two categories, namely, internal and external support.

#### 4.3.3.1 Internal (Organizational) Support

Internal support is generally received from colleagues and from supervisors. For instance, support was usually offered when respondents visited a colleague to talk about a difficult case or to ask for assistance and guidance.

Some respondents relied on their colleagues for support when they had personal issues that caused them distress. Some respondents received support from colleagues by being connected with resources or an external network. For example, B6 indicated that she had a resource book in which she kept a record of all her useful contact or resources that she had identified herself. These resources and connections were available to her colleagues too.

*B6: I have an envelope and log books where you can find what resource you can get. All my staff members know that they can have access to it.*

Most of the respondents depended on a co-worker for support and consulting on difficult cases. Thirteen out of the 16 respondents indicated that they had made use of their supervisors and that they saw them regularly. Some indicated that they did not have a structured timetable to see the supervisor, but they had an open-door policy. One indicated that no job opportunities had come her way; otherwise, she would have left her job, which implies that supervision support did not count for her. Only two respondents indicated that they did not receive supervision because they had been in the field for too long. All the respondents indicated that their supervisor kept them well informed and that they were happy with the supervision they were receiving.

Fifteen out of the 16 respondents indicated that the support they received from their colleagues and supervisors had helped them significantly and that it had contributed to them

remaining in their jobs. This is in agreement with some of the literature that states that the quality of direct supervision in child welfare leads to employee retention (Westbrook, Ellis & Ellet 2006). Renner, Porter and Prester (2009) found that supervisor support would increase the workers' commitment to the organisation and the likelihood of staff retention, even when other organizational and job factors are taken into account.

Naude (2008) argued that supervision might be the most important factor in retention, citing the fact that competent supportive supervision is the single most important factor in an organization. The findings indicated that social workers who remain in their jobs are more likely to report that their supervisor is supportive, approachable and willing to show appreciation and show concern for their wellbeing. This was found to apply to the respondents in this study who had no intention of leaving.

The respondents from BADISA and ACVV had structured supervision, regularly seeing their supervisors who had an open-door policy. One respondent from Child Welfare indicated that she had received structured supervision, whereas another received informal supervision in response to a heavy caseload. She regularly consulted her supervisor, although sometimes this occurred when they met in the tearoom, or when they were smoking a cigarette outside. Some of the responses are given below:

*B3: Yaah! It's a good support system at home that makes me survive more; and some of my colleagues, they always have a word of encouragement, and then I will be OK ... and I can go on again.*

*B5: I am kept well informed; and I get regular e-mails and my colleagues are very supportive.*

*B8: My main reason for being here is the support that I get from my colleagues and I have an excellent supervisor.*

*C2: Yes, I have supporting colleagues and a very supporting supervisor; what I have started to do is...with my supervisor, it's an open-door policy and we try to sit down and work on the case as much as we can do.*

#### **4.3.3.2 External (Individual) Support**

External support refers to support outside of the work environment. Fifteen of the 16 social workers indicated they received support from their family, friends and church. One indicated that she received professional help because she did not have a good support structure outside work or at home, because she was divorced and so she made use of external supervisor to ensure that she was adequately supported.

Two respondents advised that their spouses were particularly supportive because they were working in the same field. This meant that they could easily relate to them and their work situations, which helped them to cope. 14 respondents indicated that they had support from their family and church and that this helped them to unwind after a long day at work.

The following quotations are relevant in this regard:

*B5: Lots of friends, and also in my church, I am in a prayer group and am happy because they are very supportive.*

*B6: My husband, if he notices that I am stressed, he makes an effort and supports me when I get home and my husband sees that I have had a hard day, he sits with me, and talks to me and makes a cup of tea.*

*C1: I think I have an excellent support system; I have my husband and my family and my parents.*

In conclusion, support has clearly helped the respondents to cope in their jobs – and thus to remain in their jobs, although one respondent said that adequate support had nothing to do with her remaining in her job. Support was mainly received from supervisors, colleagues, family, friends and church. That is to say it qualified as external sources.

#### **4.3.4 Suggestions**

On this theme, the researcher asked the respondents what they thought could be improved to make their working environment more stress-free.

#### **4.3.4.1 Individuals**

Only three of the 18 respondents focused on themselves when asked what they would like to improve. They indicated that they would like improve their skills, specifically with regard to changes in technology, in order to become more competitive. Others said that they would like to improve their working relationships with other colleagues. One respondent suggested that social workers could be rotated in a specific area to reduce monotony.

#### **4.3.4.2 Organization**

With regard to improvements on an organisational level, all the respondents indicated that a salary increase would be the most important. Some suggested that the government should subsidise their organisations. Interestingly, the respondents from BADISA felt that favouritism should be addressed and that all social workers should be treated the same, regardless of where they worked.

Most of the respondents recommended that more social workers should be employed. They also felt that the government should give more bursaries and allocate some of their bursary holders to the NGOs. Some of the respondents from BADISA, ACVV and Child Welfare indicated that they would appreciate it if the organizations could increase and improve their office space to make them more congenial. One respondent from BADISA wished she could have more space in her office, because the filing cabinet and the desk took up all the available space. One respondent from Child Welfare indicated that she wanted her office to look decent.

Other issues raised included going on outings, so that people could bond, an increase in training opportunities, better remuneration, team-building exercises, improving orientation and getting better incentives.

Respondents from BADISA and ACVV said that communication needed to improve between supervisors and social workers. Respondents from ACVV complained that they were sometimes not told about changes and they were not involved in any of the decision-making; they thus wanted the managers to improve communication.

Below are some of the suggestions that were obtained:

*A3: Yes ... increase the salary ... communicate with us about decision-making and changes and ... coz we never know what's going on, no one tells us.*

*A4: Salaries, more social workers, but financially we could not support any more social workers, so we had to cut down.*

*B2: In this organization, I would like to improve the relationship between colleagues; and I would like to improve my knowledge; and I think that the supervisor should see what's going on here ... and they must do activities and put us together in a group, so that they can see us getting along, so that we can start to work on the negative stuff.*

*C1: Certainly, it will be the communication with child welfare, I believe we need to employ more workers we also need to address the matter of salaries and try to increase staff members' salaries.*

*C2: I would say fixing up and making our working environment safer for the staff to work in and more decent: and the supervisor and managers should show a little bit of interest and support.*

In conclusion, all the respondents thought the organization should increase their salaries with some help from the government. Only three respondents focused on the things they could do to improve their own situation.

#### **4.3.5 Manager's Perceptions**

The following discussion focuses on the managers' perception on why social workers were leaving and what they thought could be done.

##### **4.3.5.1 Turnover**

CM indicated that her perception was that high turnover rates were caused primarily by low salaries. She deduced that low salaries were the primary reason for leaving, because she had not heard of anyone leaving and taking on the same type of job at the same salary. As a

second cause, she identified high work pressures. She acknowledged that child protection services were a particularly difficult area, mainly because it was emotionally stressful, but also because of the pressure of managing high caseloads.

She added that staff turnover had a direct impact on the remaining social workers, because it took a long time to replace them, which meant that the remaining social workers had to take on additional work. She sometimes conducted exit interviews with her social workers before they left for another job, but found that she could not help much because their organization has no money to increase the salaries.

Like CM, AM too identified money as the main reason for the high turnover rate, because most social workers compared their salaries with the salaries of social workers who worked for the government. She added, *“It’s just that young social workers still have their study loans to pay off and cars to buy so that the issue of money plays a role.”* She had noted that older social workers that were married usually did not show any intention of leaving because they had someone to support them. This finding concurs with McCullough (2002) who reported that older employees were less likely to quit than younger employees, because the former prefer stability whilst the latter are more likely to take risks.

#### **4.3.5.2 Communication**

CM felt that communication in her organization was good, arguing that she had an open-door policy. CM highlighted the fact that all social workers met with their supervisor regularly and in this way, she had improved communication by means of direct contact with her employees through e-mails and through telephonic conversations.

AM too said that her communication was good, because she had an open-door policy and she closely supervised her social workers, so she was aware of what was going on in her organization. She mentioned that she was always available on her cell phone.

#### **4.3.5.3 Summary**

Both managers seemed to have an open-door policy and a clear communication channel, although respondents from Mitchell’s Plain ACVV branch indicated that communication was

very poor between social workers and the lower managers. They complained of not being consulted.

Both managers admitted that low salaries were the main problem but they could not do much to improve these, because their organizations simply did not have enough funding. They both stated that their main challenge was retaining social workers. It was also tedious to invest time in teaching social workers and settling them in, only to have them leave before the year's end.

When asked what they were doing to retain their workers, both managers indicated that they offered support and worked on making the working environment more agreeable. An interesting observation was that the ACVV manager believed that team-building and outside supervision could help in retaining social workers. The Child Welfare manager did not think much could be done, besides increasing salaries. For her it was normal to have a high turnover of staff because she believed that people needed change. CM felt, in contrast, that the government should provide bursaries for social workers who work for NGOs when they have finished their studies.

Both managers indicated that they were not always aware of the workers' intentions. CM emphasised the point that she was disappointed with the new system because people never called for references. AM indicated she saw turnover as an advantage at times, because new employees tended to have new ideas and energy.

In conclusion, the researcher could see that both managers conducted interviews to try to make the conditions more favourable, although they were unable to address the issue of money because of a lack of funding. Both managers believed that the social workers that remained did so because they were focused and were very positive. Both seemed to understand the reasons for the high rate of turnover.

## **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research findings were discussed. This was done by summarising the framework of the analysis, giving a profile of the respondents and discussing the findings. The final chapter will contain the main conclusions and the recommendations of the study

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# **CHAPTER 5**

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter of the dissertation, the main conclusions of the research, as well as the respondents and researchers' recommendations will be presented. The recommendations will be made to the DSD and organizations working in the child welfare field, as well as for future research in this field.

### **5.2 Conclusion**

This conclusion uses the themes that were discussed in Chapter 4.

#### **5.2.1 Organization**

The findings show that the three organizations had high turnover rates and low retention rates. Very few social workers stayed for longer than three years. BADISA had more social workers remaining in their job longer than ACVV and Child Welfare social workers. Furthermore, both BADISA and ACVV had higher retention rates than Child Welfare, because they were based on Christian values.

BADISA was at an advantage when it came to hiring new staff because they regularly recruited new social workers from Huguenot College. The manager from Child Welfare reported that the rate of turnover had increased and that the retention rate had decreased because most of the social workers stayed in their jobs for less than a year.

##### **5.2.1.1 Working environment**

It is evident from the findings that managing the workload was a challenge for many of the respondents. All dealt with this challenge in different ways: some planned their days, whereas others dealt with the work in terms of priorities and others tackled crises as they happened and one respondent described it as 'fighting fires'.

Most of the respondents identified money and low salaries as the primary reason why social workers leave their jobs. Other factors were working conditions; changes in life circumstances, better prospects by going to work for the government; high caseloads; not feeling safe and a lack of opportunities for growth and development.

Those who stayed were generally older, more experienced social workers; a few younger social workers indicated that they stayed because they were still paying off their student loans.

#### **5.2.1.2 Salaries**

All the respondents indicated that their salary was the main reason why social workers were leaving their jobs. Fourteen out of the 16 respondents were not happy with their salary, but showed no intention of leaving their job. Only one respondent indicated that she was indeed leaving, while another one had the intention to leave but had not finalised arrangements yet.

#### **5.2.1.3 Working conditions**

Most of the participants realised that there were no opportunities for promotions or for developing their careers, because the branches in which they worked were too small. Most respondents indicated that there was little opportunity for upward mobility. Promotions were rare due to flat structures and favouritism within their organizations. This particularly affected some of the participants because it added to other problems already existing in the organization.

#### **5.2.1.4 Communication**

Most respondents indicated that communication needed to be improved within their three organizations. The ACVV respondents seemed to feel most strongly that communication should be improved because they were usually not informed about changes and this strained the relationships between them and the managers.

#### **5.2.1.5 Challenges and overcoming challenges**

The main challenges mentioned by the respondents were limited resources, high caseloads, low salaries and pressure from deadlines because of high caseloads. Most found ways of

working around these problems, for instance, by networking with other resources, getting support from colleagues and seeking help from their supervisor.

## **5.2.2 Individual issues**

### **5.2.2.1 Motivation**

Some of the participants were motivated to become social workers because they had grown up in a family of social workers, while others had been exposed to a community where social workers were common. Therefore, they had always wanted to give something back to the community.

Twelve of the sixteen respondents felt they had been called to do God's work. They also loved working with people and making the necessary changes and improvements to other people's lives. Adam's equity theory states that a highly motivated employee is one who perceives his rewards to be equal to his contributions (Siegel, Schraeder & Morrison, 2008).

### **5.2.2.2 Responsibility**

Financial responsibility played an important part in the retention of social workers. Most needed to provide for their families, and some were still paying off their student loans.

### **5.2.2.3 Work Experience**

All the respondents indicated that the work became easier to manage with experience. Over time, they became better at managing their caseload. This is in line with the findings of McCollough (2002) who indicated that, the longer an employee stays; the less likely he or she would want to leave. He also stated that mature employees like stability. Work experience and age are thus significant factors in the retention of social workers.

### **5.2.2.4 Religious Reasons**

Religion played a significant role in the retention of social workers, as some of the respondents believed strongly that it was their purpose to work as a social worker. Furthermore, they believed that God had put them on earth for a reason and they thus viewed it as a calling.

### **5.2.2.5 Support**

The findings showed that 15 out of the 16 respondents indicated that support from family; friends, supervisors and colleagues had helped them to survive in their jobs. Support seemed to be one of the main reasons why respondents had remained in their jobs for longer than three years.

### **5.2.3 Perceptions of managers**

Both managers interviewed in the study seemed to have an open-door policy, and both acknowledged that low salaries were the main problem. Sadly, they could not do much about this, because their organizations did not have enough funding for them to increase the salaries. They were aware that their main challenge was retaining social workers and said that it was tedious to invest time in teaching social workers and settling them in only to have them leave before the end of the year.

Both managers believed that the social workers, who remained, did so because they were focused and very positive. They further emphasised the fact that they provided good support to their employees.

## **5.3. Recommendations**

### **5.3.1 Organization**

Salary increases and benefits are two of the things that the organizations need to work on if they wish to retain workers. One of the respondents suggested that NGOs should employ someone to raise funds for salaries. Kaye and Jordan-Evans (1999) cited that salaries and benefits are the most common reason why employees remain in their jobs. It is very clear from this study that NGOs need to offer competitive salaries and better remuneration packages.

Secondly, NGOs need to work on providing pleasant working environments. For example, respondents from BADISA indicated that they needed more office space. The ACVV (Mitchell's Plain) indicated that they shared office space and that it would make their work

easier to have their own office. The respondents from Child Welfare indicated that improving offices and sanitary facilities would make their life easier and more enjoyable, considering that they spent most of their days at work.

Thirdly, the heavy workload needs to be addressed. The best solution is to employ more social workers, which ties in with employing a fundraiser to raise funds to enable organisations to hire more staff. NGOs should also encourage social workers to rotate in order to avoid the monotony of dealing with the same clients and facing tedious work routines.

Fourthly, training opportunities must be provided for social workers, so that they can become more familiar with new technologies. For example, all the organizations had some mature social workers. Sending them on a course would make them more efficient in this fast-growing global technological world, by teaching them how to use computer and new software, which can make filing much simpler. The organization could contribute towards the training, as some respondents said that they could not afford to attend such courses on their salary. Such staff development is a major retention strategy (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 1999). Managers need to make the most of every opportunity to develop their staff. For smaller branches, there may be fewer advanced positions or promotions available, so special benefits tailored to the individual may be more meaningful at such levels.

Fifthly, a greater emphasis on team building is encouraged, as most respondents stated that they would appreciate outings for the purpose of bonding and strengthening relationships. Regular team building would also improve relationships between managers and social workers, as well as ensuring that managers are in touch with the welfare of their workers and able to discern when they are unhappy and require assistance or intervention.

Sixthly, regular meetings between managers and social workers are vital for improving communication. The use of e-mails to update the social workers on any changes in the organization would keep them informed and give them a greater involvement in decision-making.

A seventh recommendation is that social workers be encouraged to make use of their support system, such as regular supervision from their supervisors. It is important to build good working relationships with colleagues because they can help with difficult cases.

Lastly, networking and building relationships with other organization are also important factors. For example, the three organizations can form a forum and meet every month to network and to get to know about useful resources in other areas. Attending these meetings could help social workers to build relationships with other organizations

### **5.3.2 Government**

Firstly, external supervision is recommended for social workers. This will create a space where they can express themselves freely, without feeling judged or having any fears for their job security.

Secondly, NGOs and organizations need to develop a supportive organizational climate by building a working partnership in the larger community to improve the community's perception of social workers. A supportive organizational climate fosters respect for individual staff, as well as for the client who receives the service. In the light of the day-to-day challenges and decisions that social workers face, staff members need the assurance that their organization will support them.

Thirdly, the government should help NGOs by subsidising the social workers' salaries. They should also subsidise more posts and programmes where necessary.

Fourthly, more opportunities for promotion are needed; these should be based on work excellence, rather than on age and experience. NGOs and government should investigate other forms of movement for social workers, considering the subsidisation difficulties. The government should address the difficulties in this regard (Naude, 2008).

Fifthly, government and NGOs need to form a partnership to encourage the retention of social workers, in order to avoid competition for scarce resources and skills.

Lastly, the government should encourage social workers working overseas to come back to South Africa, thus reducing the shortage of skilled and experienced social workers in the country.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the main conclusions of the research, together with the researcher's recommendations, were presented. Recommendations were made to the DSD and to the social workers and NGOs.

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# APPENDIX 1

## Interview schedule

My name is Belinda. I am a Masters student at the University of Cape Town. I am studying Social Work and am doing my last year in Social Policy and Management. I am doing some research on *What motivates social workers in child welfare to stay in their field for longer than three years?* I found that many people look at high turnover in social work but they never look at what makes people stay longer in their jobs. I want to find out what is it that you are doing right.

On issues of confidentiality, please note that your name will not be revealed; your responses will be analyzed together with other responses, and the main conclusions and recommendations will be forwarded to the various participants and their organization. If I say something that you are not comfortable with answering, you should let me know and we can skip the questions.

### *Section A: Personal information*

Would you like to provide a name or nick name?

Gender:

How old are you?

Marital status

Are you religious?

Language group?

Number of dependents?

Name of organization:

What college/university did you attend and when?

Level of education (diploma/degree)?

Did you get financial assistance towards the degree or did you fund your own studies?

### *Section B: Personal Profile*

Is this your first job? If No, have you worked somewhere else?

Why did you leave your previous job?

How long have you been working in the field of child welfare?

Why did you choose to work with kids? (Is it something that you always wanted to do?)

If you had an option, would you go into another field or study something else?

How good is your support system outside the working environment?

How do you maintain a reasonable balance between family life and work?

Do you take your work home?

Does your work interfere with your personal life?

Do you sometimes identify with cases you work with? If yes, how do you deal with it?

Do you experience stress in this line of work?

What do you do to cope with stressful cases?

What motivated you to be a social worker?

How do you find working in the child welfare field?

What is it that you like most about being a social worker?

What are the main challenges that you face as a social worker in the child welfare field?

Do you think your faith/religious belief has played an important part in you being able to sustain your job in the organization?

And how do you overcome these challenges?

What is it that you do that makes you survive in this organization for three years or longer?

Is it because you have a good support system at home?

Or because you utilize the support system you have at work, like seeing your supervisor regularly?

Is it something you grew up around and felt that the community needed to address?

Do you see this job as more than a job, more like a calling?

### *Section C: Organization*

How many social workers do you have in your organization?

Do you understand your organizational goals and structure?

Do you feel that your organization is accessible to the population it aims to serve?

Do you feel that your organization is making a contribution to the community?

Do you feel part of your organization's decision-making process?

What are your organization's communications channels like?

Does your organization support other programs that are not directly linked to social work, for example, sports?

Are you concerned about your organization's financial situation?

*Section D: Current job*

Did your social work education include sufficient training in child welfare for you to perform your job properly?

How do you feel about the training and orientation training you experienced when you started your current job in this organization?

Do you feel that orientation helped you to settle into your job?

How would you change things in the orientation program?

Do you have an updated and clearly formulated written job description?

Do you feel that the tasks allocated to you are within the contents of your job description?

Do you have control over the work and decisions you make?

Do you work flexi time or office hours?

Do you consider your salary to be adequate, given the demands?

What benefits are you entitled to in your organization?

How would you describe the career prospects in your organization?

How would you describe the training opportunities for social workers at your organization?

How would you describe the supervision you are receiving?

Does your superior support you in your job?

Do you receive regular feedback on your work performance?

Does your supervisor keep you well informed about what is going on in the organization?

How can you describe the team spirit in your working environment?

How satisfied are you with the morale of the people you work with?

Do you feel that your work gives you a personal feeling of accomplishment?

Do you feel that you receive appropriate recognition for your contribution?

How do you juggle the demands of court cases and your workload?

How do you prioritize your workload?

Do you often experience conflict between you and your supervisor over cases?

What do you like least about your job and/or the company? Please explain.

What are the things you would like to improve?

*Section E: Consequences of high turnover*

Many people leave and change their jobs in the social work field; what do you think are the reasons for the high rate of turnover in social work, besides money?

If you could rank three of the main reasons of turnover, which one would be at the top?

Could you explain your answer?

To what extent does remuneration (in terms of money) contribute towards employee turnover?

What is the impact of turnover on the remaining social workers?

Does the coming and going of other workers affect your work?

Do you feel that, if the organization provides learning and development opportunities, it would help in retaining employees?

Are you sometimes aware about other employees' intention to leave?

If yes, how do you respond to their intention to leave?

Do you feel that the company could have done more to retain workers?

What do you think, in your opinion, can be done to reduce the high rate of turnover?

#### *Section F: Service delivery*

How does turnover affect the quality of service that you can deliver?

How do you deal with the negative feedback (media/clients) about you as a social worker not doing much?

#### *Section G: General Question*

What do you think is the major problem affecting South African social workers?

What are the main challenges that you face as a social worker in the social work industry?

And how do you overcome these challenges?

You mentioned that you worked for \_\_\_ years; what is it that you do that has helped you to survive? What is your secret that we can share with the newcomers in the field?

*Thank you for participating in this research*

## APPENDIX 2

### Letter of entry

Dear Sir or Madam

Ref: Masters Research and Interview sessions

I am writing in reference to the above. I have spoken with you telephonically before, and was asked to put my request in writing. I am a Masters student in Social Policy and Management at the University of Cape Town. I am doing my thesis on what motivates social workers in child welfare to remain in their field for longer than three years.

I would like to set up interview sessions with your staff. Specifically, I would like to interview five random staff members who have been employed in the field of child welfare for three years or longer. The interviews will take an hour or less, depending on the participant. They can be held at any time that is convenient to you, including on weekends.

I would also like to interview a social worker in a managerial position to find out their views on the matter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 078 650 9938, should you have further questions regarding the above. All informants will be treated as confidential, and I will be happy to give you the copy of my final report.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Belinda Mugwagwa