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FACTORS THAT AFFECT SOCIAL WORKERS' JOB SATISFACTION, STRESS AND BURNOUT

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Abstract

Social work was classified as a scarce skill and the retention of social workers is an important aspect that needs urgent attention. The research goal of this study was to determine what degree of work engagement and job satisfaction South African social workers experience in their current positions and how this influences job turnover, burnout and the intention to leave the profession. The purpose was to determine the needs social workers experience that will affect turnover in the profession. The needs/problems social workers experienced were stress, burnout, lower job satisfaction and work engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

The social work profession in South Africa has experienced a critical decrease of social workers. The retention of social workers is challenging not only for South Africa, but also for many different countries as described in studies conducted in the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Vermeulen, 2008:1). South Africa has also experienced a drastic shortage of social workers, which has affected many social welfare organisations. Not only has this contributed to high case loads, but it has also lowered the visible means of support that social workers provide in the community, with regard to families as well as foster Care. According to the report by the Department of Social Development (2009:2), the shortage of social workers further contributes to a lack of capacity to implement policies and programmes that deal with social issues such as substance abuse, HIV and AIDS, chronic poverty, food insecurity and other related social conditions.

According to Adlem (2007:5), many reasons contribute to the high turnover of social workers. These include poor working conditions, poor compensation for work, lack of resources and support, and increased demands for services. Hence social workers are experiencing work stress, burnout, decreasing job satisfaction and a lack of positive work engagement.

The approach followed in this study was of an empowerment nature, as empowerment has become an increasingly important factor in determining employee health and wellbeing (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005:439). According to Durand (2008:36), empowerment in the workplace has two meanings. Firstly, it refers to the practice or set of practices involving the delegation of responsibility down the hierarchical structure of the organisation, resulting in increased decision-making authority for employees in respect of the execution of their primary tasks. The second meaning of empowerment refers to psychological empowerment and to feelings of empowerment as reflected in the competence/confidence in employees' abilities to perform a task well, to experience impact or influence in their jobs, to perceive self-determination and a sense of meaning.

The objective of the study was to determine (through a self-constructed questionnaire) what degree of work engagement and job satisfaction South African social workers in the North-West province experience in their current positions and how this influences job turnover, burnout and the intention to leave the profession.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a serious shortage of social workers caused by the exodus from the profession at an alarming rate and the resultant classification of social work as a "scarce skill". This has the obvious implication that the current demand for social workers within South Africa is not being met in terms of the numbers of social workers currently practising

within the country (Department of Social Development, 2009:2). This impacts negatively on the social work aims of enhancing the social functioning and wellbeing of individuals within society through empowerment, and promoting social change and problem solving within human relationships (Janse van Rensburg, 2009:14; National Association of Social Workers, 2014:1).

The challenges that organisations face in recruiting and retaining competent social workers continually confront practitioners and researchers. So why are they leaving? Why is it so difficult to retain and recruit social workers? Whitaker, Weismiller and Clark (2006:24) listed the experiences of social workers as involving “increases in paperwork, severity of client problems, caseload size, waiting lists for services, assignment of non-social work tasks, level of oversight, coordination with community agencies, and availability of professional training.” Most of these increases in the work load of social workers can be characterised as challenges to effective practice. According to Whitaker *et al.* (2006:24), social workers also report that they experienced decreases in job security, staffing levels (both social worker and other), availability of supervision and, most of all, the levels of reimbursement. Occupational stress can be caused by factors in the internal environment (individual), by the external environment (work/environment) or by the nature of the work (Van Wyk, 2011:6). High turnover rates in social work agencies are, firstly, a major obstacle to timely investigations, compromising the ability of agencies to protect children; secondly, they contribute to the negative consequences of lower social work numbers in relation to the escalating need for the services they provide to other sectors of the community (Earle, 2008:6). Weaver *et al.* (2006:v) point out that the retention of social workers is an immediate and pressing professional and practical concern.

Strolin, McCarthey and Caringi (2007:4) categorise the causes for turnover according to three areas: individual factors, supervisory factors and organisational factors. Individual factors can be defined as causes of turnover that stem from individual worker characteristics such as educational background, professional commitment and demographics. Organisational factors are those causes of turnover that stem from the organisation such as caseload size, job satisfaction, organisational climate and culture, salary, benefits, promotional opportunities and administrative burdens. Strolin *et al.* (2007:12) further relate that organisational factors such as autonomy, influence over decisions affecting the job, flexibility, caseload size, supervision and professional development opportunities influence social workers’ job satisfaction over time. Supervisory factors are defined as the causes of turnover that stem from insufficient supervisor support and competence.

There appears to be a definite link between retention/turnover and positive engagement of social workers and burnout, stress and job satisfaction. Strolin *et al.* (2007:5) state that turnover in child welfare and other human services may be attributed to burnout. Eborall and Garmeson (2001:8) maintain that the stressful and demanding nature of the work and the conflicts created by time pressures are contributing factors taxing the personal and professional coping strategies of social workers and could lead to staff turnover.

In summary, it appears that burnout, stress, work engagement, turnover and job satisfaction are the five aspects which are mostly focused on in relation to the retention of social workers for the profession. This study therefore proposes to examine the following research questions: What degree of work engagement and job satisfaction do South African social workers experience in the North-West province? How does work engagement and job satisfaction affect social workers' job turnover rate, their level of burnout and their intention to leave the profession?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The general aim of this study was to reclaim positive work engagement for social workers in the North-West province through an empowerment programme addressing the issues contributing to low job satisfaction, burnout and job turnover of social workers. The objectives of this research are to determine what degree of work engagement and job satisfaction South African social workers experience in their current positions and how this influences job turnover, burnout and the intention to leave the profession.

Babbie (2010:117-118) and Mouton (2001:55) and state that a research design refers to a plan or blueprint of the way a researcher intends to conduct the research. Fouché and De Vos (2011:142-143) explain that a research design is a guideline according to which we determine the data-collection methods. A quantitative research design within the intervention research model was used in this section of the article. The quantitative method often employs measuring instruments. Measurement instruments also refer to questionnaires and scales (Delpont & Roestenburg, 2011:171). De Vos and Strydom (2011:475) define the intervention research model as studies carried out with the aim of "conceiving, creating, and testing innovative human service approaches to preventing or minimizing problems or to maintain the quality of life".

The first phase (Problem analysis and project planning) and second phase (Information gathering and synthesis) of Rothman and Thomas' six-phase Design and Development model (DandD) were utilised for the purposes of this article (1994:9).

TABLE 1
THE INTERVENTION RESEARCH: MODEL

Phase 1	Problem analysis and project planning
Phase 2	Information gathering and synthesis
Phase 3	Design
Phase 4:	Early development and pilot testing
Phase 5:	Evaluation and advanced development
Phase 6	Dissemination

Adapted from Rothman and Thomas (1994:28)

During this needs assessment the quantitative method used was a self-developed questionnaire containing closed-ended questions. The focus of the questionnaire was job satisfaction of the social workers in practice as well as their stress and burnout levels. The first part of the questionnaire, Section A, was based on biographical information. The second part, Section B, contained closed questions. A Likert rating scale was used for these closed-ended questions. The third part, Section C, consisted of open as well as closed-ended questions.

The Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus analysed the data quantitatively. Fouché and Bartley (2011:249) point out that professional research can be analysed manually or by computer. Data were sorted to reflect the most interesting views, arranged into topics, and data belonging to each separate category were correspondingly clustered together in one group according to themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:153-155; Schurink *et al.*, 2011:402).

To select the respondents exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was used, as this method is a non-probability sampling technique used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate (Castillo, 2009:1). Researchers use this sampling method if the sample for the study is limited to a very small subgroup of the population. The North-West province is a vast and extended area and the research covered most of the area stretching from Potchefstroom up to Mahikeng and Christiana. For this reason the snowball sampling method was the preferred choice in order to reach more subjects. This type of sampling technique works like chain referrals. After observing the initial subject, the researcher asks for assistance from the subject to help identify people with a similar trait or interest (Castillo, 2009:1).

By means of this method, ninety questionnaires were distributed to social workers from the North-West province who were practising social workers. Sixty Questionnaires were received back. Social workers from the following institutions in the North-West province were approached: NG Welsyn, Child Welfare, South African Women's Federation (SAVF), Correctional Services, South African Police Force, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Health, "Ondersteuningsraad", the Department of Defence, the Department of Education, Child Line, North-West University and SANPARK. The focus of the questionnaires was job satisfaction levels of the social workers in practice as well as their stress and burnout levels.

This study also complied with the ethical standards as set out by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) by taking into account ethical issues, like anonymity and confidentiality, privacy and informed consent

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Romk & Bakker, 2002:74). When individuals feel engaged at work, a series of benefits tend to ensue: one of which is that turnover of employees is reduced. Individuals who are engaged in their work are typically very energetic, dedicated, and absorbed at work, primarily because they enjoy their role, which ultimately tends to improve their wellbeing (Moss, 2009:1).

Job satisfaction is simply how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs. It is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs (Spector, 1997:2). It can affect absenteeism and staff turnover and overall wellbeing, work productivity and work effort (Cabrita & Perista, 2007:2; Syptak, Marsland & Ulmer, 1999:26).

Stress is the result of “an imbalance between the level of demand placed on people, as they perceive it, and their perceived capability to meet the demands” (Selye, 1956:15). Work stress, job stress and occupational stress are often used interchangeably and linked to job turnover (Dollard, Winefield & Winefield, 2003:5). Stress can be defined as the state or condition that develops when energy is required to meet the physical, social, psychological and emotional demands of one’s environment (Dewe, 1987:490; Verwey, 1996:102-107). When applying this into the workplace, it can be described as occupational stress, as it is “subject to the rigours of the role as social worker” (Clegg, 2001:102).

Burnout, according to Van Zyl-Edeling and Pretorius (2005:168), can be defined as “the exhaustion or breakdown phase after long-term or intense stress, when the body’s reserves are depleted and physical or emotional breakdown happens ... especially if [people] work in taxing areas involving violence, abuse, and serious illness. However, even the strongest, most experienced, best-trained, and most positive person has a limit to her capacity to deal with stress and could burn out unless protective measures are put in place”. Burnout is an important variable affecting engagement as well as job turnover (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010:90; Halbesleben, 2010:102; Leiter & Maslach, 2005:2).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Ninety (90) social workers from the North-West province of South Africa were involved in this study. Sixty (60) Questionnaires were hand-delivered back from social workers currently in practice (thus a response rate of 67%).

The biographical data in **Section A** indicate that the average respondent was a female between the ages of 30 and 40 years, working mainly with children, families and adults. They had an average of 11.5 years of work experience. Maslach *et al.* (2001:57) indicate from their studies that variables of age, gender, marital status and educational level do not influence (moderate) the relationship between job burnout and organisational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to leave.

Section B consisted of 39 self-developed closed-ended questions on what affects work engagement, job satisfaction and burnout of social workers. Table 2 indicates the results of section B in relation to the respondents’ burnout, positive engagement and job satisfaction. All 60 respondents filled in the questionnaire but not all of them filled in all the questions. Only 15 questions at the higher and lower end of the continuum, and those the researcher felt had specific relevance to the study, were analysed.

The impact of being valued and appreciated at work (F=55, N=60)

Factors positively associated with projected long-term tenure in the social work field revolve around the issues of being valued, feeling safe and being treated fairly (Fitts, 2006:ii). In this study 16 (26.7%) of the respondents felt valued and appreciated less than 40% of the time, while 39 (65%) felt they were appreciated and valued more than 60% of the time. Five (8.3%) respondents did not answer the question. In this case it seems that more than half of the social workers in North-West province felt valued and appreciated, while nearly 27% felt appreciated less than 40% of the time. Being valued, receiving praise and positive feedback are important aspects of job satisfaction (Collins, 2008:1181).

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

No	Question	F	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Less than 20% of the time	Less than 40% of the time	60% or more of the time	80% or more of the time	100% or more of the time	Did not answer
qb4	I feel valued at work	55	1	5	3.02	1.13	16 (26,7%)		39 (64%)			5 (8.3%)
qb5	I feel appreciated at work	55	1	5	2.95	1.11	16 (26,7%)		39 (64%)			5 (8.3%)
qb6	I feel involved in decisions that affect our organisational community	55	1	5	2.76	1.10	22 (36.75%)		33 (55%)			5 (8.3%)
qb7	Creativity/innovation is supported in our organisation	55	1	5	2.96	1.22	23 (38.3%)		32 (53.3%)			5 (8.3%)
qb8	I have the resources I need in order to do my work	56	1	5	3.11	1.07	14 (23.3%)		42 (70%)			4 (6.7%)
qb10	I am satisfied with my salary	56	1	5	2.84	1.12	20 (33.3%)		36 (60%)			4 (6.7%)
qb11	I am satisfied with my benefits	56	1	5	2.80	1.05	20 (33.3%)		36 (60%)			4 (6.7%)
qb12	I am satisfied with the connection between pay and performance	56	1	5	2.66	1.03	21(35%)	11(18.3%)	22 (36.7%)			6 (10%)
qb14	Have you recently (within the last six months) experience reduced work performance	56	1	5	2.29	1.14	19(31.7%)		23 (38.3%)			4 (6.7%)
qb16	I get the opportunity to attend job related seminars or continued education on practice issues	56	1	5	2.93	1.28	21 (35%)		35 (58.3%)			4 (6.7%)
qb18	I want to leave my current job as a social worker	55	1	5	2.42	1.42	22 (36.7%)	8 (13.3%)	11(18.3%)	8 (13.3%)	6 (10%)	5 (8.3%)
qb20	I am satisfied with my work load in general	55	1	5	2.91	1.19	23 (28.3%)		14(23.3%)	17 (28.3%)		5 (8.3%)
qb23	I am satisfied with my opportunities for promotion in general	54	1	5	2.22	1.21	20 (33.3%)		36 (60%)			4 (6.7%)
qb27	I am satisfied with my overall relationship with my supervisor	55	1	5	3.69	1.15	6 (10%)		49 (81.7%)			5 (8.3%)
qb28	I am satisfied with my relationship with my peers in general	56	2	5	3.73	0.70	17 (28.3%)		39 (65%)			4 (6.7%)
qb30	I am overall satisfied with my job	56	1	5	3.21	1.09	5 (8.3%)	8 (13.3%)	43 (71%)			4 (6.7%)
qb31	I feel engaged with my job	56	1	5	3.36	1.12	12 (20%)		44 (73.34%)			4 (6.7%)
qb36	I believe I am a competent social worker	56	2	5	4.13	0.74	2 (3.3%)	6 (10%)	27 (45%)	21 (35%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.7%)
qb37	I have enough energy for activities besides work	56	1	5	3.13	0.99	14 (23.3%)		42 (70%)			4 (6.7%)
qb39	I believe I can make a different in my client's life	56	1	5	4.04	0.87	1 (1.7%)	1 (1.7%)	54 (90%)			4 (6.7%)

Job satisfaction can lead to enhancing the social worker's role within the organisation and reducing absenteeism, increasing retention and improving the quality of services offered to clients, while dissatisfaction could lead to the opposite. Research on job satisfaction has shown that the more satisfied an employee is with his/her job, the less likely they will contemplate leaving (Farmer, 2011:1).

It is the researcher's opinion that attention needs to be given to the 27% of social workers who do feel undervalued and unappreciated, as these workers would contemplate leaving their profession.

The impact of being involved in the organisational decision-making process (F=55, N=60)

When employees are more active in decision-making they feel more engaged, which leads to higher satisfaction and lower turnover rates (Peltier & Dahl, 2009:10). In this study 22 (36.7%) of the respondents felt they were involved less than 40% of the time in decision making that affects their organisational community. There were 33 (55%) respondents who felt that they were involved 60% or more of the time. Five (8.3%) of the respondents did not answer this question. Again, more than a third of the respondents felt not involved in decision making, which correlates with the feeling of not being appreciated and valued in the organisation.

Support for creativity and innovation (F=55, N=60)

For this question 23 (38.3%) respondents indicated that their organisation was supporting creativity and innovation less than 40% of the time. Another 32 (53.3%) recorded that their organisation supported creativity and innovation 60% and more of the time. Five (8.3%) did not answer the question. More than a third of the respondents were not supported in their creativity and innovation ideas. Creative work environment was found to be a good predictor of participants' job satisfaction and creative self-efficacy level (Chan, 2000:60). Stimulating creativity and innovation could increase the job satisfaction and engagement of the social workers. Creativity in social work is needed to find new innovative solutions to problems, to move with the times. More support will flow to organisations showing more passion, creativity, energy and drive (Liang, 2007:1). It is the researcher's opinion that creativity and innovation stimulate energy and dynamism within social workers as well as in their organisations. To embark on fresh ideas and do things differently banish boredom and repetitive behaviour that could cause job dissatisfaction and reduce engagement.

Available resources (F=56, N=60)

Studies have consistently shown that job resources are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker & Leiter, 2010:185). Most of the respondents, namely 42 (70%) in this research, indicated that they have the resources they need to do their work 60% and more of the time. There were 14 respondents (23.3%) who indicated that they have these resources less than 40% of the time. Four (6.7%) did not provide an answer to the question. Social resources, such as work social support, and personal resources, might prevent work overload and prevent burnout (Gray-Stanley, 2011:1). Knowledge,

supervision, financial resources and promotional opportunities are resources particularly affecting engagement and job satisfaction in this research.

The impact of financial rewards and promotional opportunities (F=54, N=60)

Factors that increase job satisfaction among social workers include satisfaction with salary. Job satisfaction decreases for social workers who have a poor salary (Cole, Panchanadeswaran & Daining, 2004:2). Feeling taken advantage of is correlated with a lower level of job satisfaction, but is not correlated with intention to leave the social work field (Fitts, 2006:iii). Most of the respondents were only 60% or less satisfied with their salary levels, benefits or the connection between pay and performance.

Fitts (2006:iii) found the best predictor for job satisfaction was promotional opportunities. The best predictor for changing jobs was low financial reward. A significant 21 (35%) respondents were satisfied with their opportunities for promotion 20% or less of the time. Another 11 (18.3%) were satisfied only 40% of the time with their promotional opportunities, while 22 (36.7%) respondents indicated their satisfaction 60% or more of the time. Six (10%) respondents did not answer the question. In relation to salary, 20 (33.3%) were happy with their salary 40% or less of the time. There were 36 (60%) respondents who indicated that they were satisfied 60% or more of the time with their salary. Four (6.7%) did not answer the question. Hence, one third of the social workers were unhappy with their salary and they were unhappy with their promotional opportunities. Again, this would suggest that a third of the respondents in this research were at risk of leaving the profession.

Experience of reduced work performance (F=56, N=60)

Fourie (2004:2) mentions that burnout included withdrawing from social contact outside of work, workaholism, having a quick temper, suspiciousness, rigidity, cynicism, overconfidence, alcoholism, stubbornness, paranoia and/or feelings of omnipotence. A person suffering from burnout may also experience headaches, insomnia and/or gastrointestinal disturbances, loss of commitment at work, fatigue, boredom, inappropriate attitudes towards clients and self, role conflict, and total emotional and physical exhaustion. Of the respondents, 19 (31.7%) indicated that they experienced reduced work performance only 20% of the time, while a significant 25 (41.7%) of respondents experienced reduced work performance 60% or more of the time. This would indicate that, although social workers are generally satisfied, a level of burnout appears to be present affecting 41.7% of respondents' work performance.

Continuous professional development (F=56, N=60)

Twenty-one (35%) respondents indicated that they receive an opportunity to attend job-related seminars or participation in continued education on practice issues only 40% or less of the time. Another 35 (58.3%) have the opportunity 60% or more of the time. Four (6.7%) did not provide an answer. The researcher agrees with the bulk of research (Bakker, Demerouti, Hakanen & Xanthopoulou, 2007:275; Grasso, 1994:89-105; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte & Lens, 2008:278) that limited educational and career opportunities are push factors resulting in social workers leaving the profession, while at the same time opportunities for professional development are seen as pull

factors to other organisations and professions. There is a constant striving towards growth and improvement. Gaining knowledge is one way of preventing burnout, stress and job dissatisfaction. If this need is not addressed, alternative opportunities might start luring away the social worker. More than a third of social workers in this research feel this need is currently not addressed.

Intention to leave (F=55, N=60)

Leiter and Maslach (2009:331) found that a negative relationship between job satisfaction and job turnover, indicating that dissatisfaction prompts individuals to consider career changes. A significant 6 (10%) of the respondents want to leave their current job as social worker 100% of the time, while another 8 (13.3%) want to leave their job 80% of the time. This means that nearly a quarter of the respondents want to leave their current position 80% or more of the time. Another 11 (18.3%) want to leave their position 60% of the time and 8 (13.3%) want to leave their job less than 40% of the time. Of the respondents, 22 (36.7%) want to leave their current job less than 20% of the time, while 5 (8.3%) did not answer the question. There were 25 (41.7%) of the social workers (nearly half) who indicated that they wanted to leave their current job 60% of the time. These findings once more emphasise the need to develop a retention strategy in order to prevent social workers from leaving their organisations or the profession.

Satisfaction with workload (F=55, N=60)

Job satisfaction decreases for social workers who have a heavy workload, according to Cole *et al.* (2004:5). Bakker and Leiter (2010: 186) found that flexibility in professional skills boosted work engagement when qualitative workload was high, and diminished the negative effect of high qualitative workload on work engagement. Seventeen (28.3%) respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their workload in general 80% or more of the time, while 14 (23.3%) were satisfied 60% of the time. Another 23 (38.3%) of respondents were satisfied with their workload in general only 40% or less of the time. Taking into account that in the previous question it was indicated that a third of the social workers were unsatisfied, did not feel appreciated and valued and felt a reduced work performance, a consistent trend might be developing among more or less a third of the respondents that might be lost to the profession unless positive intervention occurs.

Supervisor relationship (F=55, N=60)

Employees who experience organisational support become more engaged with their job and organisation (Chang & Wei, 2008:5). Supportive supervision relates to higher job satisfaction (Cole *et al.*, 2004:5). Studies have consistently shown that job resources such as social support from colleagues and supervisors are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker & Leiter, 2010:185). In relation to this question on supervision, 49 (81.7%) respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their overall relationship with their supervisor 60% or more of the time. The fact that 80% indicate their satisfaction with their supervisor relationship correlates with the nearly 71% that feel satisfied with their job in general. Six (10.0%) indicated that they were satisfied

with their relationship with their supervisor less than 40% of the time. Five (8.3%) did not answer this question.

Relationship with peers (F=56, N=60)

There were 39 (65%) respondents who indicated that they were satisfied with their relationship with their peers 60% or more of the time. Peer relationships provide emotional support, spur professional growth, impart cultural and political knowledge, encourage collaboration and innovation, and extend personal influence. When peer relationships become dysfunctional, they stir up undercurrents that distract people, cause resources to be hoarded, constrict information sharing and, generally, undermine engagement (Ruyle, 2007:1). Seventeen (28.3%) of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their peer relationships only 40% or less of the time. Another 4 (6.7%) did not indicate an answer.

Job satisfaction (F=56, N=60)

There were 43 (71%) respondents who indicated that they were satisfied with their jobs 60% or more of the time, while 4 respondents (6.7%) did not answer this question. Another 5 (8.3%) indicated that they were satisfied with their job less than 20% of the time, while a further 8 (13.3%) were satisfied with their job less than 40% of the time. This means that nearly a quarter of the social workers involved in this research were not satisfied with their jobs. Factors that can lead to dissatisfaction if not present can include supervision, interpersonal relations, physical working conditions, low salary, company policies and administrative practices, benefits, and job security. When these factors fail to meet minimum thresholds, job dissatisfaction occurs (Herzberg, Mausner & Synderman, 1959:113).

Work engagement (F=56, N=60)

There were 44 (73.34%) of the respondents who felt engaged with their job 60% or more of the time, while 12 (20%) felt engaged 40% or less of the time. This correlates with the results of the previous question, as job satisfaction and the achievement of work goals will result in engagement (Rothman & Rothman, 2010:5). Four (6.7%) respondents did not answer this question. Nearly a fifth of the social workers involved in this research are disengaged or on the road to disengagement.

The researcher agrees that feeling engaged stimulates passion for the work. This could then engender positive self-belief, as indicated by Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli (2012:510), who state that positive emotions seem to explain the transformation of job resources into positive self-belief on a daily basis. The researcher further believes that positive self-beliefs contribute to resilience in dealing with stress and burnout. Addressing engagement and reigniting passion for the work for the 21.4% who are not fully engaged could prevent possible turnover.

Self-esteem and feelings of competence (F=56, N=60)

Of the respondents, 21 (35%) believed that they are competent social workers 80% of the time. No respondents believed that they were competent 100% of the time. Another 27 (45%) felt they were competent 60% of the time, while 6 (10%) felt competent 40%

of the time. Two (3.3%) indicated that they felt competent only 20% or less of the time and 4 (6.7%) respondents did not provide an answer. This correlates with the findings in Section C of the questionnaire that around 61.7% of the respondents have experienced positive engagement. Personal accomplishment is associated with work engagement (Fourie, 2004:iv). One respondent felt that she could make a difference in her client's life 20% or less of the time. Another one respondent believed that she could make a difference in her client's life 40% or more of the time. There were 54 (90%) of the respondents who felt they could make a difference 60% and more of the time. Four (6.7%) did not provide an answer. Believing in oneself is seen as positive self-esteem and, according to Korunka, Tement, Zdrehus and Borza (2010:16), a person's low self-esteem plays a role in the development of burnout.

Energy for outside activities (F=56, N=60)

Of the respondents, 14 (23.3%) answered that they have enough energy for activities besides work only 40% or less of the time. Another 42 (70%) of the respondents felt they had enough energy for activities besides work 60% or more of the time, while 4 (6.7%) did not provide an answer. Nearly a quarter of the respondents do not have enough energy left for activities besides work, which places them, according to the researcher, in a position to be at risk of burnout.

DISCUSSION

Considering their experiences of insufficient time to complete day-to-day work tasks, heavy workloads, poor compensation, challenging and/or difficult clients, as well as few resources, long working hours and unclear job expectations, it is not surprising that social workers experience work-related stress. Under these less-than-optimal working conditions, social workers are often "pushed to the limit" when trying to meet their job requirements. Over time this can result in burnout, impaired performance, poor mental health, impaired cognitive functioning, decreased concentration and health-related problems for social workers. Additionally, these issues may cause social workers to consider a career change.

In summary, then, 71% of the respondents in this research were mostly engaged with their job and experienced job satisfaction, but nearly half contemplated leaving the profession. Another 41% had experienced reduced work performance in the last six months. This could indicate high stress levels with possible burnout unless circumstances are addressed. Nearly 30% of respondents appeared already disengaged and experienced less job satisfaction.

It is thus obvious that social workers do experience stress and burnout as a consequence of their workload and time management; as a result, they tend to feel emotionally drained and unproductive. This could lead to feeling unsatisfied and contemplating leaving. The organisational climate and rewards an organisation provides can affect this process. In order to address these issues, increased support, support groups, supervision, knowledge and skills improvements are necessary in order to assist social workers to deal with the stressors and keep them excited about and interested in the profession.

Re-establishing a sense of control, mastery and competence in one's work situation may seem at first glance a daunting task. However, it is the researchers' opinion, based on the research defining the underlying relationships between job satisfaction, burnout, stress, job turnover and positive work engagement (Dollard *et al.*, 2003:5; Halbesleben, 2010:102; Leiter & Maslach, 2009:331; Prins, Hoekstra-Weebers, Gazendam-Donofrio, Bakker, Jacobs & Van der Heijden, 2010:237; Richer, Blanchard & Vallerand, 2002:2104), that with strategies such as stress management, burnout prevention and increasing job satisfaction, increased positive work engagement is an attainable goal. All these elements combined together can enhance support opportunities and improve coping strategies for social workers. It is under such circumstances, along with the provision of essential resources and manageable workloads, that social workers can thrive and develop positively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More research needs to be focused on retaining social workers for the profession.
- It is recommended that more needs assessments be done to create awareness in order to prevent burnout and to lower stress levels among social workers.
- Better salaries and working conditions are needed to keep social workers in the profession.
- It is recommended that organisations place more emphasis on providing continuous professional development opportunities for their employees.
- More support needs to be provided to social workers in the form of supervision and support groups.
- More awareness needs to be created in welfare organisations and departments regarding their influence and role in preventing job dissatisfaction and disengagement.
- More research is needed to develop a programme to specifically target managers of social workers regarding the effect and prevention of stress, burnout, dissatisfaction and disengagement.
- It is recommended that an empowerment programme be developed that addresses the needs identified by the social workers of North-West province to enhance their work engagement and job satisfaction and to prevent burnout, stress and possible turnover.
- It is further recommended that this empowerment programme is presented in group format.

CONCLUSION

The recruitment and retention crisis in social work is acute and is having a destabilising effect on our local communities (Anon., 2005:12; Department of Social Development, 2009:18; Earle, 2008:6). The primary mission of the social work profession is the delivery and commissioning of responses to the needs of society's most vulnerable people, to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic needs of all people, with

particular attention to those who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty (National Association of Social Workers, 2009:6). Gaining a better understanding of the key factors influencing the recruitment and retention of social workers will promote the essential worth of social work, and with that, greater recognition will follow for the challenging nature of the job and the serious responsibilities allied with it. The aim of this study was to focus on retention, and to ensure that social workers experience work engagement and job satisfaction.

In this article the researcher presented, analysed and interpreted research findings based on responses provided by 60 social workers from the North-West province. The research questions focused on work engagement, job satisfaction, burnout and stress that social workers experienced in their current positions. The purpose was to determine the needs social workers express that will affect their intention to leave and to determine what is needed to retain them for the profession.

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