THE POTENTIAL SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: VIEWS OF KEY INFORMANTS AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

by
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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any other qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Based on the global definition of social work, according to the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), generalist social work may be defined as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people, with principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities. Within the higher education space, social work is considered to be a specialised area of practice. This is because social work is part of a multidisciplinary team of specialists attached to the education system in order to address and treat problems that interfere with teaching and learning. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) recognises services for students as a crucial endeavour in promoting their holistic development, and in providing effective aid for them to meet the demands of tertiary life. As far as this is concerned, higher education institutions have responded to the call to provide student support services. However, there is an overwhelming gap in research that comprehensively studies the scope of social work practice in higher education institutions and the scope in which social work practice could continue as a response to providing services to students. In light of this, the researcher's study aimed to gain an understanding of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa.

This research followed a qualitative approach with a combination of an exploratory and descriptive design. Key informant sampling was combined with quota sampling to sample and recruit research participants. This led to 18 participants being interviewed for this study with the researcher utilising a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams to ensure health and safety precautions. The researcher utilised a thematic content analysis approach when analysing the data that was collected during the interviews.

The primary recommendations deduced by the researcher from the findings are that the role of social workers at Stellenbosch University needs to be expanded. This expansion should encompass diverse student needs, including both preventative efforts in mental health support and interventions that consider the broader familial context. Additionally, there is a pressing need for the establishment of a well-defined policy framework outlining the roles and responsibilities of social workers within the

university setting. Finally, advocacy for enhanced funding and resources is crucial to facilitate the integration of social work services across different university departments and initiatives.

OPSOMMING

Gebaseer op die wêreldwye definisie van maatskaplike werk, volgens die I*nternasional Federation of Social Work (IFSW)* en di*e International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)*, kan algemene maatskaplike werk omskryf word as 'n praktykgebaseerde professie en 'n akademiese dissipline wat maatskaplike verandering en ontwikkeling, maatskaplike samehorigheid, asook die bemagtiging en bevryding van mense bevorder, met beginsels van maatskaplike geregtigheid, menseregte, kollektiewe verantwoordelikheid, en respek vir diversiteit. Binne die hoër onderwysruimte word maatskaplike werk beskou as 'n gespesialiseerde praktykgebied. Dit is omdat maatskaplike werk deel vorm van 'n multidissiplinêre span van spesialiste wat aan die onderwysstelsel verbind is om probleme wat met onderrig en leer inmeng, aan te spreek en te hanteer. Die Witskrif vir Hoër Onderwys en Opleiding (2013) erken dienste vir studente as 'n belangrike strewe in die bevordering van hul holistiese ontwikkeling, en in die voorsiening van doeltreffende hulp om aan die eise van tersiêre studie te voldoen. Met betrekking tot hierdie aspek het hoër onderwysinstellings gereageer op die oproep om studente-ondersteuningsdienste te bied. Daar is egter 'n gaping in navorsing wat die omvang van maatskaplike werk-praktyk in hoër onderwysinstellings omvattend bestudeer, en in die omvang van maatskaplike werk aan studente by hoër onderwysinstellings. In die lig hiervan het die navorser se studie ten doel gehad om 'n begrip te verkry van die potensiële omvang van die maatskaplikewerk-praktyk by die Universiteit Stellenbosch as 'n hoër onderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika.

Hierdie navorsing het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg met 'n kombinasie van 'n verkennende en beskrywende ontwerp. Sleutelinformantsteekproefneming is gekombineer met kwotasteekproef om navorsingsdeelnemers vir die navorsing te werf. Dit het daartoe gelei dat onderhoude met 18 deelnemers gevoer is, met die navorser wat 'n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoudskedule gebruik het. Die onderhoude is via Microsoft Teams gevoer om gesondheids- en veiligheidsmaatreëls te handhaaf. Die navorser het 'n tematiese inhoudsanalise-benadering gebruik om die data wat tydens die onderhoude ingesamel is, te analiseer.

Die primêre aanbevelings wat deur die navorser uit die bevindinge afgelei is, is dat die rol van maatskaplike werkers by Universiteit Stellenbosch uitgebrei moet word. Hierdie uitbreiding moet verskeie studentebehoeftes aanspreek, insluitend voorkomende

dienste in geestesgesondheidsondersteuning, sowel as ingrypings wat die breër familiekonteks betrek.

Daarbenewens bestaan daar 'n dringende behoefte vir die totstandkoming van 'n duidelike beleidsraamwerk wat die rolle en verantwoordelikhede van maatskaplike werkers binne die universiteitsomgewing uiteensit. Laastens is verbeterde befondsing en hulpbronne nodig om die integrering van maatskaplikewerk-dienste regoor verskillende universiteitsdepartemente en inisiatiewe te fasiliteer.

DEDICATION

In memory of my loved ones that I lost during the execution of this study.

My father in-law, SS Mdaka (1955–2022)

My nephew, Luchumo Iyapha Madlingozi (2009–2022)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY AND RATIONALE

Based on the global definition of social work, according to the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), generalist social work may be defined both as a practice-based profession and as an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people, with principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities. It is underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge and also engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). Within the higher education space, social work is considered to be a specialised area of practice (Mkhize, 2014). This is because social work is part of a multidisciplinary team of specialists attached to the education system in order to address and treat problems that interfere with teaching and learning (Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). As a result, higher education institutions in the modern era have always offered psychosocial support, counselling and residence services for students through student affairs divisions, university counselling centres and other avenues (Vonk, Markward & Arnold, 2000; Wilson et al., 2013; Schreiber, 2014; Sheats, 2017).

International literature on the social work profession in higher education argues that, while a higher education institution may be considered a non-traditional point of social work practice, social workers in a higher education set-up play a very important role (Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). Vonk et al. (2000) argue that the education and training that social workers receive enables them to work with different populations, especially those who are marginalised and those who face substantial life barriers to academic success. Unlike other professions, social workers effect changes through assessment, planning, monitoring, linking and advocating between the client and their community system (Shelesky, Weatherford & Silbert, 2016). Therefore, social work brings a holistic perspective to understanding the student and their environment (Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020). As such, according to Tinto (2017), students are more likely to persist and to graduate in settings that provide academic, social, and personal support.

Linking to the South African context, Mkhize (2014) makes the case for the importance of the social work profession in higher education institutions by distinguishing certain roles of social workers, which may be contextualised for the tertiary environment, namely the advocacy role, the facilitator role, the programme designer role, and the case-management role. Engelbrecht (1999) argues that policy, and procedures as well as the nature and the field of intervention usually influence the intervention roles fulfilled by the social worker. In addition, Ornellas, Spolander and Engelbrecht (2016) describe the role of the social worker as one who participates in and influences different levels (micro, meso and macro) of society and functioning. This approach involves working at the micro level with individuals, at the meso level with institutions, and at the macro level with public advocacy. At a higher education institution, the scope of social work practice depends on the size and the type of institution, its geographic location, differing practice needs and the student population's financial resources (Vonk et. al., 2000; Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020).

In light of the clear underpinning of the aforementioned arguments, increasing attention seems to have been given to universities and to the well-being of students since South Africa's first democratic election in 1994 (Pandor, 2018). In particular, the university's role received specific attention in the face of global challenges and neoliberal influences in the higher education system (Jansen, 2003; Park, 2003). This attention has been exacerbated in recent years, triggered by student protest actions that ensued in 2015 in South Africa, which began over proposed fee increases and soon led to a nationwide call for free education (Naicker, 2016). These student protest groups were collectively referred to as the fallist movement and include the #FeesMustFall movement (FMF), Rhodes Must Fall (RMF), #WitsSoWhite and #OpenStellies (Jansen, 2017).

In the aftermath of the fallist movement, many issues that plagued the higher education sector came to the fore. These highlighted the way that poverty, inequality, and exclusionary institutional cultures impact how students live, think and learn (Letseka & Breier, 2008; Machika & Johnson, 2015; Naicker, 2016 Okoye, 2018). Moreover, students are faced with mental health-related challenges, HIV and AIDS, food insecurity, substance abuse problems and gender-based violence (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010; Twill, Bergdahlb & Fenslera, 2016).

These broadening social justice-related challenges that students face strengthen the need for higher education institutions to explore the scope for in-depth social work practice in tackling these challenges (Mkhize, 2014; Sheats, 2017). This assertion is also articulated by Sheafor and Horejsi (2015:142) when they state that human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action.

Against this backdrop, social welfare in South Africa is guided by various policy documents (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). These include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, No. 108 of 1996; the Social Service Professions Act, No. 110 of 1978 as amended; the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997; the Social Assistance Act, No. 595 of 1992; and the Comprehensive Report on the review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Social Development, 2016a), amongst others. Although not recognised by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) as a specialised field of practice in South Africa, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013:17) recognises 'student support services, such as academic support, social support, assisting students to get bursaries and complete their programmes of study, and assistance with finding workplaces' as crucial in ensuring that students adapt to the demands of tertiary life.

Furthermore, Raniga and Zelnick (2014) point to the fact that the National Minister of Social Development has established a task team to review the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), which involves the critical examination of current social work roles, programmes, and services within a transitional socioeconomic and political context. This Review of the White Paper of Social Welfare (Department of Social Development, 2016a) made it an opportune time for social workers to contribute to policy formulation and implementation; also, in the case of social work practices in higher education environments. However, neither the Review of the White Paper of Social Welfare (Department of Social Development, 2016) nor the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) contain any specific references to social work practices in higher education institutions, despite the fact that in 2016 it was recorded that 975 837 students' study at higher education institutions in South Africa (DHET, 2016).

There is ample research in the United States of America that explores the role and scope of social work at higher education institutions (Shelesky et al., 2016; Sheats,

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2017; Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020) but there is limited research in South Africa (Mkhize, 2014). Search engines, including Academic Search Premier, Taylor & Francis Online, and ProQuest were consulted; yet they did not provide sufficient results on the subject matter within the South African context. Hence, this study seeks to understand the potential scope of social work practice at a higher education institution in South Africa. Stellenbosch University will be used as a case study, since it provides services that are designed to improve and empower student well-being from a holistic and ecological spectrum (SU CSCD, 2020).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (RSA, 2013) recognises services for students as a crucial endeavour in promoting their holistic development, and in providing effective aid for them to meet the demands of tertiary life. As far as this is concerned, higher education institutions have responded to the call to provide student support services. However, there is an overwhelming gap in research that studies comprehensively the scope of social work practice in higher education institutions and the scope in which social work practice could continue as a response to providing services to students, as evidenced through the literature engine search on Academic Search Premier, Taylor & Francis Online, and ProQuest. Vonk et al. (2000) specifically recommend that further research should examine knowledge about social work practice in higher education institutions. The literature in higher education is mainly focused on student experiences of various support services provided by university administrators and how these services are delivered (Möwes, 2005; Güneri, 2006; Perron et al., 2011; Chinoda, 2013; Machika & Johnson, 2015; Steenkamp et al., 2016). Some of these studies are also not locally based. The study by Mkhize (2014) seems to be the only South African study that looked into social work in higher education institutions. However, the study did not look at the potential scope of social work within higher education institutions but specifically looked into social work as a support service for tertiary students. Some institutions of higher education in South Africa, such as Stellenbosch University (SU), do make provision for social work support (SU CSCD, 2020) but what the potential and full scope of social work practice is, is not known. For these reasons, there is a dire need to explore the potential scope of social work practice within higher education institutions in South Africa in order to

identify potential avenues for the expansion of social work practice at a South African university, such as Stellenbosch University, given the set of skills of social workers that may contribute to the well-being and success of students at South African higher education institutions.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research sought to answer the following research questions:

- What is the scope of generalist social work practice (professional status, definition, theoretical basis, domain, roles and principles) within a global and local context?
- What is the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions within a global and South African context?
- What is the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University?

1.4 GOAL

The goal of the research was to gain an understanding of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:
- To describe the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its professional status, definition, theoretical basis, domain, roles and principles within a global and local context;
- To analyse the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions within a global and South African context on the basis of an ecological systems perspective;
- To explore empirically what is and what can potentially be the scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University;

- To make conclusions and recommendations to the broader higher education institution sector in South Africa and specifically to applicable stakeholders at Stellenbosch University regarding the scope of social work practice.

1.6 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The main theoretical undergirding for this proposed study was the ecological systems perspective. The language of the ecological systems perspective (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979a) was used to interpret and analyse the higher education institution as a system and the scope of social work practice within different levels of institutional expectations, which includes the personal or individual (micro) level, cultural or group (meso) level, and society (macro level) (Bernstein & Gray, 1996; Dominelli, 2002; Gray & Lombard, 2023). When using the lens of the ecological systems perspective, the purpose of social work involves the enhancement of people's adaptive capacities, removing the environmental challenges that hinder them from optimal social functioning, and increasing the availability of resources to meet their basic needs (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2015:75). South African policy and legislation, such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013), the Service Delivery Model for Developmental Social Welfare Services (RSA, 2005), and the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, among others, as well as Stellenbosch University policies and institutional reports, such as the Annual Integrated Report (2019), the draft SU Mental Health Policy (SU CSCD, 2020) and the Annual Transformation Report (2020), as well as a body of knowledge on social work practice within higher education institutions by Mkhize (2014), Shelesky et al. (2016), Sheats (2017), and Raphael and Goldrick-Rab (2020), served as theoretical points of departure. The researcher also looked at post descriptions and relevant documents available at Stellenbosch University regarding the university's social work services.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This methodological section will address the research approach and design, the sample that participated in the study, and the method, and means of data collection and analysis.

1.7.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was employed in this study. Jackson, Drummond and Camara (2007) note that qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding the experiences of human beings in a humanistic and interpretive approach. For Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach used in exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social or human problem. This research was initially guided by deductive reasoning, where the researcher uses general ideas and funnels them to a specific situation to prove that a conclusion is right through a thorough literature review, and by inductive reasoning, which involves working back and forth through the data and the themes to reach an overarching conclusion (Fouché, 2021a). This was the best approach for the enquiry of this study, as the information and experiences from key informants were explored, interpreted and analysed against existing research, in order to draw conclusions regarding the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa. Additionally, this research study strove to provide new knowledge that is constructive for the social work profession within higher education settings.

1.7.2 Research design

An exploratory and descriptive research design was utilised in this study. Exploratory research is defined as research that is conducted to gain new insight when there is very little data on the subject rather than only confirming existing knowledge (Strydom, 2013). On the other hand, descriptive research is used to provide an accurate representation of the participants by providing thick descriptions of variables (Strydom, 2013; Rubin & Babbie, 2016). The advantages of using these two designs are that an explorative design will assist the researcher to be flexible by having no prescribed structure, while the descriptive design will enable the researcher to describe and identify the situation in terms of its deeper meaning (Doyle et al., 2020). Within a descriptive design, the researcher utilised a case study. A case study is described as an analysis of individuals, groups, events and policies within a specific time and setting (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021a). This was done so that the study could provide an investigation of the potential scope of social work practice at higher education institutions in South Africa, with a specific focus on the case of Stellenbosch University, to gain information to answer the research questions (Rubin & Babbie, 2016).

1.7.3 Sample

Strydom (2021:379) defines sampling as utilising a portion of the population to symbolise what can be expected in that total population. This study utilised non-probability sampling, in particular purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is described by Rubin and Babbie (2016:222) as being judgemental about which case is most representative of the phenomenon to be researched. As such, the technique assisted the researcher to approach key informants who have special knowledge of the problems to be researched (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Key informants encompass a wide range of people with a broad range of perspectives from different groups and sectors (Strydom, 2021:385). Key informants are usually used as respondents either because of their expertise or the power they yield in the particular field of research (Fouché, 2021c). This was followed by contacting and collecting data from participants at Stellenbosch University fitting the criteria of inclusion.

The criteria for inclusion of participants was as follows:

- Participants must either be a registered student or an employee of Stellenbosch University;
- Participants must fulfil a key role in the student community;
- Participants must have regular and direct contact with registered students;
- Participants must have knowledge about the social well-being of students.

The sample size of the study was 18 key informants (participants) at Stellenbosch University, and included participants, identified as experts in the particular field of interest (see Fouché, 2021c). The key informant sampling was combined with quota sampling since "the main purpose is to draw a sample that adequately represents the population in form" (Strydom, 2021:383). Therefore, a cross-section of participants in particular categories of persons are sampled, recruited and included in the study (according to the set criteria for inclusion). Strydom (2021) also postulates that the sample size in each category of quota sampling is usually selected in proportion to the category size, and the selection of participants may rest with the fieldworker's knowledge of the particular case. Within the context of Stellenbosch University as a case study, the key informants were recruited from the Centre for Student Communities, the Centre for Student Counselling and Development, Campus Health,

and various levels of student leadership. This included relevant key informants such as two residence heads (one from the Private Student Organisation and one from the SU residences), two Residential Education (ResEd) coordinators, four professionals from the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (management, psychologist, social worker, counsellor), two staff members from Campus Health (medical doctor and nurse), two Student Representative Council (SRC) members, six students from various levels of residence leadership (four residence head students and two residence cluster conveners), and two lecturers from the Department of Social Work. The researcher will comment on the recruitment of participants in the empirical chapter.

Owing to the nature of qualitative research, Strydom (2021:380) suggests that qualitative research has the flexibility for the sample size to be larger or smaller. However, Charmaz (in Creswell, 2014:189) suggests that saturation can occur when 'gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights'. Therefore, the data saturation principle is an important goal in qualitative research (Mason, 2010). The researcher believes that data saturation had been reached once interviews had been conducted with 18 participants, since participants' narratives became similar. Saturation is reached when no new information is obtained from interviewing research participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A sample of 15 participants is regarded as enough to research the goal of a qualitative study when conducting interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

An ethical clearance application was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the university (See Annexure 2). Upon receipt of the ethical clearance, an application was submitted for institutional permission (See Annexure 2). Within the application process for institutional permission, a privacy impact self-assessment tool was completed to identify potential privacy and personal information risks. The privacy impact self-assessment tool is available from the Division for Information Governance (IG). This tool assists researchers to be well positioned to submit their request for institutional permission. Once institutional permission had been obtained, participants who fit the criteria of inclusion were contacted by the researcher, via email and telephonically, since the researcher had access to their contact details, which are available on the university's open contact list. All participants were sent an email with an informed consent form to read, which had to be signed by the participant, before

participating in the study (See Annexure 3). Owing to COVID-19 health and safety measures, all interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. The researcher was interested in opinions and perceptions, which would not generate the strong emotions of physical face-to-face observation. The use of a Microsoft Teams as an instrument of data collection is explained in the next section.

1.7.4 Instrument for data collection

Burns and Grove (2001:460) describe data collection as a method of selecting participants and gathering information from the participants. Interviewing was utilised as the method of data collection. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule (See Annexure 1) because the method gives the researcher more flexibility to be conversational when conducting the interview, while being guided by the interview schedule in exploring the topic holistically (Rubin & Babbie, 2016:168). The interview schedule consisted of prepared questions according to the relevant themes, generated by the overview of the literature (Geyer, 2021:358). To ensure health and safety precautions, and owing to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted by the researcher via Microsoft Teams. Initially, the researcher had intended to use telephonic interviews but decided rather to utilise an online video platform. According to Deakin and Wakefield (2014), video-calling platforms such as Skype, which is similar to Microsoft Teams, allow for interpersonal communication without face-to-face meeting. This enabled the researcher to conduct the interview at a time most convenient to the participant (Geyer, 2021). Permission was requested from the participants to record and transcribe the sessions through Microsoft Teams, so that the researcher would be able to identify themes and be able to analyse the data (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017). Although the meeting was conducted virtually, the Microsoft Teams platform has a video function which enabled the researcher to be able to also see the participants face. Further, the information regarding the participants' identity was not disclosed and the recordings were downloaded and kept strictly in a password-protected laptop and also saved in cloud-encrypted storage with a password.

1.7.5 Data analysis

The data collected were analysed in a qualitative manner. Cresswell (2014:195) describes data analysis as the process of putting the information collected into

segments, "like peeling the layers of an onion and putting it back again". Similarly, Schurink, Schurink and Fouché (2021b) refer to data analysis as a process of sifting through the important information to find a way of constructing what the information reveals. After each interview, the researcher downloaded that transcribed interview using the saved recording in Microsoft Teams. This is called the data preparation phase (Schurink et al., 2021b).

Even though figures and tables were used in the profiling of participants, these do not indicate that the study was quantitative in nature. Within the data analysis process, the researcher made use of thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis draws attention to the reporting of common issues (patterns) mentioned in data, when not much is known in a particular area (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). During the thematic content analysis, the data were coded to form themes and patterns and the researcher conducted the coding manually. The coding steps implemented included getting a sense of the transcriptions, identifying the underlying meaning or topic, clustering similar topics, shortening the topics into codes, putting together all the data belonging to each code, and writing a preliminary analysis (Creswell, 2014:198). Chapter Four of the study was devoted to the analysis and interpretation of data, consisting of direct participant dialogues. After all the findings were analysed, the existing literature review was used to compare the data.

1.7.6 Data verification

Validity and reliability are two important elements by means of which a researcher conveys the steps taken to check the accuracy and credibility of the study (Creswell, 2014:201). The data were verified through the following aspects:

Credibility: Credibility is a demonstration of the accurate description and identification of the subject (Schurink et al., 2021b). The researcher ensured that the empirical analysis of the subject was clearly described and identified by mentioning the parameters of the participants.

Transferability: Transferability refers to whether the findings of the study could be applied from one specific context to another (Schurink et al., 2021b). In this case, the researcher described the methodology, steps and protocols that were followed in

researching the scope of social work practice by ensuring that data saturation was achieved.

Dependability: Dependability refers to logic, accurate documentation and auditing of the research process (Schurink et al., 2021b). The researcher achieved dependability by confirming that all data were recorded and analysed, and that the findings were presented to the study supervisors.

Confirmability: Confirmability refers to when the findings of the study can be reflected and confirmed by another study or researcher (Schurink et al., 2021b). The researcher ensured that the study is confirmable by including academic literature to substantiate findings and by making sure that the study was objective and was not influenced by the researcher's subjective opinions and biases (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

Researcher reflexivity: Reflexivity is defined as the researcher's critical reflections regarding their own biases and assumptions that are reflected upon throughout the research process (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). Owing to the nature of the study, the researcher's position at the institution, and the professional relationship of the researcher with some of the key informants, reflecting on the researcher's own biases after each interview was crucial, so that none of the opinions of the researcher could be echoed that would influence the qualitative data (Schurink et al., 2021b). A reflection report is attached to the final research report – See Annexure 5.

1.8 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

The researcher ensured ethical appropriateness as a crucial factor throughout the completion of the study. Rubin and Babbie (2016:80) describe ethics as moral assumptions which deal with matters of right and wrong. These assumptions and behaviours are guided by a set of ethical guidelines and principles, which should be used to evaluate the researcher's own conduct (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Stellenbosch University's Social Work Departmental Ethical Screening Committee (DESC); thereafter, Research Ethics approval was also obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (REC) – See Annexure 4. Also, an institutional permit was obtained from the Division for Information Governance (IG).

Since the study sought to gain an understanding of the potential scope of social work practice, the study was considered to be **minimal risk.** The researcher intended to collect data that are not sensitive and personal, since she was only interested in the views and opinions of the participants in relation to the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University. Since some key informants were the only participants holding a particular position in a specific division, the following ethical considerations was considered throughout the research process:

Confidentiality: Confidentiality refers to the act of ensuring that an individual's information will be kept private by restricting others from accessing their personal information (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). Since the interviews were done using a virtual meeting platform that had a video- and voice-recording device, the researcher ensured that the recorded information was kept securely in a password-protected laptop and stored in a OneDrive cloud software, which is password protected. The transcribed hard copies were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office.

Anonymity: Anonymity can be described as the process of ensuring that no individual is aware of a research participant's identity (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The researcher discussed components of informed consent with the participants and explained that it would only be the researcher and her supervisors who would have knowledge of their identity. Any personal or identifying information collected from the participants was recoded into pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of participants in this study.

Informed consent: Informed consent refers to the consent that a research participant gives to the researcher to interview them and to use their information (Sugiura, Wiles & Pope, 2017). An informed consent form was emailed to the participants to read, and it was explained to them, whereafter they needed to sign the form before participating in the study (See Annexure 3). The informed consent addressed factors such as confidentiality, anonymity, the participant's right to leave the process at any point and other information pertaining the research process.

Non-maleficence: It is the ethical obligation of a researcher to ensure that harm is avoided for the participant, or for anyone in the research process in any manner –both physical and emotional – throughout the research process (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). Although no personal details of the participants were discussed in the study, should discomfort be experienced, participants were made aware that they could leave the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable to continue.

Debriefing: Debriefing can be described as the process through which the researcher discusses the participant's experience of the research process after the interview and identifies how mistakes could be rectified for the rest of the research process (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). After each interview, the researcher conducted a debriefing with the participant to ensure that the participant felt comfortable with the interview procedure.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Discussing the limitations of a study allows the researcher to be more aware of the weaknesses within the research process because these have an effect on the conclusions and results (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). One primary limitation pertained to the scarcity of South African research focused on the scope of social work practice within higher education institutions. This lack of local research made it challenging to extrapolate and to apply global contexts to the South African setting. Nevertheless, the researcher successfully identified a range of South African literature examining facets of support services within universities and social work, utilising them to contextualise the various contexts that social workers encounter within South African higher education institutions.

The second limitation of this study was that the researcher only investigated the scope of social work practice within Stellenbosch University. The researcher had aimed to interview 20 participants; however, the research eventually consisted of 18 participants, only drawn from one higher education institution, which is Stellenbosch University, thus not making it possible to generalise findings. However, given the qualitative nature of the research, it was not the goal to generalise findings, but rather to gain insight into key informants' experiences, which could assist in guiding the goals

of future studies. Furthermore, the manner in which the research was conducted, and all steps and procedures, were extensively described, which will also allow for this research to be appropriately adjusted to other parts of South Africa if necessary.

1.10 PRESENTATION

The researcher endeavoured to adhere to the planned time frame during the entirety of the research process. The research study comprises five chapters. Chapter One focused on the introduction of the research through the introduction of the rationale, the problem statement, the theoretical framework and the research methodology within which the study is framed. Chapter Two describes the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its professional status, definition, theoretical basis, domain, roles and principles within a global and local context, while Chapter Three analyses the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions within a global and South African context on the basis of an ecological systems perspective. Chapter Four contains the empirical study, which aims to investigate the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University. Chapter Five relates to the conclusions that have been derived from the analysis of data, along with the recommendations that have been put forth to the broader higher education institution sector in South Africa and specifically to applicable stakeholders at Stellenbosch University regarding the scope of social work practice.

CHAPTER 2: THE SCOPE OF GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on a brief description of the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its professional status, definition, theoretical basis, domain, roles and principles within both a global and local context. In order to achieve the aforementioned, several themes will be explored within the social work profession. As a point of departure, a brief overview of the history of the profession will be presented by tracing the historical emergence within a global context and in South Africa for a localised context. The researcher will also consider the definition of social work, its theoretical underpinnings and its principles, to enable the reader to comprehend fully what the social work profession pertains to. This chapter will also explore some of the discourse around decolonised social work and social work post-COVID-19.

This chapter will lay the groundwork for the context necessary to understand the following chapter that pertains to the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions within a global and South African context on the basis of the ecological systems perspective.

2.2 GLOBAL DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK

According to Midgley (1995:19) social work is "an organised approach of providing social welfare which uses professionally qualified personnel to deal with social problems". However, social work has evolved and developed professionally and academically around the world (Engelbrecht, 2015). Based on the global definition of social work, according to the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), generalist social work may be defined as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people, with principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities. It is underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge and also engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being (IFSW & IASSW, 2014).

This definition was adopted in 2014 upon numerous country consultations, with the representation of over 110 country members.

A significant aspect of the global definition of social work was identified by Ornellas et al. (2016) in arguing that there have been three definitional shifts from the 2012 definition. These shifts relate to academic, scientific and indigenous theory, shifting from individualism to collectivism, and shifting from micro-heavy to increased macro understandings of inequality and social problems. The changes to the global definition, along with recognition of the importance of strengthening knowledge and theory, encourage critical reflection on the purpose, role and function of social work in society (Ornellas et al., 2016).

2.3 THE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL WORK

The definitional shift of social work that has been alluded to above also prompted the reviewing and reconsidering of the ethical principles of the social work definition (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). According to Sewpaul and Henrickson (2019), this review, which has resulted in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (IASSW, 2018) reached an agreement on nine main principles which include the following:

2.3.1 Recognition of the inherent dignity of humanity

This means treating people with respect worthy of their humanity. Social workers work with people from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and respect should be the foundation of an ethical practice.

2.3.2 Promoting of human rights

Social workers have an obligation to educate people regarding their inherent rights.

2.3.3 Promoting social justice and equity

Social workers advocate actively for the equitable distribution of resources by challenging systemic oppression and unjust policies.

2.3.4 Promoting the right to self-determination

This involves recognising an individual's agency. Social workers respect a person's freedom to think and make their own decisions.

2.3.5 Promoting the right to participation

The emphasis is on capacitating people to participate fully in their societies, including those who have been excluded historically.

2.3.6 Respect for confidentiality and privacy

Social workers must preserve confidentiality as far as possible as they are privy to people's personal circumstances. However, this right must be breached when there is potential to self-harm or to harm others.

2.3.7 Treating people as whole persons

Social workers must provide a holistic approach (active participants, well-rounded, inclusive environment) in their provision of social welfare services.

2.3.8 The ethical use of technology and social media

With the increased use of digital technology and social media, social workers must obtain informed consent of persons that they are working with and, in turn, provide them with proof of ethical practice.

2.3.9 Professional integrity

Social workers must ensure that their own behaviour is appropriate and that they do not engage in conduct which may contravene their code of conducts.

Within the context of the above-mentioned principles, it may be deducted that the infiltration of neoliberal and management principles in social work has affected the profession dramatically with political and economic practices and tenets, based on the premises that human well-being can be advanced optimally by the state through creating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, and which is characterised by private markets and free trade (Spolander et al., 2014). This deduction has also been highlighted by Banks (2021) by pointing out that decades of managerialism and procedure-driven practices has undermined the professional ethical judgement of social workers. In addition, this is indicated in the global social work definition described above with its promotion of the principles of social and economic justice and the movement from individual to collective approaches (Ornellas et al., 2016). In respect of this, Jones and Truell (2012) argue that the influence of neoliberalism in the world has resulted in the transformation of the global definition of social work, which

prompts social work to be 'more aware of global realities and act differently' (Ornellas et al., 2016:1194).

2.4 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

The history of social work is described as being characterised by divergent views and narratives (Gray, 2005; Smith, 2014). For the purpose of laying a foundational understanding of generalist social work practice, the researcher will provide and present an overview of critical events that have led to the emergence of the social work profession both from an international perspective and within South Africa.

2.4.1 An international perspective

Social work officially originated in the late 19th century as a movement primarily experienced within the United States and the United Kingdom (Lymbery, 2005; Payne, 2005; Stuart, 2013). During this period, social problems were increasing despite the vast industrial development which came with notable technological and scientific developments (Rees, 2001; Lymbery, 2005; Horner, 2012; Stuart, 2013). The emergence of social work as a professional occupation was pioneered through the existence of Charity Organisation Societies (COS), which were founded in England in the late 1800s (Lymbery, 2005; Stuart, 2013; Bosanquet, 1914).

These organisations, which were primarily private and philanthropic in nature, offered relief to those in need (Lymbery, 2005). However, the leaders of these charity organisations soon became concerned by the growing amount of freely given charity, so they hired educated women to conduct assessments to ensure that deserving people with no other means of support were provided with assistance (Midgley, 1995). Jane Adams and Adith Bott were among a few notable social workers of this era. The Freudian theory which promoted therapeutic and psychoanalytic approaches to welfare influenced early social work. In 1917, Mary Richmond developed the conceptual base for social case work leading to her book, which became an authoritative text in social work practice (Agnew, 2004; Stuart, 2013). Therefore, the social work profession has a long history of focusing its efforts on basic human rights and social justice for the oppressed, vulnerable and displaced (Parrot, 2010).

2.4.2 A South African perspective

Against this backdrop, in South Africa the history of social work is complex. Smith (2014) argues that the history of social work in South Africa clashes with socio-political events. Perhaps the most notable event to mention which affected social welfare in South Africa was apartheid. Apartheid was a unique system of institutionalised racial discrimination following the electoral victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 until the early 1990s (Dubow, 1989). During apartheid, social work, as an established profession in South African society, is argued to have had an active role in the democratisation of the country (Patel, 2005). However, Engelbrecht and Strydom (2015) argue that the active voice and impact of social work on the prevailing social development paradigm of the country is questionable. Social work under the apartheid government supported apartheid welfare structures and was characterised by the marginalisation of the African majority (Nicholas, Rautenbach & Maistry, 2010; Smith, 2014). During the late 1800s through to the early 1900s, the approach to social welfare was led by private philanthropic organisations (Engelbrecht, 2011). The Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging (ACVV), as one of the prominent organisations, was officially instituted in 1904 as the first formal welfare organisation (Du Toit, 1996; Engelbrecht, 2011). The core business of the ACVV was family care work within the context of poverty alleviation with a focus on the white population. It was much later, after the 1934 Carnegie commission, that social work was formalised and the first social workers were trained in historically white institutions; then later, this was extended to historically black institutions (Engelbrecht, 2015; Schenck, 2019).

In light of this historical exposition, Schenk (2019) argues that, although social workers are doing good work, history also shows us that social work does not always work towards removing social injustices. For example, a study conducted by Gray and Chrichton-Hill (2019) found that ethnic women in New Zealand had negative experiences relating to welfare receipt. Maylea (2020) also pointed out that social work has been complicit in past atrocities in places like Australia, New Zealand and Canada. As a result, Smith (2014) argues that the origins of social work in South Africa are better understood with their relatedness to socio-political, economic contexts and circumstances around people's livelihoods. In South Africa, inequality within social welfare during the apartheid years and the expression of racial domination over African

people has laid a foundation for the belittlement of indigenous ways of social work practice (Rautenbach & Chiba, 2010). Hence, Mabvurira (2018) and Mathebane (2020) verify that indigenous ways of helping within the African culture and of solving problems have been destroyed by colonisation.

2.5 A SHIFT TOWARDS A DECOLONISED SOCIAL WORK

Several different perceptions on decolonising social work in Africa and South Africa have emerged within social work dialogue in the last decade (Smith, 2014; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015; Mabvurira, 2018; Mathebane & Sekudu, 2018; Schenck, 2019; Mathebane, 2020). The decolonising of social work dialogue reflects on colonisation in Africa, the history of social work in South Africa and the legacy of apartheid, which remains entrenched in South Africa (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The current social work knowledge is argued to be marred by colonial domination and a flawed epistemology (Mathebane & Sekudu, 2018). This can be seen through colonial tenets in the history of social work about which Smith (2014:305) contends that the 'very origins of social work are found in the dynamics of the capitalist system and the resultant conditions of poverty and social conflict'. Hence. Mabvurira (2018) argues the importance of utilising indigenous knowledge for the adoption and advancement of Afrocentric social work. Afrocentric social work involves using African-centred theory and tools to empower and transform the lives of those of African descent (Fairfax, 2018). Therefore, critical reflections regarding social work practices in South Africa must be revised to be more suitable and relevant to our current context (Van Breda & Sekudu, 2019).

2.6 AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF SOCIAL WORK

As explored in the historical development of social work, social work has relied on professionally trained workers to intervene effectively with social challenges experienced by individuals and families (Midgley, 1995). Banks (2021) argues that the term 'profession' is used to give the occupation a status and to provide unity among social workers around the world. Also, Moorhead (2021) suggests that professional identity is an important element of being a social worker. Social work as a profession cannot be understood outside the principles of social justice, human rights, collective

responsibility, and respect for diversities (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). Hence, Engelbrecht and Ornellas (2020) argue that these principles ensure a profession that is relevant, accountable and just within a socio-political, economic and culturally diverse and complex environment.

However, there seems to be a discourse that reflects the status of social work as a profession as contentious (Lymbery, 2001; Healy & Meagher, 2004; Sewpaul, 2010; Maylea, 2020). Ornellas et al. (2016) argue that this is largely connected to the profession's continuous grappling with its identity and place not only within the broader welfare landscape, but within the functioning of society as a whole. In addition, Sewpaul and Henrickson (2019:1472–1473) assert this as the profession's 'preoccupation with proving itself as scientific' which has, in turn, 'distracted practitioners from communities and relational ways of working'. Sewpaul and Holsher (2004) refer to this as an ongoing questioning of the professional identity of social work, while other professions do not struggle with such questions in the same way. An example of this questioning of the professional identity of social work can be seen in Maylea's (2020) article in which he argues that the profession cannot be 'reformed and must be abolished'.

Furthermore, the professionalisation of social work is largely context specific and may differ from country to country (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). In some countries, social work is regarded as a fully developed profession, while in Asia and other developing parts of the world it is seen as being a semi-profession (Sewpaul, 2010). Healy and Meagher (2004) contend that, in Australia, Britain and Canada, social service work is being deprofessionalised as a result of many factors which include the fragmentation and routinisation of social work.

Weiss-Gal and Welbourne's (2008) paper compares the professional features of social work in ten countries. The authors then consider two competing approaches that serve as a framework for discussing the professional status of social work, which are the attributes approach and the power approach. Some of the indicators from both perspectives are public recognition of professional status; professional monopoly over specific types of work and professional autonomy of action. The study closes by indicating that, across the ten countries, 'the aspiration to professional status is strong

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and acts as a powerful motivating force behind the development of professional organisations, professional ethics, and professional knowledge' (Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008:289).

Within the South African context, the social work profession is largely defined by government rather than by the profession itself (Gray & Lombard, 2008). Social work has authority and is regarded as a profession through the Social Service Professions Act (110/78) (RSA, 1978). The Act provides the regulations for a statutory, autonomous Council for Social Service Professionals (SACSSP) and sets out, inter alia, an ethical code and standards for education and training in social work (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015).

On the other hand, Mabvurira (2018) argues that the social work profession was set up against a background of professional imperialism and suggests indigenisation of the profession. This is corroborated by Ornellas et al. (2016), who indicate that there is a need for the profession to acknowledge and integrate the indigenous knowledge, theories and values in each area, country and region when engaging in global discourse.

2.7 SOCIAL WORK THEORIES

In order to have an understanding of the relevance of theory for social work, it is pivotal to understand a scientific theory. A scientific theory is defined as an explanation of a phenomenon or of particular aspects that occur in the natural world that can be examined empirically (Rogers, 2018; Strydom & Fouché, 2021). These aspects are explained by scientists through careful observation, reporting regularities and theories. Strydom and Fouché (2021) assert that a theory assists in gaining and attaining reliable knowledge which helps with in-depth appreciation of the world. According to Dale, Smith, Norlin & Chess (2006), all theories start with a set of assumptions about humans and the world they live in.

Within social work, a theory is 'one that helps us to do or to understand social work' (van Breda, 2010:3). In this regard, Stepney and Ford (2012) assert that it is essential that social work practice is informed by a clear theoretical knowledge base and skills.

The global definition of social work recognises the profession as being underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). As such, the most popular theories utilised in social work include psychodynamic, psychosocial, systems, ecological, feminist and critical theories, among which are those also borrowed from other professions such as psychology and sociology (Fairfax, 2018).

Social development, also known as developmental social welfare, is the specific driving theory for South African social work (Patel, 2005; Gray, 2010; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). Midgely (1995:13) refers to social development as an approach 'for promoting people's welfare'. This developmental approach is distinct in its ability to merge social and economic development efforts. Patel and Ulriksen (2017) argue that South Africa's developmental approach to social welfare was shaped by the country's unique history of inequality and human rights violations owing to colonialism and apartheid. Thus, developmental social work, places emphasis on non-material resources such as the promotion of human rights, the integration of social and economic development and the facilitation of community participation as the centre of welfare policy and planning which is contrary to apartheid's residual and institutional welfare approach (Gray, 2010; Lombard, 2019).

However, Engelbrecht and Strydom (2015) argue that, in daily social work practice, the role and function of developmental social work is not yet clarified. In the same context, Gray (2010:94) argues that developmental welfare has 'failed dismally to improve the plight of the most disadvantaged of South Africa's population'. Engelbrecht and Strydom (2015) attribute this to the glaring contradictions between economic policy and social policy, which are presenting features of a welfare state. On the other hand, Weyers (2013) argues that there was never a clear depiction of how developmental social welfare should be defined in different contexts and this has given rise to a number of debates and interpretations that are apportioned to the construct. Van Breda (2018) suggests that, since the predominant mode of social service delivery in South Africa is social case work, which is focused on the individual, there needs to be an alignment of a social work practice with developmental welfare principles.

In view of the above, there is a call for the indigenisation of social work theories and intervention approaches. Through this action, South Africans may draw on the wealth of their cultural and social heritage as Africans (Van Breda, 2019). Mabvurira (2018) argues that indigenous theories should also be acknowledged and recognised. These include the significance of family members, the community, traditional leaders, and neighbours during the helping process. Mogorosi and Thabede (2018) emphasise the importance of the social work education community in developing theory and training that is suitable to its own socio-cultural context. Meanwhile, Shek (2017) questions whether social work theories with Western dominance can be used, for instance, in the Asia–Pacific region without specific challenges. This affirms that, although social work theories draw from a wide range of scientific theories, they may not be universally applicable.

2.8 SOCIAL WORK METHODS

An important element of the social work process is the selection of intervention methods (Engelbrecht, 1999). Social work methods refer to predominant methods and activities that social workers employ when helping clients. These methods are referred to as casework, group work, community work, policy, administration, research and supervision (Gray, 2010; Teater, 2010). The integration of casework, group work and community work and administration is regarded as the primary methods of social work practice (Engelbrecht, 2015). Policy making, supervision and management are considered to be secondary methods. As a result, they are often implemented by senior social workers who are more experienced (Engelbrecht, 1999; Johnson & Yanca, 2007). Also, secondary methods are not necessarily taken up by all social work professionals but are often implemented by social workers with more senior expertise (Zastrow, 2017).

The primary methods of social work are explained below:

2.8.1 Casework

Casework is the oldest method of social work practice as it can be seen in the beginning stages of social work through the work of Mary Richmond (Stuart, 2013). This method utilises a variety of skills, techniques and other aids to affect the client's

level of functioning (Black-Hughes & Strunk, 2010). Social casework services are provided for individuals and families on a one-to-one basis to help them resolve personal and social problems (Thompson & Thompson, 2008; Zastrow, 2017).

2.8.2 Group work

Group work is another method of social work which has been utilised since the 1930s (Doel, 2013). The focus is on members' emotional and social needs in order to achieve a specific set of group objectives within a group context (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2006). Unlike casework, which focuses on the individual, group work also focuses on the individual within the group itself and the variety of stages through which the group passes during its designated activities (Becker, 2005).

2.8.3 Community work

Community work is a generalised term which encompasses forms or models of community work, including community action, community development and community education (Popple, 2015). Community work refers to direct work with local people of a geographical or functional community to provide intervention for a problem or need they have identified (Twelvetrees, 1991; Henderson & Thomas, 2013). Weyers (2011) and specifically Zastrow (2017:44) argue that the aim of community work is 'assisting the local community to evaluate, plan, and coordinate efforts to provide for the community's health, welfare, and recreation needs'.

The point of departure in all three primary social work methods is that social problems cannot be viewed in isolation (Engelbrecht, 1999). Ornellas et al. (2016) argue that the social work profession has long been conflicted between community work and social change, and therapeutic individual- and family-based methods as their core functions. Even though that may be, Staniforth, Fouché and O'Brien (2011) argue that both interventions have a meaningful contribution to make in the social work practice framework. The amount of time spent with each social work method varies; however, every social worker will be expected to have training in all of them (Henderson & Thomas, 2013; Zastrow, 2017).

In South Africa for instance, most communities are ravaged by poverty and unemployment, with approximately 49.2% of people living beneath the upper bound

poverty line (StatsSA, 2017). However, the most widely used social work method is casework (Thabede, 2005; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). In his study, Thabede (2005) suggests that social casework in South Africa lacks cultural sensitivity and that the practice should undergo a fundamental shift to be relevant, contextual and culture sensitive. In the African culture, the importance of collective decision-making is emphasised, holding communal harmony and well-being in high regard (Van Breda, 2019). Therefore, there is a need for change within the African social work fraternity to develop decolonial epistemologies and pedagogical practices (Mathebane, 2020).

2.9 SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The environment within which social welfare services are rendered has changed over the past 15 years (DSD, 2013). The change has been brought about largely by changes in the socioeconomic and political situation in South Africa, which necessitated legislative and policy reviews to make social welfare programmes and services responsive to the needs of the poor, the marginalised and the most vulnerable groups in society (Lombard, 2008; DSD, 2016). The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) guided this transformation process (RSA, 2013) through the use and approach to practice of developmental social welfare (Patel, 2005; Weyers, 2013).

Hence, in the South African context, social services are exercised in various settings such as government and non-governmental sectors (Rautenbach & Chiba, 2010; DSD & SACCP, 2012). These consist of a range of departments, including the offices of premiers, child welfare, family and marriage societies, hospitals, mental health settings, disability, the aged, early childhood development, youth services, correctional services, work with offenders outside of prison, work with persons with epilepsy, social work in schools and in cooperate settings (RSA, 2013; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). Through the implementation of a social development approach, attempts focus on trying to bridge the micro–macro service delivery practices (Rautenbach & Chiba, 2010).

Presently, the review of the White Paper (RSA, 2016a) report contains key observations and proposals from the beneficiaries of social services and the broader voice of the sector represented by non-governmental organisations and institutions of

higher learning that produce social service professionals as well as social service professionals themselves. It is indicated in the review report that many of the services delivered previously continue to be delivered. However, a range of additional services and programmes have been developed and are currently supplied. These include, for example, active ageing, drop-in centres, home- and community-based care services, stimulation centres, diversion shelters, and prevention and early intervention programmes. Provinces continue to fund several new fields such as youth development, women development, victim empowerment and HIV and AIDS (RSA, 2016).

When it comes to policies within the South African social work domain, the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016a) outlines the broad policy guiding principles for social welfare services and social work. This policy document has had a significant effect on social welfare and social work service delivery in South Africa. Social work became a well-known role player in the provision of organised social welfare services, both in the governmental (primary sector) and non-governmental sectors (Gray & Lombard, 2008). As a result, the Comprehensive Report on the Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (2016a) acknowledged the crucial role that social work played in relation to the provision of social welfare services and legitimised the profession as the chief provider of social welfare services in the South African context.

The Department of Social Development is the primary body of the government sector that is responsible for providing strategic direction for social development, protection, and welfare social services to the vulnerable and that funds national organisations (DSD, 2016). At the non-governmental level, social welfare services are rendered through profit and non-profit organisations (NPOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), and Community-based Organisations (CBOs) (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). The adoption of the White Paper as a policy document, came with the introduction of the concept of developmental social welfare and enabled the expansion of social assistance programmes in South Africa (DSD, 2016).

As highlighted earlier in the text, the domain of social work has inherited the legacy of colonisation with Western traditions considered to be universally applicable worldwide

(Rautenbach & Chiba, 2010; Smith, 2014; Mathebane, 2020; Maylea, 2020). In a study conducted by Ornellas et al. (2019) in mapping the current status of social work across 10 countries, the authors highlight two seemingly contradicting ideas. The first is the growing demand for the use of social work in areas with social and economic inequality and migration. The second factor is the evident infiltration of the global neoliberal agenda into the values and ideals of the social work profession worldwide. This view is supported by Ornellas (2018) when she highlights the fact that the social work profession battles between the two dimensions both in the Department of Social Development (state) and the NGO, thereby suggesting that there are still shared features across the Global North and South that influence social work practice in South Africa.

2.10 SOCIAL WORK ROLES

Building on this foundation, social workers fulfil crucial roles when delivering social welfare services (Mkhize, 2014). In working with individuals, groups, families and community organisations, social workers understand the complexity of their role in being change agents (Engelbrecht, 1999; Henderson & Thomas, 2013; Zastrow, 2017). Ornellas et al. (2016) describe the role of the social worker as one who participates in and influences different levels (micro, macro and meso) of society and functioning. This approach involves working at the micro level with individuals, at the meso level with institutions, and at macro levels with public advocacy.

The Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997 (DSD, 2016b) proposed that clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of social workers and other categories of social service professionals be developed. Engelbrecht (2015) highlights this as a concern, in that the social work role is defined largely by the government rather than by the profession and that this could jeopardise the independence and professional credibility of the social work profession in the country.

Furthermore, the social service professionals comprise social workers, social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers, community development practitioners, youth workers and probation officers (SACSSP, 2012). While social work is unique in some

ways, it is fully expected to overlap with the other social service professionals in terms of roles and functions performed. However, there is a need to ensure that the professional roles of social work are appropriate to the demands of different countries, and this could be achieved through a deliberate attempt to indigenise social work (Mogorosi & Thabede, 2018).

2.11 ROLES FULFILLED BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN GENERALIST PRACTICE

Within the scope of generalist social work practice, there are distinctive roles of social workers which are identified by a number of authors (Pardeck, 1988; Hepworth & Larsen, 1993; Morales & Sheafor, 2011; Mkhize, 2014; Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020). What usually influences the intervention roles fulfilled by the social worker is the policies, procedures, nature and field of intervention (Engelbrecht, 1999). Additionally, Chibaya (2022) notes sensitivity and flexibility as key in ensuring the social workers' choice of the role they adopt.

In the following section, the researcher will focus on the roles performed particularly by South African social workers (Engelbrecht, 1999).

2.11.1 Enabler

When linking the different levels of a client's functioning, the social worker can play the role of an enabler in helping individual clients to embrace their own strengths and abilities (Black-Hughes & Strunk, 2010). In other words, the enabler role entails helping service users efficiently and effectively to find ways of altering their environment (Potgieter, 1998).

2.11.2 Counsellor

This role pertains to empowering service users to deal with their social problems through the process of interviewing them (Engelbrecht, 1999). Social work counsellors need to be competent in a range of skills which include being able to listen effectively (Potgieter, 1998).

2.11.3 Mediator

Within the social work context, the social worker assumes the role of a peacemaker to resolve conflict which may be present between individuals and families (Compton & Galaway, 1999).

2.11.4 Activist

According to Chibaya (2022), social workers as activists are involved in initiatives that promote human rights and social justice. In this role the social worker has already assumed the side of the vulnerable and oppressed (Engelbrecht, 1999).

2.11.5 Advocate

Social workers exercising this role identify and champion a cause of the individuals, groups and communities (Compton & Galaway, 1999). It is a concept which social work borrowed from the legal profession (Compton & Galaway, 1994).

2.11.6 Broker

According to Hoffman and Sallee (1994), social workers deal in broader social issues relating to social justice and the attainment of human rights for vulnerable populations. Here, the social workers base their action on knowledge of the community and its resources and puts people in touch with facilities and services that they are often not aware of or are too scared to use (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993).

2.11.7 Facilitator

A facilitator can be considered to be a person who helps a group of people to work together effectively through meticulous planning and steering them to understand and attain their common objectives (Potgieter, 1998). The social worker can also play the role of a facilitator for the families or groups through the facilitation and linking of psychosocial support with NGOs and other government agencies (Mkhize, 2014).

2.11.8 Coordinator

Within a community set-up the social worker may also be called upon to take on the role of a coordinator by working in different ways with the broader population in combining community-wide resolutions (Zastrow, 2017). Worth highlighting in terms of coordinating is the involvement of service users themselves in determining and meeting their own needs (Chibaya, 2022).

2.12 SOCIAL WORK POST-COVID-19

The COVID 19 pandemic which has affected the world, has altered the way of life and has affected people's lives and communities everywhere (Mpofu, Dahlmanns & Chirwa, 2021). The social work profession was not an exception to the unprecedented changes and, in some instances, to challenges globally (Banks & Rutter, 2021; Recmanová, Kalenda, & Kowaliková, 2021; Ready et al., 2022).

The first instance relates to information and communication technologies between the social worker and the client since social workers were forced to conduct their interventions remotely, because of social distance precautions (Mishna, Milne, Bogo & Pereira, 2020). This occurrence has transformed how social services are provided (Recmanová et al., 2021). For instance, in the case of social workers who provide palliative care their quality of care, which is often through face-to-face contact, was affected by the implementation of remote palliative care programmes (Snoubar, 2021). Many families were prevented from entering hospital and care facilities, which resulted in the loss of physical contact of the family with the patient.

The other instance relates to ethical aspects of providing interventions to clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Banks and Rutter (2021) conducted a study in which they investigated the impact of COVID-19 on UK social work practice specifically through an ethical lens. The study results revealed that there were ethical challenges where social workers found themselves having to weigh between individual needs versus public health risks and whether to follow government or agency rules. Mishna et al. (2020) posit that there is a paradigm shift in social workers' interventions which prompts creativity. On the other hand, these authors also note the impact of the transition in the inability to protect client confidentiality and privacy because of the use of different Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platforms which may not be compliant with the various Acts that pertain to the protection of private information.

2.13 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a person outside the social work profession is able – in this chapter – to comprehend fully what the social work profession encompasses. This chapter

presented a thorough discussion of the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its definition, principles, historical development, professional status, theoretical basis, methods, the domain of social work in South Africa and the roles assumed by social workers.

Chapter Three explores the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions within a global and a South African context on the basis of the ecological systems perspective.

CHAPTER 3: THE SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two attempted to discuss the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its definition, principles, historical development, professional status, theoretical basis, methods, the domain of social work in South Africa and the roles assumed by social workers. The said endeavour has laid the foundation from which one can comprehend fully what the social work profession entails.

As such, the second objective of this study aims to analyse the scope of social work practice at a higher education setting and at Stellenbosch University in particular. A theoretical framework is central to any research plan. This framework will be presented in this chapter by means of the ecological systems perspective. The theoretical underpinning shows the various levels of higher education institutions, specifically, how Stellenbosch University social work practice permeates the higher education environment.

3.2 THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

According to Teater (2014:116), the ecological systems perspective concerns the 'interaction and interdependence of organisms to the environment'. Within the social sciences, the ecological perspective is used metaphorically. The concept of ecology links life to its natural habitat and, in this perspective, to its environment, where the relationship between organisms and their physical environment is the focus (Dale et al., 2006). Before discussing the different concepts in ecological systems perspective, a brief history will be presented.

3.2.1 A brief history of ecological systems perspective

The concept of ecological perspective has been developed by several authors, including Lewin (1952), Germain (1973) and Bronfenbrenner (1979a). Bronfenbrenner (1979a) is frequently applauded with illuminating contextual variation in human development (Darling, 2007). His reference to the theoretical ecology perspective has its roots in human development science, which studies the developing person in their natural environment or ecology. Bronfenbrenner (1989) refers to this perspective as

embedded on a set of 'nested structures' which interact and are reciprocal. These are the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro systems. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979a), development can be seen through these interrelated systems, in how a person perceives and relates to their environment, and in their capacity to sustain the environment's properties.

After what was offered by the above-mentioned early ecological theorists, Germain's groundwork offered a new way of viewing social work practice (Pardeck, 1988). Germain referred to the adaptive balance of organisms and their environment as a 'goodness-of-fit' and suggested that it should be aimed at correcting the 'misfit' between the two because it leads to stress in a person's life (Germain, 1973). This insight set the stage for the development of the life model by Germain and Gitterman (Nash, Munford & O'Donoghue, 2005). This model was developed from an application of the ecological perspective.

In social work practice settings, applying ecology to human beings involves the perspective that humans interact with their physical, social, and cultural environment (Teater, 2014). The physical, social and cultural environment referred to is the natural world including the built world designed by man, the social interactions with family and friends or the community, and the norms, beliefs and language that shape a person's perspective. Through the brief history of ecology, we begin to understand the influential and reciprocal nature through which the person relates to their environment. In linking the ecological systems perspective as a relevant theoretical framework for this study of social work in higher education, Stellenbosch University (SU) is modelled after a system as a result of its mutual interaction and influence on its subjects. This theory will assist us to understand what the social workers' interactions with the systems are which influence the client(s) or student(s) life, e.g., family, the community and institutional policies and legislation.

3.3 SYSTEMS WITHIN THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Bronfenbrenner (1979a) explains that, in the world of an individual, five systems of interaction exist, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. However, for the purpose of this research, we will discuss the

micro, meso and macro systems to depict how social workers interact with the different levels of a higher education system. The systems are expounded upon below:

3.3.1 Microsystem

The microsystem is the smallest and most immediate structure in which the person responds or the people with whom the person interacts on a face-to-face basis. In this instance, the microsystem represents social workers who interact on a daily basis with their service users. What is also important here, is the other persons in the setting, the nature of these links, and their direct or indirect influence on the development of the person. In relation to this study, the relationships within the microsystem include reciprocal interactions of social workers with students, student leaders, their unit heads, fellow social workers, and other staff members in the higher education institution, who provide student support services (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a:7; Ott, Quinn & Thompson, 2004).

3.3.2 Mesosystem

The meso level is influenced by a set of links among the microsystems representing the social workers at the middle (meso) level of institutional management. Bernstein and Gray (1996) classify this level as being more concerned with relationships among the systems in an environment and at the organisational level. According to Rooney, et al. (2013), social work services at this level entail group work. The stronger and more diverse the links between the microsystems, the greater the positive influence that the mesosystem has on individuals (Nash et al., 2005). At Stellenbosch University, this system is represented by middle management from different centres and divisions (directors and senior directors).

3.3.3 Macrosystem

The macrosystem is related to policy and legislation which, in this study, could relate to the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (2013), the Service Delivery Model for Developmental Social Welfare Services (2006), and the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, among others, as well as Stellenbosch University policies and other relevant institutional policies that guide service delivery in terms of the support services that are provided by the institution. This level is also symbolised by policy makers in the form of top management. In the case of Stellenbosch University, it is the Rectorate. Thus, the scope of social work practice within higher

education institutions can be influenced by laws and policies, some of which are owned by certain Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs).

3.4 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS IN ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

This section presents a discussion of the different concepts of the ecological systems perspective, which will be applied within the context of Stellenbosch University.

3.4.1 Person-in-environment

Arguably the most noteworthy concept in ecological thinking is the reciprocity of person–environment exchanges. According to Germain and Gitterman (1980), person–environment fit refers to a person's or group's needs, rights, capacities and goals in respect of their physical and social environment within a specific cultural context. Within this context, these exchanges are influenced by the understanding of norms, principles and cultural beliefs that control the way individuals control and use their environment. To add, Germain and Gitterman (1996) postulate that the person-in-environment in social work practice indicates the significance of a person and their behaviour in relation to the environment where the person lives and acts.

As individuals move through the course of their life, the ecological perspective assumes that individuals try to maintain a good level of fit between themselves and their environment (Teater, 2010). When there is a good fit, the environment provides resources and experiences that assure the person's optimal functioning through biological, cognitive, emotional and social development (Germain & Gitterman, 1996). For example, if social workers in higher education institutions render and provide sufficient services and resources that are sensitive to the well-being of the students, the students are more likely to utilise these resources. However, development and functioning may be impaired, and the environment may be damaged when there is a poor fit between the person and the environment.

3.4.2 Physical and social environment

According to Teater (2010), the physical environment refers to the natural world and the built world in the way that the environment is constructed by society. While the social environment denotes the relations and human communication within society, people's experiences from their own beliefs, acquired knowledge, cultural

understandings and norms, further influence the way in which they use and respond to the physical and social environments. In this way, individuals are known to be operating in a mutually beneficial process in their physical, social and cultural settings (Germain, 1973; Siporin, 1980).

In terms of this study, the services that are provided by the social workers across campuses of Stellenbosch University take place within a physical–social environment, which is their work environment. This is in line with the relevance of the ecological systems perspective to social work within a higher education institution. It is important for social workers to understand how their interactions with others in their social context influence the way in which they do social work.

3.4.3 Habitat and niche

According to Payne (2005), habitat and niche refer to the physical and social settings of the client and the particular social position that the client holds. These play a crucial role for an individual as they influence how their needs, rights and aspirations are met. Germain and Gitterman (1996:9) argue that these can interfere with the basic functions of family and community life. If habitats do not support the growth and social functioning of the individuals in them, this could most likely lead to isolation, disorientation and helplessness. Most people succeed when habitats have an abundance of resources that are required for their growth and development.

Niche, the social position that the client holds; is closely linked to the position persons hold in the family, community or the social system. Niches can be oppressive, and this can be linked to factors relating to power (Gitterman & Germain, 2008). When linking this concept to this study, the physical and social setting that social workers assume is the SU campus. The question is, when examining the needs of the students who access social work services, what social position do they hold within SU? Are they students from low-income families? What is the role that their family of origin and environment play in their current performance on campus?

3.4.4 Open and closed systems

The value of the social work profession is that it deals with wholes, rather than with parts of human or social behaviour (Payne, 2005:143). This assists in reflecting

whether a system is closed or open, in order to gain an understanding of how various other systems influence people and their environment. Von Bertalanffy (1969), who is regarded as the originator of the general systems theory, argues that systems are sets of elements standing in interrelation.

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2012:30) classify systems as open or closed in relation to how they interact with the outside environment. Open systems are permeable and allow energy to cross the boundary (Payne, 2005). They are characterised by continuous activity which allows input and output exchanges with the environment (Dale et al., 2006). Therefore, openness is crucial for growth and change: the less the interaction among systems, the greater the disequilibrium experienced. To place this in context of the study, if social workers in higher education institutions continue interacting with various systems for intervention, there is an increase in the exchange of resources and information.

Closed systems do not interact with their environments and the boundaries are impermeable. Closed systems are depicted to be rigid and totally independent of their environment (Chetkow-Yanoov,1997:25). Systems cannot completely isolate themselves, in particularly systems involving human beings, since they tend to interact with other small and large units. Once they do, this can have a negative impact on the homeostasis of the individual and the family (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1997:40). Sheddy (2013) further states that systems (open/closed) which create and uphold oppression, discrimination and injustice should be questioned and analysed. Social workers must employ a set of principles that aim to understand which systems support or oppress people. When one looks into the university and the family of origin as systems, the family of origin is a closed system in that the social worker cannot interact with them directly but needs to do so via the community social worker, should the social worker need to assess home circumstances. This can impact negatively on the student as it may delay the assistance they would receive from the social worker.

3.4.5 Coping, human-relatedness and power

The other important concepts within the ecological systems perspective are coping, human-relatedness and power. All three concepts are critical and interdependent;

therefore, the social worker must act in ways that restore, support and increase these attributes (Germain & Gitterman, 1996).

- **Coping measures**

Coping is defined as cognitive and behavioural ways in which to change an aspect of oneself, the environment, the exchanges between them, or all three to enable the management of negative stressful situations. These measures and ways are deliberate in order to influence the environment and to use personal resources, which include problem solving, motivation and the ability to use information and resources from the environment. In addition, to cope entails altering the quality of person–environment fit to improve the levels of fit (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Germain & Gitterman,1996:14). The social worker provides coping mechanisms to the client as soon as the client is part of the helping relationship. Should the client (in this instance, the student) possess these coping mechanisms, their well-being would improve significantly. Since higher education contexts tend to place great emphasis on mental well-being, occupational well-being, and intellectual well-being, this would have positive results for SU as an institution responsible for promoting students' well-being (Harward, 2016).

- **Human-relatedness**

Human-relatedness refers to the individual's ability to sustain meaningful relationships. Bowlby's (1973) concept of attachment is linked to relatedness. Within social work intervention with families, this concept emphasises the innate capacity of people and human need to belong and have healthy relationships (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). Lack of support networks may often lead to experiences of isolation and loneliness. Therefore, the need to be close to people who influence one's life is paramount, and Payne (2005:151) refers to these as attachments. In this study, this links in terms of the services of social workers. Human relations can be enhanced as a result of social work practice.

- **Power**

Bronfenbrenner (2005), in his account of power, addresses the concept of coercive power, which is withholding power from marginalised and vulnerable groups based on

personal and cultural biases. Enforcing coercive power has consequences that maintain oppressive institutions such as poverty, racism and gender exploitation. The other is exploitative power, the exploitation by the dominant group that leads to negative person–environment relationships, which can be seen through injustices and the suffering of vulnerable and oppressed groups. This view was further supported by Germain (1996:24), that the withholding of power by dominant groups leads to the oppression of vulnerable groups. Germain and Gitterman (1996) demonstrate that the failure to advocate for power equality could result in limiting growth promotion. Therefore, investigating the scope of social work practice within higher education institutions should not be overlooked as this might be a way of empowering the students who receive services from social workers. These students come from diverse communities, and it might happen that many of them have been affected by oppression and exploitation.

3.5 THE RELEVANCE OF THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE TO SOCIAL WORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

As explained above, the ecological systems perspective assists in understanding how individuals and groups are interdependent, interact and link with various dynamics at different levels of organisation in the social environment (Teater, 2014). In this sense, the way in which social workers engage with people's problems and the professional interventions they offer depend largely on their observation of how the world in which they live operates (Sheedy, 2013). In the case of social workers in higher education institutions, a clear understanding of the exchanges between people and their environment, helps to gain a deeper understanding of the source of the problem that is faced. This is an important concept for the study as it involves the experiences of key informants on how they perceive students to be interacting and making use of their physical and social environments (namely, the support services provided by social workers in higher education institutions).

Furthermore, in the context of the study, when it comes to the social position of clients, social workers often provide social work services to students who are marginalised, especially those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have also seen in a previous section on social work within SU that the social work profession is known

for food-security support. Since the social work profession started out with Mary Richmond through charity organisations (Lymbery, 2005), could social work at SU be seen as charity work? Do social workers at SU utilise the driving theory of South African social work, which is known as developmental social welfare (Van Breda, 2010)?

However, another important aspect to consider is the involvement of the family as a habitat. According to Nyembezi (Personal interview, 3 August 2022), they as SU social workers do not engage with the family of the student when providing interventions and depend on the Department of Social Development social workers for home visitations to assess the home circumstances. This aspect agrees with Lutz (1956), argued to be among the first to propose a systems model of social work practice, who emphasised the 'multiorganizational' nature of the environments through which our clients receive intervention. In this case, the social worker's ability to interact with other systems underlines the fact that the university system can be regarded as an open system, allowing for increased support for students.

Furthermore, if one considers the intervention methods that need to be selected when helping clients, could this mean that social workers at SU utilise casework more frequently than the other methods such as group work and community work? Linking this to the theoretical framework of the study, which is the ecological systems perspective, the perspective has a holistic and socially sensitive nature regarding assessment and intervention.

3.6 SOCIAL WORK WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A GLOBAL CONTEXT

There is a significantly wide array of global literature on social work services within higher education institutions (Jones & Donovan, 1986; Vonk et al., 2000; Pomrenke & Morris, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013; Shelesky et al., 2016; Sheats, 2017). In some global literature, social work services within higher education institutions assume the role of case manager, rather than the explicit title of social worker (Adams, Hazelwood & Hayden, 2014; Shelesky et al., 2016; Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020;).

Case managers engage clients 'in the collaborative process of identifying, planning, accessing, advocating for, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating resources, support, and services' (Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020:1). Moore (1990) argues that case management is a major component of the current mainstream of social work practice. As a result, the mass shooting tragedies that swept across American campuses during 2007 and 2008 led to an increase of visibility of case managers in most higher education institutions (Shelesky et al., 2016). Although research on social work in higher education institutions within South Africa is noted as being sparse (Mkhize, 2014), could it be possible that this information pertaining to post descriptions not being explicitly noted as 'social worker' is the same in the South African context? In examining this question, it would be important to be cognisant of this information during data collection when the researcher consults with key informants.

According to Pomrenke and Morris (2010), social work is part of a multidisciplinary team of specialists that ensures that students have the support and guidance needed to achieve their education goals. In a higher education institution, one will find that social workers may assume the role of a mental health provider/practitioner in providing psychosocial support and counselling services for students through student affairs divisions[1], university counselling centres and other avenues of providing support to students (Vonk et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2013; Schreiber, 2014; Sheats, 2017;). Social workers provide counselling either for individual students or for groups (Vonk et. al., 2000; Shelesky et. al., 2016). This means that social workers are fundamental participants within multidisciplinary teams, as they provide care from within a holistic continuum of care (IFSW & IASSW, 2014).

Looking into the models of practice used in colleges and universities in the Global North, Vonk et al. (2000) conducted a study to identify a model of social practice for use in post-secondary educational settings. The study found that the social workers used some form of traditional clinical model of practice by conducting assessments, advocating for students and providing systemic change. However, Raphael and Goldrick-Rab (2020) point out that both clinical and non-clinical models of practice are

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[1] 'Student affairs generally focuses on all things related to the student and the student's life in the institution, mostly outside the classroom. It also refers to the administrative unit of the institution which houses and focuses on student programmes, activities, functions and services' (Lumadi & Mampuru, 2010:717).

used in higher education. Clinical models of practice focus on students' psychological well-being and non-clinical models focus on assessment, student advocacy, student empowerment and follow-up. As a result, Vonk et al. (2000) state that the social worker exercising the clinical model is likely to spend considerable time in casework activities, while the social worker utilising the non-clinical model will most likely spend considerable time assessing systems to identify where intervention will benefit the most students. It is important that these models are adapted to serve the identified needs of students and are utilised according to the resources of the university (Shelesky et al., 2016; Vonk et al., 2000).

3.7 AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

In providing an overview of social work in the higher education sector in South Africa, it is necessary to first contextualise the higher education system with reference to South Africa's foundational history of apartheid within higher education and its enduring legacies. Within the context of the legacy of inequality, South Africa can be deemed as one of the most unequal countries in the world and is characterised by a young population (StatsSA, 2018:42). The higher education system in South Africa is no exception to inequality. It has been recorded that 51% of the youth between 18 and 24 claimed that they do not have financial means to pay for tuition fees (StatsSA, 2017). The poorest students are usually the ones affected by the limited resources (Jansen, 2017). It is necessary to understand this context of the higher education landscape of South Africa in which social workers provide interventions.

3.7.1 The apartheid era

Higher education under the apartheid government was characterised by the marginalisation of the majority African[2] students, underpinned by the 1984 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Sehoole, 2005). This constitution designated higher education institutions by race and ethnicity where each institution was for the exclusive use of one race and ethnic group (Bunting, 2006; RSA, 1996). For instance, in the Eastern Cape, there was a division of the Xhosa nations where the University of Fort Hare was meant for all Xhosas from the Ciskei region and University of the Transkei was for those in the Transkei region. The same applied with

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[2] Definition: African in this case refers to black, coloured and of Indian descent.

Kwa-Zulu Natal where there were universities for Zulu people and Indian people. These universities did not have high-ranking degree programmes such as Accounting, Engineering or Science; those degree courses were only designated for white universities (Bunting, 2006). Funding for black universities was limited and under government control (Jansen, 2003). Black universities had to spend their funds annually and the amounts they did not spend were taken away at the end of the year. This meant black universities could not spend money on long-term projects such as building laboratories or paying off huge services which take more than a year to render (Nkomo & Sehoole, 2007). The apartheid system limited the courses of study at black institutions[3], denying access to educational development and leaving black institutions chronically under-resourced (Jansen, 2003; Soudien, 2008).

Today some universities are referred to as historically white (those universities which were for white students) and historically black (those universities which were for black students). The inclusion of racist apartheid policies into Higher Education and Training (HET) became the source of great conflict and tension as these institutions were limited in their ability to meet the moral, political, social and economic demands of freedom (RSA, 1997). It is within this bleak historical background that the challenges of the past still persist in higher education in South Africa today. This information is important to the understanding of how Stellenbosch University is classified in relation to the history of higher education as the case of this study.

3.7.2 The post-apartheid era

The South African Higher Education and Training landscape has undergone a transformation since the dawn of democracy in 1994. This transformation was necessitated by the transition from a nationalist, authoritative and racially institutionalised apartheid government to an open society in which government is based on the will of the people ('democracy') (RSA, 1996).

The shift to post-apartheid South Africa came with mergers in higher education between 2002 and 2005 in pursuit of the goal to have a non-racialised education

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[3] Historically black institutions refer to universities and technikons located in the former 'independent homelands' for African students. All of the public sector institutions were created on the basis of race, language and ethnicity under the apartheid system (Jansen, 2003).

system that curtails the racial inequalities relating to access to higher education (Jansen, 2003). The idea was to break the historic resemblance of white and black and to reform to a new look of universities. This meant that historically white universities (HWU) had to merge with historically black universities (HBU) to break the unevenness in resources, teaching, and learning. But this was not always a success because some universities were not merged, i.e., Stellenbosch University and UCT, to mention a few. And where universities merged, the HWU still hold more power than the HBU. For example, the University of North West, formerly known as Bophuthatswana University for Tswana people merged with the former white Potchefstroom University. Today this university is known as North West University. There are still more resources in the historically white campus than in the historically black campus (Jansen, 2003; Nkomo & Sehoole, 2007). Could this mean that the services and interventions provided by social workers at each higher education institutions vary according to how well resourced an institution is? Although the provision of social development services is not narrowly seen as a matter of charity, the Comprehensive Review of the White Paper for Social Welfare (DSD, 2016b:27) has noted 'the past and ongoing racial, gender, sectoral and geographic biases in access to, and delivery of, services'.

It was further established that the overall challenges facing the higher education sector include: the poor representation of staff and students from different population groups; the differences in terms of capacities and facilities between historically black and historically white institutions (RSA, 1997b; National Plan for Higher Education, 2001); transformation challenges related to racial and language divisions and exclusionary institutional cultures underpinned by the changing student profile and access to funding (Jansen, 2003; Hall, 2015; RSA, 2016); management, leadership and governance failures (Seepe, 2017); and inadequate public funding of higher education in order to provide equity of access (Badat, 2010).

As challenges broaden, efforts by higher education institutions to provide student support services are becoming increasingly imperative. Speckman and Mandew (2014) assert that there is a thin line between academic development and social and personal development, and that one does not happen without the other. Therefore, it is necessary for health and supportive strategies to consider all dimensions of well-

being in order to provide a holistic approach (Koen et al., 2017; Reich, 2013). According to Tinto (2017), students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic, social, and personal support. Jones and Donovan (1986) have also shown that students who are part of informal structures such as study groups and athletics teams and those who attend events are more likely to persist through college than students who are not part of such informal structures. It is for this reason that a student-centred system should conceptualise itself around the needs of students, and that student development and student support should be at the centre of that system (Bawa, 2014).

Among the many initiatives and policy reforms aimed at restructuring and transforming the higher education sector, student support services have been identified as a critical instrument in this process (RSA, 2013). Student support services are regarded as services related to the development and enhancing of personal and social skills and the support of students in an aligned and integrated way (Van Heerden, 2009). The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) describes student support services as academic support, career counselling, assisting students to get bursaries and completing their programmes of study, and assistance with finding workplaces for the practical components of their programmes and jobs on completion of their studies.

Furthermore, student well-being and student support has received much attention in South Africa in recent years (Schreiber, 2017). This was triggered by the protest action that ensued in 2015, which began as a protest over proposed fee increases and soon led to a nationwide call for free education (Naicker, 2016). These protest groups were referred to collectively as the fallist movements and included the fees must fall movement (FMF), Rhodes must fall (RMF), #WitsSoWhite and #OpenStellis (Jansen, 2017). In the aftermath of the fallist movement, many issues relating to the disgruntlement of students in regard to the slow pace of transformation were brought to the fore again. These mainly highlighted the way that poverty, inequality, and exclusionary institutional cultures impact the way that many students live and learn on campus (Letseka & Breier, 2008; Machika & Johnson, 2015; Naicker, 2016; Okoye, 2018). The poorest students are usually the ones affected by limited resources (Jansen, 2017).

3.7.3 Social work within higher education institutions: A South African context

Mkhize (2014) makes the case for the importance of the social work profession in higher education institutions by distinguishing certain roles that are performed by social workers in higher education in South Africa. These roles are consistent with the roles identified in the previous chapter regarding traditional generalist social work interventions. Also, these roles can be constructed according to the context of the university and the particular client and situation (Mkhize, 2014). The roles are:

- **Advocacy**

  Mkhize (2014) argues that social workers have to use the institutional powers granted to them to ensure that students' individual and collective rights are protected. This means that social workers within a higher education institution can exact pressure on the institutional structures to change when they cease to address the needs of vulnerable populations (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994).

- **Facilitator**

  Higher education institutions have various functionaries that aid in the assistance of the student population. The social worker plays a facilitative role in making sure that students do benefit from the services of these functionaries. Within a higher education institution this could look like active and purposeful guiding by the social worker in helping a group of people to attain their common objectives (Potgieter, 1998).

- **Programme designer**

  Mkhize (2014:117) postulates the idea that social workers should be involved in the development of a 'needs-based programme' as a response to the various challenges that students face on campus. Within Stellenbosch University this could take the shape of designing a cocurricular programme which has a particular focus, e.g., for students with disabilities.

- **Case management**

  The role requires the social worker to ensure that they arrange, coordinate and monitor a range of services to meet the needs of the student. This means managing the case from when it is reported until it is finalised (Mkhize, 2014).

Given the growing need for rapid change in the higher education sector to provide student support services – all of the aforementioned arguments re-emphasise the importance of researching the extent to which social work practice could continue as a response to providing services to students.

3.8 THE NATURE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: A STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Traditionally, the purpose of universities was to provide education, training, research and social impact (Hibbs, 1999; Hay & Fourie, 2000). However, Waghid (2017:2) asserts the notion of a university as an 'institution-in-becoming', which is responsive to the challenges it faces. According to Le Grange (2009:105), the evolving purpose of a university is due to the consequence of two sets of pressures, which he refers to as 'inside-out' developments and 'outside-in' developments. 'Inside-out' developments refer to pressures for a shift in knowledge production. 'Outside-in' developments, on the other hand, refer to social concerns which include aspects such as socioeconomic patterns of participation, involving who gets access to education, health care, decent housing and social integration (Le Grange, 2009). It is the latter that is aligned with the concerns of this research since these 'outside-in' factors tend to influence the social workers' intervention within a higher education institution (Chitanand, Rathilal & Rambharos, 2018).

Stellenbosch University (SU), which is the case of this research study, is situated in the town of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape province of South Africa and was founded in 1918. The university has ten faculties on five campuses and currently has 31,540 students. The student profile of the university consists of 64.3% undergraduate, 33.2% postgraduate and 2.6% occasional students, with 44.5% identifying as male and 55.5% identifying as female. SU is known as a residential campus with an active residential life. Approximately 30% of SU students make use of residential housing, while the majority are commuting students (SU, 2021a).

Stellenbosch University recently (in 2021) adopted a new Mental Health Plan for students (SU, 2021). This document is the only official document that makes reference

to the university's '"mental health and social services" (SU, 2021:10). The institutional functionary (curator) responsible for this plan is the Division for Student Affairs (DSAf), which is led by a Senior Director. DSAf comprises three centres, namely the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD), the Centre for Student Communities (CSC), and the Centre for Student Leadership, Experiential Education and Citizenship (CSLEEC) which together facilitate an ecosystem of support, development, and engagement for the university community.

3.8.1 The scope of social work practice within different levels of institutional expectations

The Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) is one of the three centres within Student Affairs that provides student-centred psychological development and support services for students. Specialists such as psychologists, a psychometrist, registered counsellors and social workers have been selected carefully to meet the needs of the university community.

The CSCD comprises four units that are briefly elaborated upon here:

- The Unit for Psychotherapeutic and Support Services (UPSS) offers psychotherapy, group interventions and social work services for students with psychological, emotional, personal and welfare needs. It is within this unit that the bulk of social work services lie (SU, 2021).
- The Disability Unit (DU) offers various services to students with disabilities or special learning needs, including the development of accessible texts, advice about and access to support technology and innovative academic support.
- The Unit for Graduand Career Services (UGCS) provides support to students in the process of entering the world of work. This includes sessions about careers, compiling a CV, exposure to network opportunities and job-searching methods.
- The Unit for Academic Counselling and Development (UACD) offers consultations, career counselling and work sessions focused on academic skills, with the aim to equip students with the necessary skills to reach their potential.

Noting the location of social work services, primarily through the identification of these units, it is likely that the majority of perspectives on the extent of social work within SU would be provided by key informants from these units.
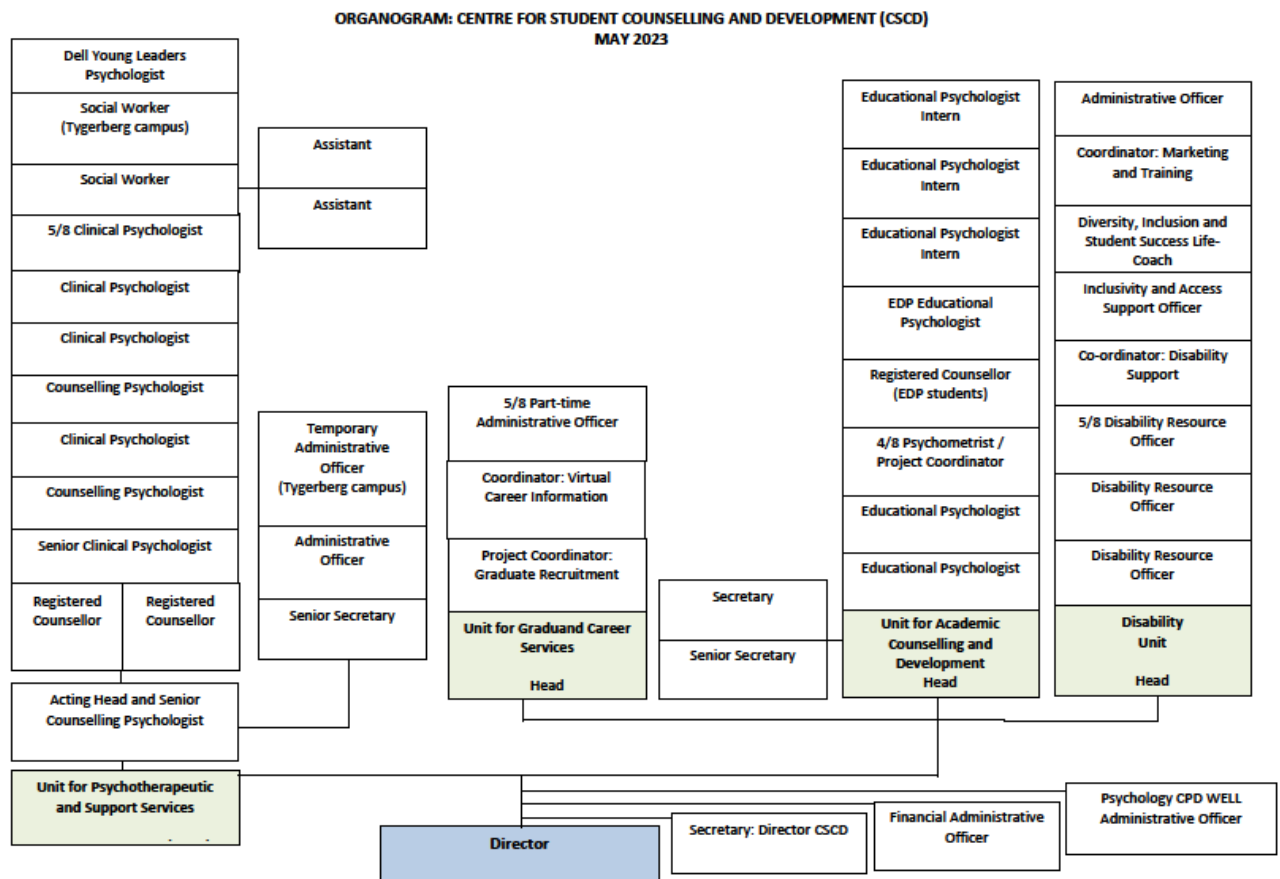
Figure 3.1: CSCD Organogram (SU, 2023)

3.8.1.1 Faculties and departments

Some faculties have within them Student Affairs coordinators who are responsible for any student-related crises. They also provide limited counselling to students, in accordance with their capacity and resources. Then they must facilitate referrals to relevant on-campus and off-campus support services, as needed, and can consult with staff on how to support students appropriately (SU, 2022).

3.8.1.2 The Centre for Student Communities (CSC)

CSC, as a centre within the Division of Student Affairs, manages all SU residences and private student organisation wards. Important role players in this regard include the residence head, primaria/primarius (head student), House Committee members and mentor bodies. In their professional capacities, they must refer students to

relevant support structures. Residence heads must coordinate and oversee the activation of the relevant protocols when a student in a residence is in need of support (SU, 2022a).

3.8.1.3 Campus Health Services (CHS)

This is a university-associated health practice that aims to provide free or affordable services to students who need attention to physical or mental health. CHS may refer the student to attend counselling at the CSCD (SU, 2022b).

3.8.1.4 The Student Representative Council (SRC)

The SRC has a portfolio called Student Wellness Officer who, at times, may be the first point of call for students who are in need of support. The Student Wellness Officer is then responsible for making contact with the CSCD or the Equality Unit should the student need counselling and other social work services (SU, 2022c).

3.8.2 Current social work services within Stellenbosch University (SU)

The Centre for Student Counselling and Development website mentions the university providing 'social work support' to students (SU CSCD, 2020). The researcher went further to examine the type of social work support provided to students through a personal interview with a social worker at SU. Nyembezi (2022) notes that the role of social work is still growing within the institution. She summarised her current duties by mentioning that they entail the following:

- Counselling students on life-related challenges.
- Food-security services to students who are in need of food-security support.
- Linking students to other resources on campus.
- Coordinating the work–study programme.

In addition, in examining a post description for the position of a 'Social worker' (SU, 2021c) that was advertised in December 2020, the duties that are fulfilled in this role are mentioned as:

- Rendering professional social work services to assist and manage the psychosocial well-being of students through providing counselling, guidance and assistance, social awareness and education;
- Assessing and managing students who present with food insecurity on campus and managing food-security initiatives on campus;

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- Providing psycho-education to students in individual and group settings;

- Establishing and maintaining an effective referral network;

- Reporting on student wellness and trends on campus;

- Collaborating as part of a multidisciplinary team and liaising with staff of the Faculty.

Mkhize's (2014) social work roles corroborate the duties rendered by social workers within Stellenbosch University, namely:

- Advocacy role – 'assessing and managing students who present with food insecurity on campus and managing food-security initiatives on campus'.

- Facilitator role – 'collaborating as part of a multidisciplinary team and liaising with staff of the faculty'.

- Programme designer role – providing psycho-education to students in individual and group settings'.

- Case-management role – 'rendering professional social work services to assist and manage the psychosocial well-being of students through providing counselling, guidance and assistance, social awareness and education'.

The CSCD Annual Report (SU CSCD, 2021) does not specify the work sessions that were rendered directly by social workers; nor does the annual report distinguish the number of students who received food-security support. Food-security support initiatives have been widely publicised at the university (SU, 2022d). As a result, the role of the social worker at Stellenbosch University is mainly associated with food-security support.

3.9 SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL WORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION

With higher education in South Africa facing many challenges underpinned by the policies of the past, and issues relating to the changing student profile and student needs mainly related to socioeconomic challenges, it seems the efforts to provide food-security support to students may be a helpful endeavour to transform our campuses into places where every student feels truly at home and part of the student community. After all, this is a critical transformation imperative, as reflected in the

Annual Transformation Report (SU, 2020:56) and promotes the student's right to participation (IASSW & IFSW, 2018).

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) recognises student support as a crucial endeavour in promoting the holistic development of students and in the provision of effective aid for students to meet the demands of tertiary life. As far as this is concerned, higher education institutions have responded to the call to provide student support services. However, there seems to be no institutional policy framework for delivering social work services and the institutions opt for what works best for them. As elaborated upon above, the only official institutional document that mentions social work services is the new SU Student Mental Health Plan (2021). Given the lack of policy framework direction, social workers, as part of a multidisciplinary team that addresses and treats problems that interfere with teaching and learning (Mkhize, 2014), are on their own in developing tailor-made services for students, according to their own assumptions and respective contexts.

There also does not appear to be a social work staffing strategy, plan and implementation mechanism that includes social work supervisors, as in the social welfare sector. The supervision framework for social work in South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) requires that a social worker should be supervised by a social work supervisor. SU social workers report to the head social worker, who is a psychologist by profession. Furthermore, it seems that more attention is given to some behavioural areas which are perceived as outside the scope of social workers. For example, managing gender-based violence not only has a behavioural aspect but it also involves psychosocial elements that need the attention of social workers.

According to Engelbrecht and Strydom (2015), South Africa currently experiences a 77% shortfall of social workers, which then affects the implementation of crucial social welfare legislation. For the longest time, SU has operated with a limited number of social workers. The increase in the number of social workers at SU could be evidence that the social work profession is growing within the institution. Perhaps, through the continued increase of social workers, this will also identify potential avenues for the expansion of student support services. This information is helpful as it provides evidence in support of the need to gain an understanding of the potential scope of

social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa, which is the gap that this study seeks to research.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter analysed the use of the ecological systems perspective as a theoretical lens to understand the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions. The reasoning of the ecological systems perspective provided an understanding of the nature of the social work role within a higher education setting.

Chapter Four relates to the empirical investigation of the scope of social work within higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE POTENTIAL SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is related to the third objective of this study which pertains to the empirical investigation of what, potentially, can be the scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University. Chapter one presented a concise literature background of the research topic and followed by establishing the goal for the research study. The point of departure for Chapter two related to the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its definition, principles, historical development, professional status, social work theories, social work methods, the domain of social work in South Africa and the roles fulfilled by social workers in generalist practice by building on the decolonising of social work dialogue. Another important point of departure established was how COVID-19 has brought unprecedented changes or new trends to the social work profession.

Chapter three gave more insight into the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions within a global and South African context, based on the ecological systems perspective. Moreover, the chapter explored the various areas where social work is practised at different institutional levels and found that there is no standardised policy framework for delivering social work services. Each institution adopts its own approach, based on the current needs of students.

This chapter presents an analysis of the results from the interviews of 18 key informants to understand their perceptions of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa. The results are organised in line with the study objectives and presented as major themes with corresponding subthemes supported by verbatim quotations to validate the participants' experiences.

SECTION A

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief description and reflection on the research methodology that was employed in this study. For an in-depth discussion of the research methodology, refer to Chapter One.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section will reflect on the research approach, research design, sampling methods, data collection measures and measures for data analysis utilised in this research methodology.

4.2.1 Research approach

This study utilised a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research focuses on interpreting and understanding the experiences and meanings of participants (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021a). This approach was chosen to explore the 'why' behind participants' views and to gain a deeper understanding of the scope of social work practice at higher education institutions in South Africa. The qualitative approach allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the topic, enhancing the study's overall insights (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). The study employed a deductive reasoning approach by initially exploring general ideas and concepts through a literature review. However, during the research process, the researcher encountered additional information that had not been considered previously in the literature review. This led to a movement between deductive and inductive reasoning, as the researcher incorporated new insights and data to further inform the study's findings.

4.2.2 Research design

The study utilised an exploratory and descriptive research design method. According to Fouché (2021b), exploratory research involves examining data which have had very little research dedicated to it. Meanwhile, descriptive research focuses on paying attention to the specific details of the situation and social setting. Within descriptive design, the researcher utilised a case study with a specific focus on Stellenbosch University as a case. A case study is described as an analysis of individuals, groups, events and policies within a specific time and context (Schoch, 2020; Schurink et al., 2021a). This was done so that the study could provide an investigation of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University, to gain information to answer the research questions (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Therefore, both exploratory and descriptive research designs were appropriate to the study as they allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the views that came from key informants. As a result, the researcher managed to get rich and thick descriptive narratives

regarding the scope of social work practice within Stellenbosch University. The researcher experienced no challenges in this regard.

4.2.3 Sampling methods

The researcher identified and drew their sample from key informants at Stellenbosch University (Strydom, 2021:385). The study utilised non-probability sampling: purposive sampling combined with quota sampling, to find potential research participants for this study. Purposive sampling is described as when a researcher selects participants who are most representative of the population being studied. Quota sampling is when the researcher draws participants who "represent the population in form" (Strydom, 2021:383). As Creswell and Creswell (2018:185), and Strydom (2021: 382) argue, the researcher used their 'judgement' to identify the participants by reflecting on the aspects of (a) 'the setting' – which is Stellenbosch University, 'the actors' and 'the events' – which is the participants fulfilling a role within student communities, and 'the process' – which is the work they undertake in executing their roles. These research methods proved to be both appropriate and necessary as they assisted the researcher in gaining a sample size that allowed the researcher to reach data saturation.

The criteria for inclusion of participants included being:
- Either a registered student or an employee of Stellenbosch University;
- Fulfilling a key role in the student community;
- Having regular and direct contact with registered students;
- Having knowledge about the social well-being of students.

The sample for the study consisted of 18 participants who are within Stellenbosch University as our case. According to Scott and Garner (2013), the minimum acceptable size in qualitative research is 15 participants. Given (2008) argues that a sample of 15 to 20 participants is usually appropriate for saturation to be achieved. This implies that, as the study progresses, more data does not necessarily lead to new information, which also became the case in this study. The researcher believed that data saturation had been reached once interviews had been conducted with 18 participants, as participants' narratives became similar.

The recruitment process of the study unfolded as follows. First, the researcher requested and obtained institutional permission from Stellenbosch University to conduct the study (See Annexure 2). Second, ethical clearance approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee for the Humanities at Stellenbosch University to initiate the study (See Annexure 4). Third, the researcher established communication with student leaders and staff who have regular and direct contact with registered students and knowledge about the social well-being of students. The researcher did not experience any challenges in soliciting participants who met the above-mentioned criteria since the researcher is also a staff member at Stellenbosch University. Carey (2012) suggests that, when choosing a sample using purposive sampling, the researcher selects only participants with the relevant experience and knowledge. All of the participants met the criteria for inclusion in that they had relative experience about the scope of social work at Stellenbosch University and could contribute valuable information to the study; hence, the researcher was able to get a good spread of views and narratives.

The researcher contacted 18 prospective research participants via email. The email introduced the researcher and then the title of the research project by describing the aim of the research as well as the benefits and potential risks of the research. All 18 participants participated willingly, expressing their recognition of the timely and significant nature of the research topic within the contemporary higher education landscape. Upon confirmation of participation, the participants were asked to complete the informed consent form (see Annexure 2) before the research interview. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams at a time convenient to the participants. The duration of the interviews ranged between 30 and 60 minutes.

4.2.4 Data collection

Given that the study was qualitative, the researcher utilised semi-structured interviews for an in-depth exploration of the topic (Scott & Garner, 2013). The researcher drew up a semi-structured interview schedule (see Annexure 1) with a mix of open- and closed-ended questions which allowed the researcher to extract rich data from the participants. Patton (2008) explains that semi-structured interviews can be useful to understand the context within which the participants practise and interact. This method worked, as the researcher was able to obtain greater understanding and to

acknowledge fresh information which was previously unknown to them as a result of this.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meeting platforms have been normalised and have become the most convenient way of meeting with people. Since the study used Stellenbosch University as a case study, and the university utilises Microsoft Teams as a platform for its virtual meetings, all participants were comfortable having the interviews on Microsoft Teams. The platform has a video function which was left on during the duration of the interview. It also allowed for voice recording and transcription with the permission and consent of the participants. The recordings were then downloaded to a password-protected laptop and stored on the cloud. The researcher and the participants did not face any issues regarding Microsoft Teams. They used the platform without difficulty and, in instances when participants encountered difficulties, the researcher helped them to troubleshoot the problem. For example, there were instances when the participant's computer microphone failed to connect, and the researcher guided them through the chat function until the issue was resolved. Other than that, no other difficulties arose during the data collection phase. The interviews were conducted between 25 July 2022 and 21 September 2022.

4.2.5 Data analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data analysis is the process of segmenting and making sense of collected data while also "winnowing" the data by focusing on some aspects of the data and disregarding other parts. After all the participants had been interviewed, the data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:79), thematic content analysis draws attention to the reporting of common issues (patterns) mentioned in data. The process that was followed included the researcher familiarising themself with the collected data, then generating codes and searching for common themes among the codes, reviewing those themes, naming the themes, and then compiling the final report. Through a denaturalised approach silence, word repetitions, pauses and stutters were removed from the transcriptions and grammar was corrected to allow for an easier understanding of the information that was conveyed (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). The researcher ensured that careful consideration was taken in ensuring that this process did not take away from what was meant by the participants' responses.

The researcher conducted member checking by discussing and reflecting on the responses of the participants with the participants. This process ensured that the researcher understood what the participants were communicating. With regard to reflexivity, which is defined by Babbie and Mouton (2011) as the researcher's critical reflections regarding their own biases and assumptions that are reflected upon throughout the research process, the researcher would journal after each interview. The researcher believes that using reflexive journaling helped them to remain impartial by recognising their own biases. Because this process was implemented earlier in the interview process, it allowed the researcher to gain more understanding of personal factors at an earlier stage, which influenced their planning and conceptualisation of different aspects of the study. The complete reflexivity report is included as Annexure 5.

The findings of the research will be presented in the sections that follow.

SECTION B

This section will present the characteristics of the participants who took part and whose views were analysed for the purpose of this research.

4.3 PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

Table 4.1 presents an overview of the individual characteristics of the participants according to their area of work, their roles and responsibilities and the length of time spent in that role. This is relevant as it provides context to the participants' knowledge and involvement with the student community. The individual profiling may also be helpful in interpreting the contexts of the narratives and analysis presented in this chapter.

Table 4.1: Participants' profile

Participant number	Area/Field of work	Experience	Roles and responsibilities
Participant 1	Residence leadership	3 years	Student guidance
Participant 2	Healthcare	16 years	Prescribe medication
Participant 3	Student leadership	5 years	Develop programmes

Participant number	Area/Field of work	Experience	Roles and responsibilities
Participant 4	Well-being	27 years	Therapy
Participant 5	Student leadership	2 years	Safety and security of students
Participant 6	Residence leadership	12 years	Residence head and coordinator
Participant 7	Student leadership	3 years	Senior students' events organisation
Participant 8	Residence leadership	14 years	Residence head and coordinator
Participant 9	Student leadership	6 years	Disability awareness trainings and workshops
Participant 10	Well-being	3 years	Emotional support, food security, student support
Participant 11	Student leadership	1 year	Cocurricular learning
Participant 12	Student leadership	4 years	Coordinate elections
Participant 13	Academic	5 years	Lecturing, supervising students, support, mentor,
Participant 14	Well-being	3 years	Screening of students for mental health support
Participant 15	Residence leadership	9 years	Residence head
Participant 16	Academic	9 years	Lecturing
Participant 17	Well-being	8 years	Psychosocial support
Participant 18	Residence leadership	4 years	Student affairs

4.1.1 Composition and selection of participants

The target population for the study was individuals who had been involved with the student community. This was to ensure that the study findings were a representation of the participants' understanding of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa.

4.1.2 Work experience

The research participants had to state the duration of their work experience. Most of the participants had between one and five years of experience working in the student community. All of the participants had more than sufficient experience, which assisted them in gaining a wide range of perspectives. It also gave the researcher a better understanding of the depth of experience the participants had with the student community and solidified the researcher's sampling methods (Strydom, 2021). Nevertheless, the duration of one's experience in the field, whether it was two or 25 years, did not affect the essence of their distinct perspectives on social work.

4.1.3 Participants' roles and responsibilities

The participants' roles and responsibilities are essential to understanding the work context of the participants, which provided the researcher with the opportunity to draw conclusions from various experiences presented. From the participants' responses the researcher noted that they all had some form of interaction with the students. Most participants focused on psychosocial support of students and aspects of training and development, while a portion of the participants focused on providing mental health support to students which, in recent years, has been a major concern among university students (Bantjes et al., 2022). The involvement of participants working or serving as student leaders in the different functions/divisions helped the researcher to understand their roles better in relation to the potential scope of social work within Stellenbosch University.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In the data analysis process, the researcher made use of thematic content analysis. Thematic content allowed the researcher to draw attention to the reported common issues mentioned by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). The sections that follow serve to present themes and subthemes related to the research findings on the participants' understanding of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa. Table 4.2 reflects the total of four themes and related subthemes and categories that were generated from the narratives of the participants.

Table 4.2: Themes, subthemes and categories

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
1. **The scope of social work in South Africa**	1.1 Social workers pursue social change	1.1.1 Challenge social injustice 1.1.2 Provide crisis intervention 1.1.3 Child protection
	1.2 Social workers' conduct needs assessment	
	1.3 Social workers provide psychosocial support	1.3.1 Offer counselling and therapeutic services 1.3.3 Provide support 1.3.4 Community education and empowerment
2. **The scope of social work on university campuses**	2.1 Address students' psychosocial needs	2.1.1 Address food insecurity needs 2.1.2 Address financial needs 2.1.3 Address accommodation needs 2.1.4 Provide counselling services 2.1.5 Conduct needs assessment
	2.2 Pursue social change 2.3 Student empowerment	
3. **Factors that hinder the scope of social**	3.1 Welfare stigma 3.2 Management support	

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
work at Stellenbosch University	3.3 Resource constraints	3.3.1 Financial challenges 3.3.2 Human resource challenges
	3.4 Poor knowledge of social work services available 3.5 Lack of collaboration	
4. **Mechanisms to improve social work services at Stellenbosch University**	4.1 Foster a culturally sensitive and inclusive environment 4.2 Adequately address student challenges 4.3 Expand the scope of social workers 4.4 Address human resource challenges 4.5 Multi-stakeholder collaboration 4.6 Management involvement	

In order to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of participants' responses and to enable effective comparison and analysis in conjunction with existing literature, the researcher in this study opted to employ both subthemes and categories. Prior to delving into each theme, a summary of the theme, along with its corresponding subthemes and categories, will be presented. The analyses will be presented in a structured manner, involving the presentation of the posed question, the inclusion of participants' narratives as quotations, and the subsequent linkage of these narratives to relevant literature in order to draw meaningful inferences. The narratives selected were carefully chosen to represent the specific subthemes and categories accurately, with key words and phrases underlined within each narrative to emphasise their

relation to the identified category and theme, which will subsequently be thoroughly discussed.

4.2.1 Theme 1: The scope of social work in South Africa

The study sought to understand the participants' perceptions of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa. To achieve this, the researcher asked the participants about their understanding of the role of a social worker in South Africa. The collected responses depict that social workers are understood to participate in a range of responsibilities within the context of South Africa. The study findings align with international literature (Wilson et al., 2013), highlighting participants' perceptions of social workers as professionals who address and intervene in people's social problems and crises. Other participants mentioned group work (parent support groups, anxiety groups, stress groups) and case management (child protection, trauma events, and rape cases) as methods with which social workers carry out these roles, which align with the notions of Vonk et al. (2000), Shelesky et al. (2016), and Hepworth et al. (2013).

In the following section, Theme 1 is presented and analysed under three subthemes, namely: social workers pursue social change, social workers conduct needs assessments, and social work provides psychosocial support. The participants' voices and analysis follow below.

4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Social workers pursue social change

Participants were requested to elaborate on their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social workers in South Africa. Their responses were based on their personal observations, experiences, or those of their family members who had encountered the involvement of a social worker in their lives. The participants articulated that the role of social workers was to pursue social change. Under this subtheme, three distinct categories were identified: challenging social injustice, providing crisis intervention, and child protection. Their voices are discussed below.

Category 1.1.1: Challenge social injustice

Some participants understood the role of social workers to address societal problems in the communities in which they work. Below are some of the participants' views:

Participant 11: *So, it's trying to make society a better place; trying to make South Africa better place. And particular for those who are faced with challenges on a daily basis. So, I wouldn't say social work is really much for the privileged, but it's really, really trying to balance out that imbalance that is created by socioeconomic factors in our societies.*

Participant 12: *I would think a social worker is the heart of the state. They provide the psychological and well-being services that the state has responsibility to provide, so they are the people that take care of the most vulnerable of our people in society.*

Participant 7: *So, I've always connected social workers with situations of distress where people need to identify what are the current challenges. So just people who work with people in distress and people in need.*

Based on these perspectives, participants recognise that social workers inherently prioritise the well-being of vulnerable individuals in society and serve as advocates for those who are unable to advocate for themselves (Suppes & Cressy Wells, 2003:280). Furthermore, there seems to be an understanding from participants that there are structures of society that have developed historically and are arranged in ways that enable some people to have vastly more access than others to resources and tools for acquiring those resources (Rawls, 1971; Young, 1990; Burke & Harrison, 2009). As such, participants are saying social workers aim to challenge social injustices by dismantling inequalities that are based on a person's social and environmental conditions. This perception aligns with the new global definition of social work, which emphasises social work's active role in promoting social change and empowering individuals (Ornellas et al., 2019). At the forefront of this understanding, the principles of human rights and social justice guide the way that social workers provide their services (IFSW, 2014).

The participants' views align with Glicken's (2010) argument that social workers have a responsibility to advocate for social change, particularly on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals within a community. These efforts for social change, as highlighted above, are to address issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and any other forms of social injustice.

Stellenbosch University is not immune to the societal challenges experienced by its student body. As access to higher education expands, an increasing number of students from low-income and vulnerable communities are enrolling, highlighting the growing volume and diversity of the student population. From 2010 to 2015, the South African higher education sector witnessed a notable growth of 10.5 per cent, with the African population exhibiting the most significant increase at 16.8 per cent (CHE, 2016). As a direct consequence, there has been a rising demand for food security support within the university, exemplifying one of the emerging challenges. This will be elaborated on further in another section (Category 2.1.1), specifically food insecurity needs.

Category 1.1.2: Provide crisis intervention

Part of the responsibility of social workers is to help people to deal and cope with the emergency challenges they experience in their lives (Strydom, Schiller & Orme, 2020). This was articulated by the study participants, as highlighted below.

> Participant 16*: So, in my view, they put out fires. I really think they are placed in a position where they are almost forced to put out fires when there's a crisis. They need to step in where there are social issues and are expected as social workers to solve those problems.*

> Participant 8: *I think social workers are very much involved in crisis management. Crisis management with well, all human beings basically. And the social workers have an influence that they can actually have.*

As part of providing crisis intervention, some participants stated that social workers offer social support to those in need.

> Participant 14: *I know there is the social assistance. So, either being able to support through donations or being able to refer people in general with any sort of social assistance or whether be grants or anything like that.*

> Participant 12*: Obviously as providing support in any form or shape and knowing that if you're not able to offer that support, what are the resources that are available within the community that you can actually refer people to.*

These views illustrate that social workers are viewed as influential and that they can use this influence to solve crisis and emergency situations. Social workers are often called upon to intervene with individuals and help them in coping with their crises (Wilson et al., 2013). As a result, Roberts (2000:11) argues that it is quite normal for people to experience crisis situations at one point or another in their lives and, as such, crises are normal in life. The challenge comes when individuals attempt to use their available mechanisms to cope with said crises, but face problems when such mechanisms do not work or when earlier unresolved crises are reactivated (UK Essays, 2018).

However, there seems to be an understanding from the participants that even when social workers are intervening in these situations, they should do so with a sense of urgency. There appears to be a lack of appreciation for a process that involves due diligence in handling matters. Meanwhile, an essential aspect of the social work professional identity lies in holistic assessment and intervention with individuals, families, groups, and communities (Hepworth et al., 2013; Gray & Lombard, 2023).

When further examined from an ecological perspective (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2015), students encounter crises in distinct ways and some can be perceived as more vulnerable compared to others, indicating the need for tailored support approaches. Moreover, the application of the ecological systems perspective allows for a deeper comprehension of the challenges arising from changes within the university environment. Therefore, this perspective effectively complements the crisis intervention approach by offering a framework to assess the necessary support required during both acute and chronic stages of a crisis.

At Stellenbosch University, the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) provides crisis services through the Unit for Psychotherapeutic and Support Services (UPSS) to students facing personal, professional or academic challenges, emotional or mental trauma, or mental health issues. In cases of emergency, students can directly contact the unit which offers a 24-hour emergency service in collaboration with ER24 (SU, 2021c). However, owing to the escalating challenges of poverty, unemployment, GBV, food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and mental health challenges (Letseka & Breier, 2008; Machika & Johnson, 2015; Naicker, 2016), social workers may face difficulties implementing the developmental welfare approach (Midgely,

1995; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). They might find themselves operating in crisis mode.

Category 1.1.3 Child protection

Social workers pursue social change by ensuring the safety and security of children in their communities. Participants also recognised that children and those who have been victims of abuse as the most vulnerable in our society who need the intervention of social workers. Their views are presented below:

> Participant 4: *Yeah, I think it's very broad. It really is very broad. Like my mother worked in child welfare. So that was about protection of children and making sure children are safe.*

> Participant 13*: …So, I think primarily in South Africa, that is the main role that they actually play because the Child Protection Sector is the main employer where we find social workers. Because even if you are not in an NGO for children. The Department of Social Development (DSD), also their primary role speaks to safeguarding children's rights, and I think this links well also with the Children's Act. Because they are at the cornerstone of implementing that particular Act. So hence, really their primary role speaks to safeguarding the needs of children.*

The participants' understanding of the role of a social worker is to safeguard and make sure that children are protected. Children are known to be of the most vulnerable groups of our society (Naicker & Botha, 2023). One participant even highlighted that in this role they are guided by legislation, in the Children's Act, which emphasises that social workers rely on using legislation and policy to protect children. The discussion on social work roles elaborates further on these respective sentiments:

> Participant 2: *More particularly, the children, which could involve either removal from the family. That's the image people always have of social workers. But you know that it is so much more than that. So, my auntie worked in the court system as the social worker. So, her job was always to protect the children.*

Other participants pointed out that their understanding of the role of social workers entails removing children from unsafe environments and placing them in families that can provide support and care. These views of social workers have been attributed to growing negative media coverage of child abuse cases over the years (Hobbs & Evans, 2017). This study shows that social workers play a significant role in taking care of those who are unable to take care of themselves.

The key point of departure here is that public perception of social workers primarily revolves around child protection (Beddoe et al., 2017; Hobbs & Evans, 2017). Thus, Naicker and Botha (2023) emphasise that child protection work involves intense emotions, as social workers investigate and intervene with families displaying signs of abuse. The Framework for Social Welfare Services (Department of Social Development, 2013) underscores the importance of caring for and protecting vulnerable groups.

Stellenbosch University focuses on providing services to university students and does not offer child protection services. However, the availability of legislation and policies, such as the Children's Care Act 38 of 2005, raises important considerations regarding the guidance of social work practices within higher education institutions. As highlighted in previous chapters, the literature acknowledges that there is no legislation or policy specifically referencing social work practices in higher education institutions (DHET, 2016).

The participants' views indicate the perception that social workers play an integral role in advocating for poor, vulnerable, and socially excluded individuals. The participants expressed that they not only perceive social workers to advocate for individuals but also for families and communities in general. Social work interventions are perceived to be in the best interest of all parties, especially the vulnerable ones.

To sum up, Francis and Webster (2019) argue that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world and this has been attributed to the historic impacts of the apartheid system (Patel, 2005). Evidence derived from the Inequality Trends in South Africa report (StatsSA, 2019) indicates that structural inequality remains prevalent across the country, with black- and coloured-headed households consistently experiencing higher levels of disparity. These findings highlight the

necessity and significance of social workers, reinforcing why participants perceived them as advocates against social injustices.

4.2.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Social workers conduct needs assessment

Needs assessments have increasingly been recognised as one of the ways in which social workers provide social work practice (Vonk et al., 2000). Assessment can be defined as a process between a social worker and a client, involving gathering, analysing, and synthesising information to create a concise picture of the client's needs and strengths (Hobbs & Evans, 2017:188). The participants described the role of the social workers as follows.

> *Participant 1: So social work is sort of helping to identify students that need food and then they used to give them vouchers so that students don't go hungry. I don't know what else they are subject to them with.*

> *Participant 2: Do they have the facilities to house their medication? If they are people who are going to need special assistance, is there special assistance available? So that's where the social worker was involved. The social worker also did counselling.*

> *Participant 4: But it is useful, I think it's very useful because they have the ability to really assess a situation. To assess someone's position. You know, they can do an assessment of the family and of the individual and make a good decision around referring for financial help. But they can do much more.*

As illustrated above, most participants' view the role of social workers to be as assessors of needs. According to Shelesky, Weatherford and Silbert (2016) and Vonk et al., (2000) it is important and necessary for social workers to conduct needs assessment as this role facilitates the linking of communities to key resources and state funded institutions. However, Garret (2004:58) argues, while assessment is an important role for social workers, it may sometimes happen at the cost of other roles such as casework, group work as well as working with individuals and their families. He further states that the social workers' assessment role may sometimes be mistakenly associated with surveillance or policing.

The findings show therefore that assessment plays a critical role in determining the appropriate intervention needed at a given time. By effectively obtaining a vast amount

of information, the social worker will be able to understand the challenges that their clients face which will allow them to make informed decisions that are most relevant for the specific client (Evans, 2017).

To conclude, the participants' perspectives align with the assertion of Lambert and Siege (2018) that successful social work interventions should involve assessing each student's needs by emphasising their strengths. They advocate for a trauma-informed biopsychosocial–spiritual approach that takes into account the complexities of diversity and oppression (Sophia & Christensen, 2016; Lambert & Siege, 2018). This emphasises the crucial importance of social workers being highly skilled in this area to support and assist their clients effectively.

4.2.1.3 Subtheme 1.3: Social workers provide psychosocial support

Social work is the kind of profession where the goal is always to try to find a solution to a problem. And the onus is not only the social worker to achieve this, but it is in collaboration with the clients. The participants described the role of the social workers as follows:

Category 1.3.1 Offer counselling and therapeutic services

The role of social workers as counsellors applies when they are working with individuals, families, and groups to address psychosocial issues (Patel, 2005:220). The participants views of social workers as counsellors are articulated below.

> Participant 2*: Because there were no psychologists at the hospital at the time, so patients who tried to commit suicide, the social workers helped those patients as well, in more of a counselling capacity than you would think the normal standard social work.*

> Participant 14: *They can do counselling around substances; they can do counselling around family issues. Like I said, they also do counselling around HIV, abortion, pregnancy and especially around abortion.*

> Participant 4*: At the hospitals the social worker is [the] person who interviews all the people who were suicidal or had midlife issues and they do the referral and the treatment plan. So, they are very involved with counselling people with mental health issues.*

Participant 4*: There are many social workers who also do their masters and then they go into play therapy, or they specialise in therapeutic modalities. And where they can see people even in private with therapy and counselling family therapy.*

The narratives above demonstrate that participants think social workers also conduct counselling. Social workers render support and guidance, and inform their clients about their needs and rights, as well as counselling them about their choices and options in addressing their social and economic needs (Patel, 2005:149). This could be by providing counselling to individuals who are suicidal, in sexual assault and rape cases, during termination of pregnancies and in substance addiction cases as part of the treatment plan. While the roles of social workers are contextual and depend on where they work (Engelbrecht, 1999), they are extensively trained in individual counselling or case management, demonstrating their high level of proficiency in this domain.

The findings affirm that participants' perceptions of social workers offering counselling and therapeutic services is accurate. Throughout history, social workers have been seen as counsellors (Lymbery, 2005). In higher education, social workers employ clinical models of practice to prioritise students' psychological well-being (Vonk et. al., 2000). Scholars such as Raphael and Goldrick-Rab (2020) and Sheats (2017) advocate for the significance of social work counselling at universities to address students' mental health and personal challenges.

The view presented by Sesane and Geyer (2017) suggest that counselling has a strong connection with fundamental values in social work, such as recognising the inherent worth of individuals and respecting the person. It also indicates that counselling and therapy are particularly appealing to those who see social work as centred around assisting and supporting individuals (Asquith, Clark & Waterhouse, 2005:18). This perspective emphasises the significance of counselling as a crucial component within the field of social work and sets the stage for further elaboration in the following segment.

Category 1.3.2: Provide support

The role of social workers has always been seen as supportive in that social workers give people the guidance they need to cope with their challenges in an aligned and integrated manner (Engelbrecht, 1999). And this is articulated by the participant below.

> Participant 15: *So, it is my understanding that they do fulfil different roles depending on the context that they are appointed in, but it is mostly to provide support to children or to the students or families that they are involved with.*

The narrative above illustrates that participants perceive social workers as playing a supportive role for individuals and families. The participants are informed and correct to perceive the role of social workers to be supportive overall in nature. This is because Shelesky et al. (2016) argue that higher education case managers coordinate prevention, intervention, and support efforts to assist students facing crises and life traumas across campus and community systems.

Moreover, the previous chapter's discussion on the ecological systems perspective included coping measures, where social workers offer clients coping mechanisms as soon as they become engaged in the helping relationship (Harward, 2016).

Category 1.3.3: Community education and empowerment

Social work is continuously challenged by the changing nature of the globalised environments within which it works (Engelbrecht, 2015). The local and the global are deeply intertwined, leading to complex transnational problems and shared risks that continue to impact heavily on communities. As such, the work of social workers in communities is more crucial now than ever (Hepworth et al., 2013; Weyers, 2013). The participants cited the important role that social workers play in communities.

> Participant 16: *We need to take social work into the communities, where I think parents should be our primary target system. Social workers are empowering parents with the skills and guidance they require to, in turn, empower their children. This will lead to fewer issues within the school system and schools.*

This narrative shows us that some participants understand the role of social workers to be involved in working with the community to educate and empower them to take action and to gain more control over the conditions of their lives. Community work in

general is not new in social work (Miley & DuBois, 1999; Weyers, 2013; Zastrow, 2017). In South Africa, social workers use community education and empowerment as a model for community work (Engelbrecht, 2005; Lombard, 2005).

Research has shown that community education and knowledge lead to empowerment and the development of self-esteem, enabling individuals to access valuable community resources (Lombard, 2005). This evidence suggests that community education effectively tackles various critical issues like poverty, gender-based violence, and HIV/AIDS (Engelbrecht, 2005). As Miley, O'Melia, and DuBois (2001:18–20) argue, education plays a vital role in social work, making community education a fitting approach to address modern societal challenges.

Finally, developmental social work, the central driving theory of social work in South Africa, emphasises the facilitation of community participation as the core of welfare policy and planning (Midgley, 1995). Community education is therefore regarded as a crucial responsibility of social workers within this framework.

In conclusion, the analysis of this theme indicates that participants possess a comprehensive understanding of the role of social work. Their responses concerning the role of generalist social work revolve around three key themes: pursuing social change, conducting needs assessments, and providing psychosocial support. These themes encompass fundamental aspects of the profession and are commonly associated with social work practice.

The pursuit of social change is a fundamental principle in social work, as social workers strive to address social injustices, advocate for marginalised populations, and work towards creating more equitable and inclusive societies (Midgley, 1995; IFSW & IASSW, 2014; Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). Conducting needs assessments is another critical component of social work, as it involves systematically identifying and understanding the specific needs, challenges, and resources available within individuals, families, and communities (Evans, 2017). This information guides the development of interventions and support services tailored to meet those needs effectively. Finally, providing psychosocial support is a core function of social work, involving the provision of counselling, support, and assistance to individuals and

groups to enhance their well-being, resilience, and overall psychosocial functioning (Shelesky et. al., 2016).

By referencing these three subthemes, participants demonstrated an awareness of the key roles and responsibilities of social workers (IASSW, 2018; Ornellas et. al., 2018). This suggests that they have an understanding of the diverse ways in which social workers engage with individuals, families and communities to promote positive change and address social issues (Hepworth et al., 2013).

4.2.2 Theme 2: The scope of social work at university campuses

Following the exploration of participants' perspectives on the role of social work in aforementioned aspects of the scope of generalist social work in South Africa, the subsequent step involved discussing their comprehension of the general roles, tasks, and functions of a social worker at a university in South Africa. Subsequently, participants were prompted by the researcher to identify and elaborate on the various roles and interventions that social workers could undertake at Stellenbosch University. The following section presents the voices of the participants along with their analysis.

4.2.2.1 Subtheme 2.1 Social workers address students' psychosocial needs

Participants were asked to describe their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social workers within university settings. Most participants shared what they have been exposed to with social work at Stellenbosch University. They shared that social workers address students' psychosocial needs, pursue social change and empower the students.

Category 2.1.1: Address food insecurity needs

Participants stated that their interaction with social work had been mostly to address food insecurity among university students. Their voices follow below:

> Participant 7: *For example, we have (Name withheld) who is involved in providing food for students who need food, toiletries, I think as well. So, I would say for me that's sort of the main role I would say of a social worker.*

Participant 11: *And just to be more practical I want to make examples of food. Food is a big issue. There is a big issue of food insecurity. But in that regard, a social workers role is very important.*

Participant 9*: So, with food insecurity, social workers will usually help students with vouchers or food meals and things like that. That was one of the big things that I've seen.*

The majority of the participants indicated that the social worker at the university gets contacted to provide food vouchers. As a result, participants mentioned that social work is definitely needed to address food insecurity and that the food vouchers provided to students have been helpful. Food insecurity among college and university students has been overlooked in the past; however, in recent years evidence shows that college and university students have been identified as an emerging at-risk population because of high food insecurity prevalence (Van den Berg & Raubenheimer, 2015; Hagedorn-Hatfield, Hood & Hege, 2022). In the South African context, student hunger came to light because of the national #feesmustfall movement at institutions of higher education in 2015. This movement brought to light the issues of students lacking basic needs in the form of food and shelter (Van den Berg & Raubenheimer; 2015; Naicker, 2016; University of Western Cape, 2017).

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to address food insecurity. As they strive to develop emerging leaders and prepare students for their careers, they ought to assess what students need beyond rigorous coursework and professional opportunities (Martinez, 2020). Food insecurity is harmful to students' mental and physical well-being, impacts their performance in the classroom, and/or puts them at higher risk of dropping out; therefore, using social workers, institutions should identify ways of offering food services and programmes (Machika & Johnson, 2015; Sophia & Christensen, 2016).

It is worth noting that, when participants were asked regarding the generalist roles of social work, the issue of food assistance in the form of groceries and food vouchers did not arise as much as it did when asking them about the roles of social workers within universities. It is as if, when that group of the population is at university, the role and the expectations on social workers change. This then fits the assertion that the

roles of social workers are context specific (Engelbrecht, 1999; Henderson & Thomas, 2013).

Another deduction from the view of the participants is that a significant portion of the population continues to face economic hardships, living below the poverty line (StatsSA, 2018). However, it appears that the government, as the primary source of welfare in South Africa (Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015), has shifted the responsibility of food security to other state agencies such as the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to fulfil this need. For example, schools have nutrition programmes like the National School Nutritional Programme (NSNP) as part of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security, but this is not the case with DHET. The government provides provisions through NSFAS study loans and bursaries, which is an agency under DHET.

To conclude, the above arguments show that food insecurity at institutions of higher learning is a global phenomenon. The participants' responses highlight that ensuring food security is one of the main roles of social workers at their university. Bearing in mind that South Africa is an unequal society, at university level there are even more students who come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As such, it is imperative to ensure that all students have access to equitable resources which include food. One of the SDG goals is to curb hunger; therefore, social workers at universities are working in line with the global agenda and the SDGs.

Category 2.1.2: Address financial needs

Participants mentioned that students at Stellenbosch University struggle with the high cost of living. Their voices and discussion follow below.

> Participant 9*: So from what I've seen, like social workers mainly helps students with like financial issues.*

> Participant 5*: I think some instances where the bursary office liaises with social workers at the CSCD to assess whether or not the student is struggling financially and qualifies for financial aid purposes like that.*

Participant 10: *At the beginning of each and every academic year, we are encountered with students who are dealing with funding issues. And in turn those students don't have food. They don't have toiletries, so it becomes then an issue of social workers to make sure that these students are provided with food during the time of their need until their funding kicks in, which normally takes a lot of time.*

The narratives above highlight students' financial challenges. At the start of an academic year, funding difficulties lead to struggles with basic necessities, such as toiletries, for which social workers are asked to assist. At this stage, the social worker takes on the role of a case manager, coordinating various services to meet the students' needs (Mkhize, 2014), and also acting as an advocate to secure the necessary resources (Engelbrecht, 1999; Henderson & Thomas, 2013). Consequently, there is a perception that social workers bear the responsibility of helping students to meet their financial needs.

Furthermore, one of the responsibilities of the social workers, as stated by the participants, is to assess students' financial needs since students may sometimes be lying. Thus, the social worker also provides education on how they can manage their funds better.

Participant 4*: It is also about providing and helping students to manage the funds available within the university to support students. And it's not just about giving money, but it's also initiatives around raising money, raising awareness around students who struggle.*

This narrative highlights the importance of effectively providing skills for managing funds to students within the university (Van der Berg & Raubenheimer, 2015; CSCD, 2020, Nyembezi, 2022). The narrative emphasises that financial support goes beyond simply distributing money, but that it encompasses initiatives aimed at raising funds and creating awareness about students who face challenges.

Access to social workers at higher education institutions ensures that students from disenfranchised, disempowered populations, or those facing challenging circumstances have readily available academic and socio-emotional support to

facilitate successful graduation (Lambert & Siege, 2018). When students encounter life and financial stressors without readily available help, they may feel less valued by their institutions, which potentially impacts their graduation journey (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Social work interventions on campus can help because social workers are trained in engagement, empowerment, and motivational interviewing strategies that enhance students voice and choice (Lambert & Siege, 2018).

In light of these findings, it is crucial to orient students with financial education, including budgeting skills. The influence of social work should not only be limited to the micro level, where it is visible and provides services that influence social change for the individual (Bernstein & Gray, 1996), but social workers must also engage at the meso level, offering support to groups (Hepworth et al., 2013), and at the macro level, advocating for policy changes and addressing the systemic and structural roots of social problems (Ornellas et al., 2016).

Category 2.1.3: Address accommodation needs

The study participants highlighted student accommodation to be a big issue at the beginning of the year for most students. Some narratives are presented below.

> Participant 13*: Yeah, primarily. And, in terms of accommodation, students get stranded, especially in the beginning of the of the year when they have not yet been placed or their funding has not yet been confirmed. They find themselves homeless. So social workers within a university are able to assist and I think they do that in terms of playing the advocacy role to say, hey, listen, we have this particular student who drove all the way from the Eastern Cape with the last bus fare and now the student is here. They have met their academic requirements but financially does not have any means as in yet because their bursary has not yet been confirmed.*

> Participant 14: *Then the same at the end of the year. Students who don't have accommodation because they have extended exams or they failed and have either A3s or whatever and they don't have accommodation in that time.*

The narratives above highlight that social workers at the university are often tasked to go the extra mile. They are called in to be readily available to assist in finding solutions for student accommodation challenges.

Once more, the narratives acknowledge the microsystem level, specifically the individual experiences of students who find themselves stranded and homeless owing to delayed placement or unconfirmed funding. It emphasises the role of social workers in addressing these challenges and advocating on behalf of students. Also, when advocating (Engelbrecht, 1999; Henderson & Thomas, 2013) for students, social workers are able to draw attention to specific cases and to advocate for the necessary support and resources. Even more, they touch on the exosystem level by referring to the broader systems and policies that impact students' financial situations, such as delayed confirmation of bursaries.

Overall, the participants' feedback highlights the expectation for social workers to address accommodation challenges. This requires social workers to navigate skilfully and to engage with the systems mentioned above, advocating for students by recognising the interplay between individual students, the university system, and the external factors that impact their experiences and well-being (Germain & Gitterman, 1980; Hepworth et al., 2013; Nash, Munford & O' Donoghue, 2005).

Category 2.1.4: Provide counselling services

The participants pointed out that the role of social workers at university is much more than just looking at the financial needs of students but also includes counselling about the psychosocial problems that students face. Their views are stated below.

> Participant 12*: When I was in my second year, I went through a very horrible personal issue and then it was the first time I actually used the social worker on campus for counselling. She was like, I actually want to introduce you to a colleague of mine who's working on creating something like a support group for students who come to Stellenbosch, and they feel like they're being othered who have that culture shock.*

Participant 13*: Giving an ear to students who are struggling because for some their home circumstances are challenging. So I think playing that supportive and emotional role is important.*

Participant 4: *Even doing counselling and then you know the traditional kind of social work things in terms of reaching out to families and having those kind of family sessions, etcetera where it was necessary.*

The narratives above demonstrate that participants understand the role of social workers at Stellenbosch University as also providing students with counselling on personal stressors and other psychosocial challenges that they face. There have been initiatives to start student support groups for vulnerable students too as it has been alluded to previously, that the socioeconomic challenges students face also impact their emotional well-being (Bantjes, et al., 2022). Here the link can be seen between social work methods in practice where social workers apply case work methods through case management and counselling skills on a personal level. Then again, we see social workers applying group work methods in practice (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2006; Black-Hughes & Strunk, 2010) by focusing on students' social needs within a group context. This is a depiction of how social workers use social work methods to guide their practice (Teater & Hannan, 2022).

Social workers are part of a multidisciplinary team, particularly in relation to supporting students who are facing challenges, and playing a critical role in counselling services through the significance of communication skills (Engelbrecht, 1999). Effective communication is crucial for social workers as it enables them to establish a supportive and empathetic connection with students. By listening actively, social workers can create a safe space for students to share their concerns, emotions, and experiences. This communication skill helps social workers to understand the unique challenges that students are facing and allows them to provide appropriate support and guidance (Seden, 2005; Potgieter, 1998; Sheafor, Horesji & Horesji, 1992).

Considering South Africa's numerous social challenges and mental health struggles (Bantjes et al., 2022), students may also face anxiety and depression. In response, support structures are essential, and social work is one such structure that can help students to cope with various social issues within the university setting. However, it is

worth questioning whether social workers should operate at the macro and community levels to involve students' family members, in addition to the micro–meso level interventions and casework group work methods used in counselling services. This approach could be the distinctive contribution of social work in engaging other systems to support students effectively (Bernstein & Gray, 1996; Teater, 2014; Dominelli, 2002) as psychologists do not normally provide such an intervention in their scope (CSCD, 2020).

Category 2.1.5: Conduct needs assessment

According to the study participants, before social workers offer any form of assistance they first conduct a needs assessment to determine the kind of help the students need.

> Participant 8: *So, with that then said, to me it feels like the social workers must deal with students and their needs at the moment. And they have to assess the origin of the needs and the challenges.*

The participants' responses show that social workers need to determine the origin of the challenges that students experience. Part of the assessment is meant to determine how the social workers can best upskill students and not always only handing out resources .

> Participant 3*: Secondly, I believe a social worker may be quite pivotal instances whereby perhaps we have a student who's pregnant and needs some form of support in, in that regard. Or perhaps a person who can make certain recommendations to their faculty and with regards to how best can the student be assisted so as to ensure that there isn't any form of academic strain.*

The narratives presented above indicate that the participants have a clear understanding of the crucial role of needs assessment in delivering interventions and support. Furthermore, the literature review explicitly highlights that social workers receive specialised training in adopting a person-in-environment perspective, which is distinctive to their profession (Teater, 2014). It is important to note the concept of open/closed systems in this specific context (Payne, 2005). Here, the social worker's capacity to interact with other systems underscores the notion that the university system can be classified as an open system, enabling greater support for students.

In contrast, although the assessment of needs is a key function within social work processes, the influence of this function among university students at Stellenbosch University may see the role of social workers being reduced only to needs assessment, which could also shape the scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University. As exposited in previous chapters, social workers bring about changes by engaging in assessment, planning, monitoring, linking, and advocating interactions between clients and their community systems (Vonk et al., 2000; Shelesky et al., 2016). This means that the social worker engages in a variety of processes in their execution of interventions.

To sum up this subtheme, the narratives of the participants regarding addressing food insecurity needs, financial needs, accommodation needs and providing counselling services align with the perceptions expressed in the first main theme regarding generalist social work. Here, social workers are viewed as 'putting out fires' and responding in times of crisis (Regehr, 2011). Regrettably, crisis services fall short of adequately meeting the needs of the numerous students requiring long-term support (Shelesky et al., 2016).

It is noteworthy that, although social workers are perceived as providing assistance in the mentioned categories, it becomes evident that they are not perceived as facilitators capable of contributing to 'strategic planning and monitoring'. Aspects such as advocating on behalf of individuals and needs assessment were more prominent in the narratives than 'planning and monitoring' (Vonk et al., 2000; Shelesky et. al., 2016). For social workers to enhance their efficiency, active involvement is recommended in the planning and monitoring of these interventions .

4.2.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Social workers pursue social change

Social workers are there to serve the vulnerable in society and, in the case of universities, these are students, who cannot take care of themselves. These students need more support and protection, according to the participants. The participants' voices follow:

> Participant 11: *But then we need these people to assist those who are disadvantaged in kind of like levelling the playing field. And I feel like the social*

workers play a greater role in actually being able to assist in the day-to-day needs of students.

Participant 10*: Social workers can then be involved with these students to ensure that they don't feel left out. And just because they can't afford doesn't mean they don't deserve to be in the spaces of learning. And to also kind of assist, especially first-year students that are coming from all walks of life to just help into the integration process. Just helping them fit in and then ensuring that they can be able to stand on their own and be able to learn without any stressors.*

The participants' voices depict that it is imperative to show students affected by socioeconomic challenges that the university is concerned for their well-being by showing care, support, and guidance for their situation. These narratives align with the findings of Motsabi, Diale and van Zyl (2020) who conducted a study exploring the role of social support in school retention among first-generation African students in the South African context. Their findings indicated the importance of social support towards the persistence and success of students in their first year of study at university.

Participants noted that Stellenbosch University is a beautiful place to be in if you have the financial means and support, but unfortunately that is not the reality for most students. Their voice follows:

Participant 12*: Because this so-called perfect institution is very imperfect for them, they do not fit in. They do not know how to use the necessary channels. They don't know how to access resources. They don't have family, they don't have the friendship support group that is behind them to ensure that they experience the institution the same way that all the others can. So, I think it is definitely necessary.*

The narratives highlight that many students enrolled in the university come from disadvantaged families with limited to no support or economical means. As such, for first-year students the university is an unfamiliar environment. These are the types of students that social workers are there to support and to ensure that they have access to necessary resources.

Furthermore, the participants identified the social worker as their advocate, who is available to support them when they are in need. This is apparent from the narrative below.

> Participant 13*: In terms of students who are financially excluded, they know they have an advocate within the social work sector or unit who can advocate for them when it comes to being financially excluded from the university. When it comes to hunger, they know the social worker is available to support them*.

The participants' responses show that it is beneficial to have people in the form of social workers who look specifically at the social ills and social difficulties of students. While everyone else is looking either at the academic performance or mental health issues, the social aspects are never neglected, especially for disadvantaged students (Pomrenke & Morris, 2010). This role fits well with the advocacy role of social workers because they are able to assist students who struggle to make it because of a history of poverty, lack of opportunities, families to take care of, and a multitude of barriers that prevent them from going to institutions of higher learning (Compton & Galaway, 1994; Potgieter, 1998).

4.2.2.3 Subtheme 2:3: Social workers empower students

Another social worker role at universities, as identified by the participants, was student empowerment. The participants stipulated that it is important and necessary to skill students, to ensure they take responsibility for their actions, and to educate them, in addition to addressing their needs. Part of this is teaching independence. The participants' voices and analysis follow:

> Participant 5: *I also know that there's a programme in which students apply to work and to do meal jobs and then they get paid. These students fall under a certain bracket.*

Several participants noted that social workers are equipped to address various situations, similar to therapists and psychologists. However, their distinct strength lies in providing students with practical guidance to enhance their lives (Cowger, 1994).

> Participant 9: *If you go to a therapist and you dealing with issues of finances or food insecurity, like I said. The therapist can just guide you mentally or emotionally on how to get through it. But social workers can get you in contact*

with someone who can give you assistance with the food voucher, or they can assist you with setting out your finances or budgeting. Or they could get you into contact with someone who can assist with those things.

Participant 18: *And I mean, I look at it over the last two years when the social workers did this online course with students (NSFAS students) on budgeting. With the little money that I get. How do I make sure that I can use it and make sure that it stretches.*

The participants' responses indicate that students at university come from different economic and social backgrounds of students and social workers are important in determining the kind of help the students need. Part of empowering, according to the participants, is helping students manage their money better. In most cases, students have a family at home which is struggling with basic needs and when they receive funding for studies and to cover their basic needs, they send it home. Here, the autonomy of students is evident concerning their funds, as they are the ones responsible for sending money home since they receive no financial support from their families (Gwacela, 2013). We also see the ecological systems in play through the role the social worker can play in interventions geared to the whole family and the community of the student. The social worker can intervene practically at a meso and macro level through collaboration with government agencies that target the family at a societal level.

According to Sheats (2017), social workers seek to enhance their clients' capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs, instead of disempowering their clients. This narrative can be seen in the voice below:

Participant 15: *Social workers are really geared towards taking ownership of what the problem is and not externalising it in terms of 'it's always something else, someone else'. And that is often what we see with our student cohort. We see this disempowerment, or they feel disabled, or I can't, and I don't know how to. My colleague says it so nicely 'this external locus of control'. That they can't manage. So yes, I am depressed, but if I actually sit down and I do my work, I focus more on my work than on the fact that I'm feeling depressed about other things.*

The narrative above aligns with the strengths perspective, which is about the importance of identifying and utilising client strengths (Black-Hughes & Strunk, 2010). An article by Cowger (1994) suggests that by understanding and harnessing their strengths, clients can feel empowered and can take an active role in their own growth and well-being. This approach aims to shift the focus from a learned culture of helplessness to a more positive and empowering one. By recognising and building upon clients' strengths, social workers can support them in achieving their goals and promoting their overall empowerment. Therefore, investigating the scope of social work practice within higher education institutions should not be overlooked as this might be a way of empowering the students who receive services from social workers.

The scope of social workers in empowering students holds fundamental importance for various reasons. This approach, which seeks to achieve individual and collective empowerment, aligns with the mission statement of the recently reviewed White Paper for Social Welfare (DSD, 2016). Furthermore, this approach supports the notion argued by Patel and Ulriksen (2017) that active individual participation in development initiatives and the exercise of human agency are regarded as fundamental principles within South Africa's social development framework.

Broadly, in the analysis of this theme, it has become evident that a student-centred system should revolve around the needs of students, prioritising their development and support (Bawa, 2014). Additionally, further to the generalist scope (addressing psychosocial needs, pursuing social change, and empowering students) of a social worker, a range of possible roles exist that social workers may fulfil in a university and those roles have been analysed above. These roles complement the roles expropriated from the literature review and complement each other in practice.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Factors that hinder the scope of social work at Stellenbosch University

The participants were asked to discuss what they think the challenges are that are related to the scope of social work at Stellenbosch University. Their opinions follow:

4.2.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Welfare stigma

The study participants stated that students do not always come forward to seek assistance because of the stigma around welfare.

Participant 1: *And young people at the age of university, they do not easily come forward when they are faced with challenges. I think they're likely to suffer on their own which enforces stigma. And you know, they don't want to be seen in bad light.*

This narrative highlights that students tend to suffer in silence and fear being judged for some of the challenges they experience. When the stigma associated with social welfare persists, it strips the people in need of their right to participation and self-determination (GSWSEP; IASSW & IFSW, 2018). For instance, according to Herselman, Schiller & Tanga (2023), children who receive statutory services or are in alternative care require love, emotional support, and a safe environment to express their feelings freely without fear of stigma or discrimination.

Moreover, when social workers exhibit enthusiasm to aid and support clients in addressing their diverse needs – be it information, direction, healthcare, sustenance, housing, or social justice – without expecting any form of compensation but as a gesture of humble service, users may overcome the stigma associated with seeking counsel and intervention (Hendricks, 2023). Given that Ubuntu serves as a core value in African society, this approach aligns with their indigenous way of life and resonates deeply with the most vulnerable members of the community (Mabvurira, 2018).

Other participants were of the view that there are many privileged students at the university and so, it is easy to disregard those in need and this is the stigma. As such, it is easy for students in need to try to fit in by disappearing in all the privilege and not being identified as poor.

Participant 7: *Surprisingly, I would say also stigma, maybe social stigma attached to accessing those resources because Stellenbosch has many privileged students.*

Participant 12*: Yeah, it's just difficult. Also, sometimes a bit humiliating to ask for help, especially when it is involving, let's say, for example, monetary issues. You know, displaying one's poverty in order to find assistance is not exactly the nicest feeling.*

The participants' responses show the stigma associated with social welfare because it is assumed that individuals cannot deal with their own problems or that their families

have problems. This stigma has been shaped from childhood and is still prevalent in older generations, who associate social work with the negative connotation of 'welfare' (Herselman et al., 2023). Social work services should be available to any student who requests them to avoid stigma and restrictive eligibility criteria (Lambert & Siege, 2018). Services should be structured to provide the necessary level of support nimbly, more at times of transition and less when things are going well.

4.2.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Management support

Participants expressed that lack of buy-in from decision-makers at the university has a negative impact on the work that social workers do.

> Participant 3: *I think, the biggest challenge which social workers may perhaps encounter would be perhaps the certain red tape that they have around them with regards to the roles and the responsibilities which have been given to them by the university.*

Some of the participants expressed that the university has a negative perception when it comes to social support, and this has been a challenge in the development of university policies.

> Participant 13: *I know the CSCD was in the forefront of pulling the process of initiating a social support policy, but then it was not approved. It was said that this cannot be approved as a policy because the university feels that it is not a welfare organisation. Because if they adopted that as a policy it means they will be obliging themselves to offer social support.*

> Participant 17*: And then the lack of support from management. They don't see that students have problems at Stellenbosch University.*

> Participant 11*: Before I even dive into that question, a point of departure is that one of the things that kind of like took me back was when I was attending a talk and someone was talking about, we have to be careful about making universities these social granting spaces, whereby a university has to a certain extent do what government does and just give, give, give, give, give. It's quite interesting when you hear something like that from someone who wasn't born into privilege, but they worked their way up and they assumed that everyone can just magically work their way through hardship. It's quite sad to see that*

> *people forget why universities exist. It's to make societies better; it's to increase our knowledge about everything.*

One of the participants highlights the efforts of CSCD in proposing a social support policy, which faced rejection owing to the university's concerns about assuming welfare organisation obligations. Notably, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013:17) emphasises the importance of student support in facilitating successful tertiary education completion. However, the literature review reveals the absence of a policy framework in guiding social work practices at higher education institutions, including SU. Not all participants were in agreement with the reasons for the university not having a policy framework guiding social support, aside from its absence in most universities. Be that as it may, the relevance of the ecological systems perspective is also noted in this instance regarding its influence at a macro level.

Also, it was established in the literature review that the university does offer an ecosystem of support services through the various centres under the Division of Student Affairs, namely: the Centre for Student Development, the Centre for Student Communities and the Centre for Student Leadership, Experiential Education and Citizenship (SU, 2021; 2022). Yet, all participants were not in agreement about in the way in which the university management directly supports typical generalist social work interventions, other than interventions focusing on concrete monetary assistance. The university has had various initiatives such as Move4Food as a strategy to raise funds to assist students with food insecurity challenges.

Consequently, these voices provoke fundamental discussions and questions that beg to be answered. They include, but are not limited to, whether participants are fully informed about available resources, whether these resources lack alignment, or whether they fail to cater to crisis intervention – a theme discussed earlier, related to the roles of generalist social workers. The inquiry further extends to whether the available resources are geared to render crisis interventions. Or perhaps they might be expressing these views because of neoliberal influences and managerialism tenets that they (even unwittingly) experience and which tend to undermine the professional ethical judgement of social workers (Spolander et al., 2014; Banks, 2021)

A study conducted by Skakane-Masango, Mtshali and Ngcobo (2022) established that there is a need to improve awareness and utilisation of the available student support

programmes through policy formulation and quality enhancement programmes in order to impact and improve the lives of students for the better. This might mean that SU management should invest in increasing the frequency of awareness campaigns held by social workers to educate students about accessing their services.

Furthermore, as distinguished earlier in the dissertation, in social work, neoliberalism manifests as administration and management in which there is a preoccupation with procedures, norms and standards (Jones & Truell, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2015). An apt example could be a greater interest in periodic statistics, monthly, quarterly, or annual reports related to the number of cases or money donated, instead of in the quality and transformative potential of these interventions.

Overall, when support from university management is examined, all of the above points need to be taken into account. Undoubtedly, when there is buy-in from institutional leadership, other resources tend to align, contributing to the success of interventions. Thus, if the university engages itself with the scope of social work within SU, the role of the university management in supporting the work of social workers must be clearly defined and evident.

4.2.3.3 Subtheme 3:3: Resource constraints

The participants were asked to discuss what they think the challenges are of the scope of social work at Stellenbosch University. Their opinions follow:

Category 3:3:1: Financial challenges

The participants mentioned that social work services probably do not get enough funding. Their voices are mentioned below:

> Participant 2*: I think social work's biggest challenge will be funding.*

> Participant 10*: I think I will mention one challenge which I think it's not only a challenge that social workers faced within Stellenbosch. I think it's a challenge that some social workers face around South Africa as a whole because it's an issue of resources. Because even in a university that seems to have money resources are never enough to actually assist everyone.*

> Participant 11*: Shame, I'm not going to lie, it's definitely funding. I know that for a fact. In as much as I do criticise them a lot.*

The narratives above highlight that participants think that one of the challenges faced by social workers is lack of funding for financing social services. Participants think this is not just a challenge unique to SU, but that there is a continuous decline and scarcity of funding in the social work sector (Lavalette & Ferguson, 2007).

As established in the literature review earlier, there seem to be more resources geared at curbing the challenges of food insecurity. Could it be that funding is readily available for more food (as a crisis intervention), as it is cheaper than funding an additional social work position, and to invest in social work services towards social change? This links with the earlier discussion regarding availability of food being seen as freely given charity, as in the history of social work (Lymbery, 2005).

The participants also expressed that limited funding therefore limits the services that social workers can provide.

> Participant 17: *And yeah, so it's one of the issues, it's always about limited funding because you don't have a specific budget for everything.*

Participants expressed that they think social workers might experience budget constraints because they are underfunded. Thus, as stated above, funding is an issue and the work that social workers do might often need funding, which is often to lessen the inequality and to try to manoeuvre and create equitable access and equal opportunities (Vonk et. al., 2000).

Overall, this comes down to the issue of resource constraints that has been iterated both in the South African and the global context. As university campuses are becoming more diversified in terms of the profile of their students, Sheats (2017) argues that financial resource allocations are becoming scarcer. Research conducted by the National Centre in Student Equity in Higher Education (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2022) adopted a global perspective to investigate how twelve universities across three countries (USA, UK, Australia) aimed to provide support for students. This study acknowledges financial challenges faced by both students and institutions.

Category 3:3:2: Human resource challenges

The participants expressed that there are not enough hands to serve more than 30,000 students at SU. Their voices follow:

Participant 8*: Like I said, first and foremost is that there are not enough hands to serve all our community, which is more than 30,000 students. I mean, if social workers have to determine like, what is the background, you know, if you are looking into each case. I mean you have to do thorough work.*

Participant 9*: I think there isn't enough social workers in Stellenbosch University. Yeah, I'm not sure what the number of social workers is in Stellenbosch. And I think if we have more social workers, it will help with the load on other support service staff.*

Participant 17*: So, also a human capacity is limited. So that's one of the challenges as well. So comparing to how many psychologists we have and educational psychologists.*

The narratives above highlight the challenges arising from the significant ratio of students to social workers. It is said that there are approximately 30,000 students and there are about three social workers (Stellenbosch University, 2021). This might affect the social workers' ability to conduct thorough and holistic assessments of the student and their environment (Raphael & Goldrick-Rab, 2020).

Furthermore, since social workers in South Africa are reported to be contending with high volumes of cases (Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015), resource constraints raises a question whether there will ever be enough social workers to serve a community adequately, whether at a university or in South African society as a whole. If participants are expressing similar human resources challenges in a university setting, it prompts consideration of whether the focus should shift towards prevention measures rather than early intervention measures, which is what the developmental social welfare approach advocates for (DSD, 2013).

To sum up, it seems that more social workers are needed at Stellenbosch University, according to the participants, to adequately meet the needs of the large student community. The limited human resources, particularly in comparison to the number of psychologists and educational psychologists (Stellenbosch University, 2021), creates challenges in the scope of social work services. Increasing the number of social workers and increasing the funding for social services is seen as essential to alleviate the workload on other support staff and to enhance the overall capacity to serve the student population effectively.

4.2.3.4 Subtheme 3.4: Poor knowledge of social work services available

According to some participants, the role of a social worker is not appreciated and, as such, their functions are further decreased in that sense.

> Participant 7*: Like your HC members, your faculty reps might not even know where to direct you in the 1st place.*

> Participant 13*: So, I've seen in residences, they would often speak about psychologists. But social workers were not featured anywhere. So, I am wondering if whether students are aware that we actually have social workers who are not only there for food security. They can also provide psychosocial support and emotional support and play a role in some instances when it comes to advocating for students' needs.*

The narratives above highlight that there is a need to ensure students' awareness of the availability and services provided by social workers at Stellenbosch University. It is noted that even some student leaders and faculty representatives are unaware of directing students to social workers. Lack of awareness may stem from the perception, established in theme 1, that some participants believe social workers to be solely involved in child protection.

From an ecological systems perspective (Kondrat, 2013), the university as a system represents one of the contextual factors that shape students' understanding and access to support services. The above narratives imply that students may associate food security primarily with social workers, potentially overlooking their broader scope of social work in providing psychosocial and emotional support, as well as in advocating for students' needs (Mkhize, 2014).

Overall, there is a need to create more awareness and conscientisation of the SU community around the scope of social workers. Post-COVID-19 it has been seen that digital communication technologies can also be helpful in getting the messaging across. The distribution of flyers, posters and banners could also be instrumental in raising awareness (Mishna et al., 2020).

4.2.3.5 Subtheme 3:5 Lack of collaboration

Some participants expressed that there may be a lack of collaboration with other social workers who are also doing social work services at other universities. The narratives are presented below:

> Participant 8*: So I'm not sure if Stellenbosch University social workers has a body that they can actually connect with to do that benchmarking and do they have the time to actually do that because it's great to hear from other institutions to know what they are doing and then invest in what they are doing.*

> Participant 13: *It does not have to be a competition. If this unit is doing this and then the other unit, why not pull in the resources together? Or if this unit is providing this kind of groups and then this section, which is social workers, will then provide this kind of groups.*

The participants highlighted that they think there may be a lack of interconnectedness among the departments which deal with student issues and that most of the poor integration is a result of bureaucratic red tape on role allocation. Participants feel that units might be working in silos, pulling from different directions instead of pulling in the resources. Furthermore, the participants' perspective aligns with the ecological systems perspective by illustrating how systemic factors, such as bureaucratic red tape and poor integration among student-related departments, can create barriers to effective support. This analysis reflects how interactions between different units within the university can impact the overall well-being of students, emphasising the importance of a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of various systems and their influence on students' experiences.

Collaboration holds significant importance in the work of social workers, as interprofessional collaboration is increasingly being recognised as a vital factor in their practice (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016). Moreover, social workers can bring to the multidisciplinary team a unique perspective concerning addressing the student needs that were mentioned in the first chapter, which include mental health-related challenges, HIV and AIDS, food insecurity, substance abuse problems and gender-based violence (Wilcox et al., 2005; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010; Twill et al., 2016; Casado, Riera & Cardona, 2020).

From this theme, it can be deduced that the scope of social work services at Stellenbosch University may be hindered by several factors. One significant challenge is the welfare stigma, which may deter students from seeking assistance owing to concerns about judgement or labelling. Moreover, resource constraints, including limited funding and staffing, limit the extent of services that can be offered to students in need. Additionally, a lack of awareness among students about the availability and benefits of social work services contributes to underutilisation. Finally, the absence of effective collaboration between various stakeholders may prevent a comprehensive approach to addressing students' social and emotional needs. Thus, these obstacles collectively impede the full realisation of the potential of social work services within the university setting.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Mechanisms to improve social work services at Stellenbosch University

The participants were questioned about their recommendations for promoting a good social work scope at Stellenbosch University. Their responses suggested several key measures: fostering an inclusive environment where social workers can engage effectively with students from diverse backgrounds, addressing students' and human resources challenges in a comprehensive manner, expanding the scope of social workers' roles, prioritising multi-stakeholder collaborations, and securing active support from the university management. The subsequent narratives will delve into these findings in more detail.

4.2.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Foster a culturally sensitive and inclusive environment

Some participants felt that social workers should be a representation of the community they serve by being inclusive and being able to work with everyone.

> Participant 1*: Umm, when we look at perhaps the theme of inclusivity, if we are to increase the Office of the Social Worker, there has to be one who is able to work with everybody.*

Participants reflected that, within the diversity of their community at the university, there is a clear difference between students who are well off and students who are struggling.

Participant 11*: So, we come from a university with lots of money. So, I think it's also a challenge to understand the new student who comes in and their particular needs.*

Participant 5*: When you deal with students from Kayamandi at a micro level and meso level, you know that the student comes from a black township. Then you would know that these are the similar issues faced by these students.*

According to the views of the participants, social workers should be able to work with diverse communities. There also seems to be a tone in the participants' views that social workers, primarily serving students facing socioeconomic challenges, should be a cultural representation of those students. This provokes a fundamental question: does this perception imply that only those social workers can empathise better with their needs? Whatever the case may be, this should not be so, since the global definition of social work, as discussed in Chapter Two, emphasises the duty and ethical responsibility social workers as being to uphold the principles of social justice by respecting diversities and advocating for the equitable distribution of resources (IFSW, 2014; IASSW, 2018; DSD, 2016).

Perhaps this is also where the argument that was presented in the literature review in Chapter Two becomes more relevant regarding a shift to a decolonised social work, which is relevant to our current context and which also advocates for indigenous ways of helping and solving problems (Fairfax, 2018; Mabvurira, 2018; Mathebane, 2020).

Another participant expressed the view that Stellenbosch University is financially well resourced and that it may be a challenge to understand the new students who are gaining access to university from different socioeconomic backgrounds. It was exposited in the history of higher education that, during apartheid, universities were separated according to race, which meant that some universities were funded better than others (Jansen, 2003). And since Waghid (2017) argues that a university should be responsive to the challenges it faces, then being responsive means that the university should take proactive measures to alleviate certain symptoms of societal decay within the university.

Therefore, when discussing diversity and inclusion at Stellenbosch University, students from disadvantaged backgrounds should not be compelled to illustrate their poverty to others in order to convey their urgent need for a social worker. It is assumed

that social workers are already familiar with the pertinent indicators. Hence, there is a requirement to align the profession's social justice values (IFSW & IASSW, 2014) and to employ person-in-environment approaches (Teater, 2014) to enhance educational outcomes by addressing students' basic needs and by advocating for more equitable campus-wide policies.

4.2.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Adequately address student challenges

Study participants argued that they should not be impacted in their education due to lack of access to resources.

> Participant 7: *Things like, I can't go to class because I can't afford pads. You know, if I've got food in my stomach and I am full, I can actually engage better. And I can also live a more dignified life.*

Working with students individually would allow social workers the opportunity to gather insight into the individual student. It also allows the opportunity to address more than just food insecurity but to take on a holistic approach which includes the family, institutions and policies, as referred to within the ecological systems perspective (Hepworth et al., 2013; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2013).

> Participant 5: *They look holistically at the home situation. So, they are in a key position to push forward the university's vision of transformation.*

The participants' responses highlight the need for holistic ways to address student needs and to have engaged citizenship. To cultivate this, students must learn in a conducive environment. Social workers need to work individually with students to address the social issues that students raise. Hence, the methods and theories of social work, specifically case work and developmental social work, become relevant in addressing the needs of students (Gray, 2010; Lombard, 2019).

Also, in terms of the theoretical framework employed in this study, which is the ecological systems perspective, emphasising the interconnectedness between individuals and their environments, the narrative reflects and highlights the holistic approach taken by social workers. They consider multiple systems that influence students' lives, such as the home environment, student life, and the classroom (Teater, 2014). By considering these various perspectives, social workers gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' context and can make informed

decisions, particularly in academic matters (Tinto, 2017). Additionally, the narrative suggests that social workers play a pivotal role in advancing the university's vision of transformation, indicating their ability to affect change within the university system.

4.2.4.3 Subtheme 4.3: Expand the scope of social workers

Some participants postulated that there is a need to identify everything that social workers can assist with at the university, and this can even include providing support to staff members.

> Participant 2*: I mean we are talking about students now, but I know of so many staff members who would also benefit from having access to a social worker. So, once we get the students on board, we can push, you know and say the staff members also need assistance.*

This narrative indicates that having access to a social worker at Stellenbosch University is beneficial and that social workers are key to the wellness of both students and staff; thus, they need to focus on that as well as on support services. This is because social workers are trained to do much more than what they are currently doing. The narrative is reflected below:

> Participant 9: *I know social workers are trained to do so much more and to help with a lot more that could assist students a lot more. So, I think maybe just like getting a better understanding of the scope of what social workers can do.*

> Participant 4: *Substances are a big problem at our universities. How do we train and educate our students? How do we skill them around all the kind of life challenges? Social workers can also add value to managing that. But also, students come without their families, but they come with their family problems.*

The narratives above highlight that students bring their family problems with them when they come to university. This perspective acknowledges the interconnectedness between individuals and their social environments, including their families (Dale et al., 2006). It suggests that the family dynamics and challenges of students can impact their well-being and academic performance significantly (Tinto, 2017). By considering the influence of the family system, social workers can understand the students' needs better and develop appropriate interventions that address not only their individual experiences but also the broader familial context. This analysis aligns with the

ecological systems perspective, which emphasises the importance of considering multiple systems and their interactions in understanding individuals and their development (Lutz, 1956; Germain & Gitterman, 1996).

The narrative above also highlights what was reflected in Chapter Three regarding current social work services within Stellenbosch University, which were pointed out to be made up out of only four main roles: counselling, food-security services, linking students to other resources on campus, and coordinating the work–study programme (Nyembezi, 2022). There are numerous services that social workers can offer: they can do screening with students, and awareness campaigns, among many others. The narrative is reflected below:

> Participant 18: *I was saying I think there's work necessary around awareness and prevention because social workers can also do mental health awareness stuff. It's not only psychologists that's supposed to do that work. I call it early intervention. That's where social workers can play quite a huge role in terms of that awareness and preventative work.*

The narrative above highlights that social workers should also be involved in doing work related to prevention and early intervention programmes. Although the bulk of mental health-related work is done by psychologists at Stellenbosch University, social workers are able to conduct the mental health awareness campaigns as part of prevention and early intervention programmes. Furthermore, social workers do provide counselling and this should be added to their scope of work (Vonk et. al., 2000; Mkhize, 2014). The developmental approach to social welfare places emphasis on prevention and early intervention services, as articulated in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) (DSD, 2006; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015; Lombard, 2019).

Participants also articulated that social workers can do group work to address some of the issues students struggle with. This view is reflected below:

> Participant 14*: Maybe not specifically anxiety and depression, but something else, where they can run groups and we can look at where the themes that we can pull from that waiting list and say we can put these students into groups; they have a common theme and it is something that our social workers can deal with.*

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From the participants' viewpoint social workers are skilled in providing groupwork interventions to address the challenges that students face. By running groups, social workers can create a supportive and collaborative environment where students with common challenges can come together to share experiences, learn from one another, and develop coping strategies (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2006). The unique contribution of social work groupwork is that they might address issues related to family dynamics, community resources, and social justice concerns (Payne, 2005; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015). That is a strength which should be utilised.

According to Lambert and Siege (2018), rethinking how higher education can support student success is a tall order that requires stepping outside of the traditional roles and comfort zones of administrators and faculty members. Fortunately, some institutions are taking on more social work services within higher education settings, opening new avenues for both students and social workers (Pomrenke & Morris, 2010; Sheats, 2017).

4.2.4.4 Subtheme 4:4: Address human resource challenges

According to the participants, there is a need for more social workers to deal with student challenges adequately.

> Participant 3: *I believe the social work office must be increased. Even if we are going to be saying that there is going to be a strengthened and sort of separation of duties between social workers and psychologists. So perhaps if we could get two or more social workers that can really help.*

The narrative above highlights that there is a need for more social workers than are already available. While participants articulated the need for more social workers, they also stated that there is a need for a social work supervisor, because there are problems in being managed by a psychologist.

> Participant 10: *I would recommend that social workers have their own supervisor. Even if it's not a manager, if we're not there yet. But a supervisor then, who is also a social worker that will be managing the social work side of things. Yes, I understand the whole point of a multidisciplinary team, but let there be a social work supervisor who will be providing supervision to social workers.*

As stated earlier in the study, the narrative above reiterates what is noted in the Supervision Framework for social work in South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012), which requires that a social worker be supervised by a social work supervisor. This highlights the importance of specialised supervision within the social work profession, acknowledging the unique knowledge, skills, and challenges faced by social workers. It recognises the value of having a supervisor who understands the context and requirements of social work practice, ensuring that social workers receive appropriate guidance and support in their professional development and practice (Engelbrecht, 2015). This may also contribute to social work services in the real sense – and not just another type of counselling psychological service.

The findings show that, for there to be more social workers there is a need for more funding. There is a need for funding to enable more social worker positions. This would allow students to receive immediate social work interventions as their needs arise, which would, in turn, ensure their success in their studies.

> Participant 17: *So, yes, Stellenbosch University does need more social workers. It's not that they don't need social workers, because these students who might not have accessed social services while they were in high school come with a lot of issues now. So yeah, and now you need to deal with those past issues.*

The narrative above demonstrates that the participant thinks students are the main stakeholders at universities and that adequate social work services are an important platform in ensuring student support. Hiring more social workers will provide a platform to support and reach more students because one person can only do so much. But if there are more social workers or an intervention specifically focused on the work, then more students can be reached and supported. Social work services on campus can help to bridge the gap between dreams and realities that confront many students. A comprehensive, holistic, wrap-around approach, grounded in the emphasis on social justice, can ease the stressors on students, amplifying their support system so that they can focus their energies on academic success and achieve graduation (Bantjes et al, 2022).

The student profile at Stellenbosch University is transforming, and more and more students, who were previously excluded, are gaining access to the university (SU,

2020). As established in the literature review, this transition calls for more social services within higher education institutions (RSA, 2013). This is because the student support services that social workers provide encompass activities that focus on developing and enhancing personal and social skills, while also providing comprehensive support to students in a coordinated and integrated manner (Van Heerden, 2009).

4.2.4.5 Subtheme 4.5: Multi-stakeholder collaboration

There is a need for different departments which focus on student support to work together to assist students in reaching their potential.

> Participant 2: *For instance, in situations where students access Campus Health Services, the social worker can actually be the one making a referral that informs them that this is someone who's struggling. This could assist Campus Health in deciding if they are going to charge the student or they are going to try an alternative way to source medicine.*

The narrative above highlights that, if a student is accessing another service or intervention within the university, a social worker could make a referral as one of the stakeholders who address the needs of students.

Some participants argued that there is a need for staff who focus on student wellness to work under one roof, highlighting the complementary role that social workers can play in understanding various systems, including family systems and individual functioning. Social workers possess the knowledge and skills to assess individuals' needs and understand the larger system in which they operate, making their contribution highly valuable.

> Participant 4: *Ya… and just to provide, I think it's part of being part of a multidisciplinary team that you don't just have one discipline represented.*

> Participant 6: *I think networking is important. Social workers bring in the understanding of the networks and where to refer to, and how to do the referral and the right referrals. So, they will be able to connect students with those referrals and give the students information.*

> Participant 5*: There are also situations where a student needs to apply for a break or leave of absence when they go to practise being a sangoma and at*

times the Transformation Office needs to be involved. The social worker can work with the Transformation Office to bring forth this perspective of understanding the student's life.

As illustrated in the narratives above, social workers can play a crucial role in providing valuable information and making referrals within the team by being the ones to identify and refer students accordingly. This can contribute to an expedited decision-making process regarding the appropriate support and interventions for the students. This demonstrates the collaborative nature of multidisciplinary teams, where each member brings their unique expertise and perspective to ensure comprehensive and holistic support for individuals (Craig, Bejan & Muskat, 2013). Social workers, with their knowledge and understanding of social and emotional factors impacting individuals, can contribute valuable insights to enhance the overall care and assistance provided by the multidisciplinary team.

Overall, offering combined services to students is important because collaborated planning, linking services, and monitoring are critical when serving students with psychosocial needs (Hopkins, 2020). Thus, it is important that social workers work as part of a team at the university.

4.2.4.6 Subtheme 4.6: Management involvement

Some participants expressed the view that the university management should collaborate actively with social workers to explore how they can assist individuals in need effectively.

> Participant 5*: OK, I think the greatest strength is where the university wants to go with regards to transformation. Social workers are in the position of being the blind spots in terms of the care and looking into the well-being of the student.*

From the participants' understanding, the university management should support the work of social workers in their institution, particularly in relation to the university's transformation goals. The social workers are seen as having significant strength in addressing blind spots and providing care for the well-being of students. This indicates that the university recognises the important role of social workers in promoting student welfare and creating a supportive environment. Linking this to the literature review, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) acknowledges student

support as a vital undertaking in fostering the holistic development of students and in providing effective assistance to help them navigate the demands of tertiary life.

Overall, it is imperative for university management to play a pivotal role in steering universities towards a desired state through inclusive processes of democratisation and restitution. At Stellenbosch University, the alignment of policies, processes, people, practices, and norms in pursuit of transformation goals remains a challenge (Fataar, 2022). Addressing these factors may lead to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of the needs of students within South African universities.

From this theme, the study findings indicate an opportunity for the university to engage with the scope of social work at the university in a transformative journey to address student challenges and social needs. Although there may be challenges ahead, the potential for positive change and improvement is substantial, and the university has the capacity to make significant progress in this direction.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to achieve the third objective of the study, which was to investigate, through empirical means, the views of key informants at Stellenbosch University regarding the scope of social work practice. The chapter commenced by evaluating and discussing the research methodology employed in this study, followed by a description of the particulars of participants who took part in the study. Subsequently, the four themes, along with the relevant subthemes and categories that emerged during this research, were identified and analysed. The themes that emerged during this study included the scope of the social worker in South Africa, the scope of social work on university campuses, factors that hinder the adequate implementation of social work services, and mechanisms to improve social work services at university.

The following chapter will present the conclusions derived by the researcher on completion of the empirical study, along with the pertinent recommendations that will follow each conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations regarding the scope of social work practice at a higher education institution in South Africa. In **Chapter One,** it was established that social work serves as a valuable support service within the higher education system, addressing and resolving issues that impact teaching and learning. The nationwide student protest actions that ensued in 2015 in South Africa regarding the social justice-related challenges that plagued the higher education sector, coupled with the dearth of research on the potential scope of social work practice in institutes of higher education in South Africa, further motivated this research inquiry. Hence, this study aimed to gain an understanding of the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa.

In accordance with the aim of this study, **Chapter Two** explored the first objective, which centred on outlining the scope of generalist social work practice in terms of its professional status, definition, social work theories, domain, roles, and guiding principles, both globally and locally. The chapter began by providing a concise historical overview of the emergence of the profession on a global scale, followed by its development in South Africa for a localised context. Additionally, it examined the definition of social work, its theoretical underpinnings, and its guiding principles, with consideration given to discussions surrounding decolonised social work and social work post-COVID-19.

In **Chapter Three**, the focus was on analysing the scope of social work practice within a higher education setting, with specific emphasis on Stellenbosch University, using the ecological systems perspective. This perspective offered valuable insights into the nature of the social work role in a higher education context and, in particular, how social work practice is integrated at Stellenbosch University.

In **Chapter Four**, the fourth objective of this study was addressed, involving an empirical investigation into the current and potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University. The chapter rigorously assessed the trustworthiness of the

research by reviewing and examining the research paradigm, research approach, and the step-by-step research process of the researcher.

This final chapter, **Chapter Five**, builds upon the empirical study and strives to achieve the fourth research objective by formulating comprehensive conclusions and recommendations for the wider higher education institution sector in South Africa. Specifically, it aims to provide actionable insights for stakeholders at Stellenbosch University concerning the scope of social work practice within institutions of higher education.

5.2. PARTICIPANT PARTICULARS

The participants who took part in this research study had some form of role with the student community at Stellenbosch University. Out of the eighteen participants that were interviewed, three participants focused on psychosocial support of students and aspects of training and development. While four of the participants focused on providing mental health and medical healthcare support to students. There were ten participants working or serving as student leaders in the different functionaries/divisions. Participants' years of experience ranged from one year to twenty-two years of experience.

5.3 SYNTHESISED CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, conclusions are drawn based on the findings from the empirical study. These conclusions will be used to form recommendations. The main findings from both the literature review and the empirical study will be discussed in a clear and organised way. The conclusions will be presented in line with the themes and subthemes identified in the previous chapter. To recall, the four key themes are: the scope of social work in South Africa, the scope of social work on university campuses, factors that hinder the scope of social work at Stellenbosch University and mechanisms to improve social work services at Stellenbosch University.

5.3.1 The scope of social work in South Africa

Several participants indicated that social workers cannot ever have one specific role and mentioned that their role is to pursue social change, to conduct needs

assessments and to provide psychosocial support on the issues experienced by their clients. The participants also mentioned that these varied roles make it seem that social workers have the solutions to everything. The understanding of the participants was also that the state delegated social workers to take care of the vulnerable people in our society since there are some people who may experience acute and sudden challenges that need the urgent intervention of a social worker. These arrays of answers were expected, as indicated by previous research, that the scope of social work varies according to country policies and legislation, procedures, and the nature and field of intervention.

The narratives indicated that participants have an understanding of the structure of society and the inequalities that thrive as a result. They also indicated that the participants understand the power and influence that social workers have, as can be seen in the use of legislation and policies to get the best outcome for their clients. While social workers do have their clients' best interests at heart, the narratives indicated that the client may sometimes think otherwise when, for instance, a child needs to be removed from their care, or when a social worker conducting a needs assessment might make a client feel as though they are being policed or under surveillance.

Based on the research findings, various roles were identified and established for social workers engaged in generalist social work practice in South Africa to promote social change. Participants acknowledged that social workers play a crucial role in counselling individuals about their choices and options while providing the necessary support and guidance to address their social and economic needs. Participants also acknowledged that the counselling approach of social workers emphasises an ecological view, taking the person-in-environment context into account. Given the increasing prevalence of mental health issues, participants felt that social workers should be fully utilised.

Ultimately, participants perceived the roles of social workers as including community education and empowerment, making it a suitable approach to tackle contemporary societal challenges. The impact of inequalities on communities leads to the importance of social workers, since they help people to learn and develop critical thinking skills.

This also means that it is the crucial responsibility of social workers to empower individuals to reframe their lived realities. Thus, it may be concluded that the participants' understanding of social work in South Africa aligns with the conceptualisations of international and local scholars in the social work discipline, and with the interventions of local generalist social workers. The conclusion that the participants are, in fact, informed about the scope of social work in South Africa, may be regarded as the point of departure for further conclusions regarding the findings of this research.

5.3.2 The scope of social workers on university campuses

This research study aimed to examine comprehensively the scope of social work practice in a higher education context, using Stellenbosch University as a case study. To achieve this, an overview was conducted of the higher education landscape, considering both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. The literature analysis revealed that the higher education system still reflects the lingering impacts of racial apartheid policies, with evident mental health and systemic challenges.

Owing to these prevailing challenges, a thorough examination of the scope of social work practice within higher education institutions became imperative. By delineating distinct roles undertaken by social workers in South African higher education, it was evident that social work practice plays a necessary and crucial role. Social workers address the psychosocial needs of students; they actively pursue social change; and they empower students in their journey through higher education.

Numerous participants emphasised the vital importance of readily available social workers to address prevalent challenges such as food insecurity, financial constraints, and accommodation needs among South African students. These fundamental needs, if left unattended, pose a substantial risk of hindering academic progression and of leading to potential dropouts. According to participants, efforts should focus on ensuring the affordability and accessibility of nutritious food options on campus.

Furthermore, when it comes to food insecurity and generalist social work roles in South African communities, participants did not mention the issue of food assistance in the form of groceries and food vouchers. However, such interventions only emerged when

participants were asked about the roles of social workers in universities. The goalposts thus keep on shifting when it comes to the expectations that participants have regarding social workers at universities. This fits into the assertion that the roles of social workers are context specific.

Nevertheless, participants alluded to the fact that a significant portion of the South African population continues to live below the poverty line. As a result, the Department of Basic Education through the National School Nutritional Programme (NSNP), and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) through NSFAS have also been given a responsibility to fulfil this need. However, it appears to participants that the government, as the primary source of welfare in the country, continues to shift this responsibility of food security onto other state agencies, which they, the participants, experience at higher education level.

In addition, social workers engage in a variety of processes in their execution of interventions. One of those processes mentioned by the participants is needs assessment. Although the assessment of needs is a key function within social work processes, the influence of this function among university students at Stellenbosch University may see the role of social workers being reduced only to needs assessment, which could also limit the scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University.

Lastly, the participants mentioned that part of empowerment is helping students to manage their money better, since they are often expected to send money home. The ecological systems becomes significant through the role the social worker can play in interventions geared towards the whole family and the student's community of origin. The social worker may be able to intervene practically at a meso and macro level through collaboration with government agencies that target the family at a societal level.

5.3.3. Factors that hinder the scope of social work at Stellenbosch University

Participants indicated that there are numerous factors that hinder the implementation of social work services at Stellenbosch University. These include welfare stigma, management support, resource constraints, poor knowledge of social work services available and a lack of collaboration. These responses highlight the pervasive stigma

associated with social welfare, often stemming from assumptions that individuals cannot deal with their own problems.

The narratives specifically indicated that social workers might encounter operational budgetary limitations owing to insufficient funding, a challenge exacerbated by the increasing diversity of students on university campuses. Furthermore, the findings revealed that there is an absence of effective collaboration between various stakeholders at the university, regarding the social welfare of students. This prevents a comprehensive approach to addressing both the students' social and their emotional needs, which hinders social work practice.

The findings showed that all the challenges mentioned in this theme have a knock-on effect on the ability of social workers to conduct thorough and holistic assessments of the students and their environment. Therefore, obtaining support from institutional leadership becomes essential in order to align resources and to facilitate effective interventions. It is imperative for university management to engage actively with the scope of social work within SU, clarifying their role in supporting the work of social workers, specifically in light of transformation and the diversifying of the student population, with a focus on giving the university access to previously excluded communities.

5.3.4 Mechanisms to improve social work services at Stellenbosch University

A number of participants emphasised the importance of social workers having the capability to engage with diverse communities. Additionally, participants noted that students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, who are now entering higher education institutions as first-generation students, should not be required to display their poverty openly in order to communicate their urgent need for social work assistance. This emphasises the significance of addressing students' needs holistically, for example, in instances of tackling food insecurity where initial concerns might lead to the opportunity to address broader issues, once a comprehensive understanding is gained.

In line with this conclusion, most participants recognised the broader capabilities of social workers beyond that of their current scope. One of the ways suggested was

through a comprehensive examination of the impact of the family and community of origin system on students in need. It is believed that social workers are able to enhance their comprehension of student needs and to formulate suitable interventions that include not only individual encounters but also encompass the wider family and community context. Also, the participants mentioned that the scope of social work could also include prevention and early prevention initiatives related to mental health support of students.

Participants also highlighted the importance of specialised supervision within the social work profession. Social workers have unique knowledge and skills, but may also experience administrative, educational and supportive needs, which are the typical functions of social work supervision. Therefore, there is value in having a social work supervisor, who understands the context and requirements of social work practice, available for social workers at the university to ensure that social workers receive appropriate guidance and support in their professional development and practice, according to the statutory requirements of the South Africa Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). This can also contribute to the advancement of social work services in general, to the benefit of students.

The participants further emphasised the collaborative nature of multidisciplinary teams within the realm of social work practice. Departments and divisions focusing on student support need to work together to assist students to reach their potential. Also key to all these mechanisms is the university management support of the work of social workers, particularly in relation to the university's transformation goals. Social workers are perceived to possess considerable prowess in addressing areas of oversight and in nurturing student well-being. This indicates the important role of social workers in promoting student welfare and creating a supportive environment.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the deductive conclusions above, the researcher recommends the following practice and policy considerations to students and social workers within higher education institutions, Stellenbosch University management, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and policy makers:

- All role players in higher education, and particularly students, should acquaint themselves with the comprehensive definition of social work, as articulated in the global definition of social work, along with the diverse roles that social workers can undertake. Such knowledge can aid in demystifying the welfare stigma identified in the study's findings. Similarly, social workers should develop interventions to destigmatise help-seeking behaviours, ensuring that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, are aware that social work services are accessible and beneficial for their well-being.

- It is advisable for social workers at higher education institutions to initiate engagement with their management to address their workplace challenges arising from the absence of a social work supervisor, leading to the exploration of potential solutions, and to adhere to the requirements of the statutory regulations of the SACSSP.

- Social workers possess the necessary expertise to facilitate financial skills effectively for students. Thus, it is recommended that social work should play a key role in improving the financial capability of students in higher education and in helping them to achieve financial well-being.

- It is recommended that social workers at higher education institutions should be enabled to expand their scope not only to address their clients' (students) individual experiences but also to involve the broader familial context which speaks to their environment/ecology.

- It is recommended that extending the scope of social work practice to staff members within higher education institutions should be investigated. This could take the form of staff wellbeing services offered to staff members.

- It is recommended that higher education institutions should undertake a comprehensive needs assessment regarding social work staffing and to formulate a strategic long-term plan for the establishment and sustainable funding of social work positions.

- Higher education institutions should establish a comprehensive framework or guideline that articulates a clear institutional-level understanding and policy for social work interventions, outlining its significance and scope within the university context.

- It is important to recognise that the influence of social work interventions extends beyond individual cases, encompassing broader societal concerns, specifically food insecurity and accommodation challenges. In order to enhance the comprehensiveness of these interventions, it is recommended that managements of higher education institutions should involve social workers actively in the formulation of strategies to curb these challenges. This inclusive approach would provide a deeper contextual understanding of pertinent issues and would potentially empower social workers to drive meaningful social change towards transformation at higher education institutions.

- It is recommended that, where available, agricultural training faculties and departments, and the Centres for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) of higher education institutions should collaborate to explore the viability of offering fresh products at affordable prices to students facing financial challenges.

- It is recommended that, when discussing diversity and inclusion at higher education institutions, ways must be created for students from disadvantaged backgrounds not to be compelled to illustrate their poverty to others in order to convey their urgent need for a social worker, since this contributes to the stigmatisation of social work services available to students.

- While food insecurity is not exclusive to South African higher education institutions, it remains a prevalent issue affecting higher education institutions in South Africa. Therefore, it is recommended that university managements engage with applicable government sectors to formalise approaches to address food insecurity within the university context. This includes the access of students at higher education institutions to medical healthcare support.

- Finally, it is recommended that a national association structure or community of practice is established for social workers who work in a higher education institution context, with the aim to engender advocacy and representation, professional development, networking, standardisation, information and research, public awareness and best practices in the country. Ultimately, such an association might contribute to the transformation of higher education institutions in South Africa.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature review reveals a lack of comprehensive research on the potential scope of social work practice in higher education institutions in South Africa. A dearth of studies hinder a thorough understanding of the scope in which social work practice could continue as a response to providing support services to students. This study has contributed to closing that gap, but further research is necessary to gain deeper insights into the following areas:

- There is a need for research into the development of a policy or framework that guides social work practice within higher education institutions.
- Research is recommended on the lived experiences of social workers working in higher education institutions, specifically to capture their voices regarding the issues and challenges of their work.

5.6 KEY CONCLUSION

It is evident that the nature of social work practice at universities is multifaceted, revealing that social workers play a crucial role in providing psychosocial support, pursuing social change, and empowering students. However, there are also prevailing challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate collaboration, and a need for greater visibility of social work services among students. Overall, there is a need for transformative change within the university setting that encourages a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to enhance the well-being and academic success of students through social work interventions.

Furthermore, the current state of higher education in South Africa is markedly influenced by prevailing inequality and widespread poverty, which significantly impacts the majority of the population. Consequently, university students often come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. In light of this reality, it is an ethical imperative for the management of universities in South Africa to be acutely aware of these contextual nuances and to demonstrate sensitivity towards the challenges faced by vulnerable students.

The research findings presented in this study provide significant contributions to the understanding of the scope of social work within university settings, solidifying the

importance of the profession in higher education as an essential partner in addressing and mitigating obstacles that impede effective teaching and learning. The identified findings and recommendations of this research will be disseminated to the relevant stakeholders through various channels, and a research article will be prepared for submission to a local social work journal for publication.

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ANNEXURE 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH – Department of Social Work

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

THE POTENTIAL SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: VIEWS OF KEY INFORMANTS AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

Researcher: Qaqamba Mdaka

The following themes will be probed in the interview:

1. **Identifying information of participants**

1.1 Describe your position/role at Stellenbosch University?

1.2 For how long have you been involved in this role/position?

2. **Views on the scope of generalist social work practice**

2.1 What do you think a social worker does in South Africa? (Motivate and give examples)

3. **Views on the potential scope of social work practice at a university**

3.1 What do you think is the main task of a social worker within a university in South Africa? (Motivate and give examples)

3.2 Do you think social work is needed at Stellenbosch University? (Motivate with specific examples)

3.3 What do you think could be the challenges of social work at Stellenbosch University?

3.4 What do you think could be the strengths (benefits) of (this response in our university) social work at Stellenbosch University?

3.5 What do you recommend towards good social work practices at Stellenbosch University? (probe in terms of micro – direct practices, meso – organisational structures, and macro levels – policy formations)

ANNEXURE 2: INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION

UNIVERSITEIT · STELLENBOSCH · UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot · your knowledge partner

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION:

AGREEMENT ON USE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IN RESEARCH

Name of Researcher: Qaqamba Mdaka

Name of Research Project: The Potential Scope Of Social Work Practice At A Higher Education Institution In South Africa: Views Of Key Informants At Stellenbosch University

Service Desk ID: IG-2766

Date of Issue: 12 August 2021

The researcher has received institutional permission to proceed with this project as stipulated in the institutional permission application and within the conditions set out in this agreement.

1	WHAT THIS AGREEMENT IS ABOUT	
What is POPI?	1.1	POPI is the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013.
	1.2	POPI regulates the entire information life cycle from collection, through use and storage and even the destruction of personal information.
Why is this important to us?	1.3	Even though POPI is important, it is not the primary motivation for this agreement. The privacy of our students and employees are important to us. We want to ensure that no research project poses any risks to their privacy.
	1.4	However, you are required to familiarise yourself with, and comply with POPI in its entirety.
What is considered to be personal information?	1.5	'Personal information' means information relating to an identifiable, living, individual or company, including, but not limited to:
	1.5.1	information relating to the race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, national, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental health, well-being, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth of the person;
	1.5.2	information relating to the education or the medical, financial, criminal or

1

Institutional Permission Standard Agreement: 13 March 2017 V1

ANNEXURE 3: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The Stellenbosch University Institutional Information

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON THE POTENTIAL SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: VIEWS OF KEY INFORMANTS AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

The above subject refers. I am a Master's student registered in the Department of Social Work of the University of Stellenbosch. I am planning to conduct a study on the scope of social work practice entitled: **The potential scope of social work practice at a higher education institution in South Africa: Views of key informants at Stellenbosch University.**

The study aims to explore empirically what is and what can potentially be the scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University. I believe that this research will be of benefit to Stellenbosch University as well as to higher education broadly as it is directed at understanding the current and the potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution.

The purpose of my letter to you is to request your permission to conduct the study and permission to access relevant documents such as institutional policies, reports and post descriptions or any document of Stellenbosch University available regarding the university's social work services that may be relevant to my study.

I look forward to your assistance with this request.

Yours faithfully,

Qaqamba Mdaka

Prof L.K Engelbrecht

Student number:

Supervisor, Department of Social Work

……………………………..

………………………………………………

Signature

Signature

ANNEXURE 4: INFORMED CONSENT

![Stellenbosch University logo] UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

_____

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by **Qaqamba Mdaka** from the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. You have been approached as a possible participant in this specific study because you are deemed to be a key informant for the study.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the current and potential scope of social work practice at Stellenbosch University as a higher education institution in South Africa.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF YOU?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to be available for a telephonic interview at a convenient time agreed upon by both you and the researcher. Should you require any further information about the research you can contact the researcher via email at qmdaka@sun.ac.za

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The research is considered minimal risk in terms of research ethical considerations (REC). All interviews are regarded as confidential; therefore, no personal details of participants will be included in the research. Discomfort may be discussed at any time during the interview and will be adequately addressed immediately.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

The possible benefits that may arise from this study include the recommendations that will be made to the higher education sector in South Africa and specifically to

applicable stakeholders at Stellenbosch University regarding the potential scope of social work practice.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I will be responsible for all expenses involved in this research; therefore, no form of payment will be required of you. You will not receive any remuneration for participating in this study.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

The research will consider all the interviews as confidential. The data obtained in the study will be handled as confidential information and it will only be shared with my supervisor but will be used anonymously as data for the study. Since the interviews will be done telephonically, the recorded information will be managed, analysed and processed by the researcher and kept securely in password-protected devices and stored in encrypted cloud software with a password. The transcribed hard copies will be kept in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet with a key code.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose to participate or not in this study. If you volunteer to be in the study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. If there are certain questions that you might feel uncomfortable to respond to, you may skip them and still remain in the study.

8. RESEARCHERS CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any uncertainties about the research, please feel free to contact the study supervisor, the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. Prof L.K Engelbrecht, Email: lke@sun.ac.za.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and may discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a

research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

_____

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

Participant

The information above was described to me, the participant.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Date _____

Investigator

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ (name of subject/participant). (He / She) was encouraged to ask questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

Signature of investigator _____

Date _____

ANNEXURE 5: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

20 July 2021

Project number: 23095

Project Title: THE POTENTIAL SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: VIEWS OF KEY INFORMANTS AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

Dear Mrs Q Mdaka

Co-investigators:

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 12/07/2021 10:24 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
20 July 2021	19 July 2024

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (23095) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Research Protocol/Proposal	Final 14 June Proposal Q Mdaka	09/07/2021	1
Recruitment material	Annexure 3	09/07/2021	1
Informed Consent Form	Annexure 3	09/07/2021	1
Data collection tool	Annexure 1	09/07/2021	1
Proof of permission	Annexure 2	09/07/2021	1

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

ANNEXURE 6: REFLEXIVITY REPORT

Reflexivity may be defined as the practice of self-reflection, whereby the researcher critically evaluates how their subjectivity may have influenced their study (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). Reflexivity helps prevent the neglect or neutralization of factors such as the researcher's background, experiences, emotions, and values (Oliphant & Bennett, 2020). Ruokonen-Engler and Siouti (2016) present the subsequent inquiries for researchers to examine while engaging in biographical reflexive journaling:

1. **What personal experience do I have with my research topic?**

I hold a Bachelor of Social Work degree; hence, my focus and interest lie in the social work domain. My research topic centred on understanding the potential scope of social work practice within Stellenbosch University. I am cognisant of the historical context of Stellenbosch University and that it previously excluded individuals from my race from studying at the institution. Nevertheless, I am driven by a desire to comprehend the role of social work in fostering social change and transformation within Stellenbosch University.

2. **How did I come to study this specific topic in the field?**

I am an employee of Stellenbosch University, and although my position does not involve a traditional generalist social work role, I have observed that the majority of students who seek social work intervention are those who have experienced significant disadvantages across various aspects of their lives. These students may have been excluded from participating equally in university life owing to their race, gender, sex, disability, HIV/AIDS status, socioeconomic status, or any other legally prohibited ground. As a result, I appreciate the impact that social work has on creating social change both within institutional settings and society at large. My personal interest in the field has thus led me to study this specific topic.

3. **What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?**

The unit in which I worked was formerly under the Centre for Student Counselling and Development, which is where social work interventions take place. As such, I have a clear understanding of the unit's position within the broader institutional operations.

Additionally, I have colleagues who work in social worker roles and am thus knowledgeable about their experiences and challenges.

4. How did I gain access to the field?

By leveraging my professional network, I was able to obtain access to participants for my research. This involved reaching out to staff and students whom I knew personally, as well as those I had encountered during the course of my facilitations and stakeholder engagements. Additionally, some participants recommended other individuals who met the inclusion criteria and expressed an interest in participating in the study.

5. How does my own position (age, gender, class, ethnicity, economic status, etc.) influence interaction in the field and the data collection process?

I am a 35-year-old black woman who shares a common history with the individuals who seek social work services at Stellenbosch University. With 11 years of work experience in the NGO, government, and higher education sectors, I have developed a diverse skill set that allows me to empathise with the challenges faced by both staff and students. These variables enabled me to maintain a professional distance while conducting insightful interviews with the participants who took part in this research study.

6. What is my interpretation perspective?

My research took the form of a qualitative inquiry, and the interpretation of my research findings was subjective in nature. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, a literature study was followed by developing an interview schedule. The schedule was then used to guide the data collection process. While examining the data collected, I noticed instances where I either disagreed or concurred with the narratives presented by participants. This was a direct result of my perspective being shaped by my involvement in the research process, which prevented me from being entirely objective. Nevertheless, I maintained awareness of this issue by engaging in reflective journaling, which enabled me to remain impartial and avoid prejudice while analysing the participants' narratives.

ANNEXURE 7: EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT

Participant 15

Researcher: The first question I'd like to ask you is, could you please describe your position and role at Stellenbosch University and in particular your involvement with the student community?

Participant: I am a ResEd coordinator within the Centre for Student Communities, so I am responsible for XXXX cluster and then I'm also the residence head of XXXX.

Researcher: How long have you been involved in in this position or role?

Participant: I started in xxxx as the acting residence head at xxxx, when their residence head was on maternity leave. So that was when my involvement with CSC (Centre for Student Communities) as a staff member started. Then I formally started with CSC in a permanent capacity on xxxx.

Researcher: Now I would like to ask from you what do you think a social worker does in South Africa?

Participant: It is my understanding that they do fulfil different roles depending on the context that they are appointed in, but it is mostly to provide support to children or to the students or families that they are involved with. And so, if I can draw up my knowledge when I was still practising as an attorney. We would usually get the social workers involved when we thought there was some trouble issues around the children, they would then usually go out and do the reports and the investigations for us and they'd give us the reports so that we can continue with legal side of things.

Researcher: What do you think then is the main task of a social worker within the university.

Participant: I do think it is to provide support to the students, but I also think supporting the staff supporting the students. Because if I think about my role as a residence head.

Participant: My training was in the legal field, so I have a lot of knowledge about that, but I don't necessarily have training and also the understanding that is necessarily of how to go exactly around a lot of issues. So yeah, we get training, and we try to equip and educate ourselves as far as possible, but it's also good if we have a colleague who is a social worker that you can phone and say, listen, I'm not quite sure what I should or shouldn't do. To ask them, what would your advice be? What is the best way for me to proceed and go forward. So, I do think that would be someone that plays a supportive role, definitely to the students and then also do to staff and to colleagues within the residence space as well.

Researcher: OK, now do you think, social work is needed at Stellenbosch University?

Participant: I definitely think social workers are needed at SU. There are a lot of things that we don't necessarily know of. And there are a lot of things that as the world changes. We get confronted with different things and I don't need confronted in a negative way at all. I just mean things come to our attention, that we don't necessarily have knowledge of or didn't know that it exists, or if we knew we didn't know it was such a big issue.

Participant: Disclaimer: If I say issue or problem, I don't mean it negatively. I'm just trying to explain. So, I do think it is necessary to have social workers.

Participant: I mean, as a residence head, if I can use Heemstede, for example. There are 220 students currently in the space. There's no way for me to know all of them personally, and if I walk by and passing, I can be like oh "Hi. How are you doing"? And to be honest they will answer "I'm doing fine". But meanwhile the student is struggling with something, and they may or may not tell me, but they may or may reach out to some of my other colleagues or specifically maybe a social worker to say this is my issue.

Participant: So I do think it is necessary for us and purely because as staff in CSC we don't know how to deal with everything and we cannot be everything to everyone. That

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is why we have people with different knowledge and skill sets so that we can work together. So yeah.

Researcher: And what do you think then could be the challenges of social work within Stellenbosch University.

Participant: I think first and foremost is funding.

Participant: I mean, let's address the elephant in the room because it always comes down to funding. Can we fund another position? Or if yes, do we have funding to sustain and execute the projects that we really want to do to assist students. So, I do think there will have to be a conversation around funding and then also the feasibility of a model because you don't want a social worker and then after a year you learn that this person can't be with us anymore owing to financial reasons, so I think that will always be an issue. Then the second thing is.

Participant: Also, to get colleagues to understand that the work that social workers do is complementary to the work that we do. It's not if a student reaches out to the social worker, it's because you're a bad residence head. Not at all. It's because the students feel comfortable enough to go to a space to say I need help.

Participant: And that when the social worker speaks to you, that you don't see it as a confrontation or a negative interaction, but rather a way of saying 'OK great the student reached out. How can we collaborate? How can we work?' So, for me that is a big thing. And I think colleagues need to be made aware as well that we have social workers, and these are their roles. Because I learned in this space that people are like "this is my job and please don't step on my toes". Instead of being like "get over here" to work for the students benefit.

Participant: Let's see what we can do as a collective to assist and to help the student. So that's just in short what I think, yeah.

Researcher: The second last question is what do you think could be the benefits of social work at Stellenbosch University?

Participant: I think one of the main benefits will be that we will offer another platform to support students. And as you also mentioned just now, students are the main stakeholders. That is why we have a job and that is why we do what we do. So I think definitely it will provide a platform to support and if we have more social workers, it will also give the opportunity to reach more students because one person can only do so much.

Participant: But if we have more social workers or an intervention specifically focused on the work, and then we can reach and support more students, I think that would for me would be one of the biggest benefits, yeah.

Researcher: All right, OK, now this is the last question I would like to ask you is, what would you recommend towards good social work practice at Stellenbosch University? And I want you when you answer this question to think within an ecological systems model where for instance you have the micro, meso and macro levels of intervention.

Participant: If the sky is the limit, it would be lovely if we can have a social worker per cluster. That way you can know that person is tied for instance to Rubix cluster. And if there are any concerns or matters or issues, then we refer our students specifically to this person. I know that it's not ideal because some clusters come with different challenges. And I mean someone will have on a certain point 100 things to do and someone 10 things to do than the other social worker.

Participant: It would be great if we can have one per cluster, because then you also know as the staff member if I am very busy, then person A, who is a social worker that is tied to my cluster and if there are issues, I can chat with them. I can get advice from them and so on.

Participant: Ideally it would be lovely if students in need of social work intervention. Have, that capacity for them to get that intervention and that support, and that help that they need. Because we want students to be successful and we want them to

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graduate successfully. And if we can have interventions that can assist with that, then why not?

Participant: And then I do think if we speak about macro scale management and policies. I don't know at this point in time to what extent does the social work centre for example, apart from reporting to the Senior Director Student Affairs, who then reports to the DVC teaching and learning, has input on the Rectors management team. Because ideally you would want to know what the challenges are.

Participant: Within a social work framework with regards to students and what interventions we can have to support and address those challenges. So ideally you want to provide feedback or information up until the Rectors management team. And not have something that is buried in a report somewhere.

Participant: But some direct feedback, some direct information that flows and says: 'Listen, these are the challenges, these are the things that we picked up on the ground. Maybe in a form of a quarterly report.'

Participant: I don't know if this is happening at the moment. But were they sit with the Centre (CSCD) or the social workers specifically so that those matters can be addressed and brought to the forefront. And I do think whenever we review policies, it is important to have the voice of social workers as part of that process.

Participant: In the same way that we will have someone from the legal division in the same way that we will have someone from academics or from wherever. Because we all bring different knowledge to the table. Not to tire out the process, but rather to understand what the different things are that can play into a specific conversation.

Researcher: OK, well, let me just stop there with the recording. We have come to the end of our interview.

ANNEXURE 8: EDITING CERTIFICATE

Ricky Woods Academic Editing Services

Editing Certificate

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To Whom It May Concern

Stellenbosch University

Editing of a Master's Dissertation

I, Marietjie Alfreda Woods, hereby certify that I have completed the editing and correction of the dissertation: **The Potential Scope of Social Work Practice at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa: Views of Key Informants at Stellenbosch University** by **Qaqamba Mdaka.** I believe that the dissertation meets with the grammatical and linguistic requirements for a document of this nature.

Name of Editor: Marietjie Alfreda Woods

Qualifications: BA (Hons) (Wits); Copy-editing and Proofreading (UCT); Editing Principles and Practice (UP); Accredited Text Editor (English) (PEG)

MA (Ricky) Woods

24 August 2023

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