FACTORS UNDERMINING SOCIAL WORKERS' ATTEMPTS AT FURTHERING THEIR STUDIES IN DRIEKOP, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother, late father, grandmother, sisters, fiancée, sons, nephews, and nieces, with special emphasis to my parents who solemnly wished for me to attain higher qualifications to break the litany of illiteracy and lower educational attainment in the family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors militating against social workers' endeavours to undertake postgraduate studies. The model of Maintaining Professional Competence was considered to guide the study with a sample of ten (10) participants who were all interviewed face-to-face in Driekop (Sekhukhune District), Limpopo Province (RSA). An interview guide was utilised in the foregoing. Content Thematic Analysis was used to make sense of the findings. The findings indicate that social workers' aspirations to improve their qualifications are hampered by the following impediments: heavy workloads and family commitments; financial constraints due to meagre remuneration; lack of motivation and poor prestige of the profession fueled by little or no consideration of postgraduate qualifications by employers; and poor reading habits and lack of information on postgraduate sponsors. Despite the aforementioned barriers, social workers acknowledged the value of postgraduate education in their lives. Given these findings, the researcher recommends that:

- Postgraduate qualifications in social work need to be incentivised.

- Social work salaries need to be improved/commensurate with qualifications, and competitive incentives provided as well.

- Social workers' heavy workloads need to be reviewed.

- Social workers need to make efforts to inculcate reading habits amongst themselves.

- Social workers must strive to balance work and family commitments to make time for further studies.

- Social workers as well as their employers should seek or source scholarships for post-graduate studies.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

- AU - African Union

- BRICS - Britain, Russia, India, China and South Africa

- DBIS - Department for Business Innovation and Skills

- DHET - Department of Higher Education and Training

- DSD - Department of Social Development

- EEA- European Economic Area

- EU - European Union

- ICL- Income Contingency Loans

- GDP - Gross Domestic Product

- HESA - Higher Education South Africa

- HSS - Humanities and Social Science

- HWSETA - Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority

- MEC - Member of Executive Committee

- MPC - Maintaining Professional Competence

- NIHSS - National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences

- NQF - National Qualifications Framework

- NRF - National Research Foundation

- NSFAS - National Financial Aid Scheme

- NSFAS - National Student Financial Aid

- OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

- OSD - Occupation Specific Dispensation

- PHSDSBC - Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council

- PSETA - Public Sector Education and Training Authority

- RSA - Republic of South Africa

- SACSSP - South African Council for Social Service Professions

- STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Management

- TREC - Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee

- TVET - Technical Vocational Education and Training

- TVET - Technical Vocational Education and Training

- UK - United Kingdom

KEY CONCEPTS

- Undermine

- Further studies

- Social worker

- Improve

- Postgraduate

- Qualification

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The core mission of social work in the world is to serve humanity. To meet the ever-changing demands of the service consumers and inter-professional collaboration (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016), social workers need to continuously update their knowledge and expertise for ultimate and effective performance. Simply put, to make more sound decisions or interventions.

It is emphasised that men and women pursue varying careers and educational paths after completion of a bachelor's degree (Clune, Nunez & Choy, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2007; Mattern & Radunzel, 2015; McCallum, 2016). Olasehinde, Akanmode, Alaiyemola and Babatunde (2015:194) opine that "it is commonly agreed that a country cannot be fully developed without large-scale investment in her educational scheme since the breakthrough of a country is directly proportional to her educational level".

Frostick and Gault (2013) argue that no country has ever seen its growth rate fall because it has overeducated its population, but there are plenty of examples of countries that have suffered from having too few skilled workers. Therefore, it is important for social workers to improve their qualifications. This is because improving qualifications at any level will enable them to be appointed on a higher salary level (without specific focus to DSD) and they will grow professionally.

Zegwaard and Mccurdy (2014) hold the view that the most highly qualified individuals have better job positions than those with lower-level qualifications. This does not necessarily imply that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training or short courses (deemed lesser) in areas such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) and others hinder one to hold higher positions. However, they do not measure up to certain postgraduate education such as master's and PhD degrees in terms of output.

Given the aforesaid information, social work remains critical in empowering communities; and less empowered social workers would be of disservice to clients or communities. One scholar posits that reading loads the mind with a new software (Satija, 2002). Hence, social workers need to be abreast of the latest developments, methods, models and theories to make more informed interventions. One way of doing this is through post-

graduate education. For this reason, it may make more sense to dig deeper and understand factors demotivating social workers from contemplating to further studies.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Social workers employed mostly in government institutions practise for a lengthy period before thinking of improving their qualifications; and they seldom think of furthering qualifications in the core profession that they choose. Social workers do not improve their qualifications after obtaining a bachelor's degree; this is a major concern (Public Sector Education and Training Authority, 2012). Badat (2010) maintains that South Africans' (especially black population) participation in postgraduate education is insufficient and on a downward trajectory.

The MPC model, which is concerned with how employees/social workers devote themselves to continuing/furthering qualifications in their profession, posits that an individual commitment is important for the growth/betterment of the organisation (DSD). As stated by Foko (2015), the humanities and social sciences field had a lower percentage of postgraduate progression from 2005-2012. As expected, social workers also possess marginal higher qualifications which are in high demand in the country (National Development Plan, 2010-2030). Habib (2011) as well as Coetsee and Weiner (2013) mention that to build a knowledge-based economy, South Africa will need to increase its PhD production rate because only a few possess such qualifications.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) (2007), which was worried by the shortage of professionals and lower improvement of qualifications in the country (social work included), set initial targets for PhD production in its ten-year innovation plan 2008–2018. The DST funds postgraduates in institutions of higher learning where 3 000 PhD graduates are produced yearly in South Africa, including social workers since 2008 (Reddy, Bhorat, Powell, Visser & Arends, 2016), although the figure is low given the population of the country which stands at 57 million. According to Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2016), social workers are among the highest scarce professionals in South Africa in terms of master's and doctoral output; not to mention the scarcity of undergraduate social workers.

According to research, an individual's history in academia and personal characteristics (such as self-motivation) may deter one to pursue postgraduate studies (Lovik, 2004). Substantial research as well maintains that poor student and supervisor relationship may

largely contribute to students' loss of interest in pursuing postgraduate education (Doğan & Bikmaz, 2015; Sithole, 2016; Bacwayo, Nampala & Oteyo, 2017). On the other side, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2015) revealed that financial considerations are the most common factors influencing the decision whether or not to study, which the MPC model refers to as individual barriers to participation in studies. Most students pursuing master's and doctoral degrees, for example, have to borrow money to finance their studies more often than undergraduate students. Few funding schemes exist which sponsor African students to undertake doctoral studies within Africa (German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD; Harle, 2013). Notwithstanding, Cloete *et al.* (2015) underline that higher qualifications, in particular PhDs, are a prerequisite for knowledge, innovation and economic growth. The implication could be that the country requires more educated people; and this may include social workers with higher qualifications at some point to address its basic problems.

Research confirms that the social work profession is undermined and this is visible through low salaries and poor working conditions, particularly in rural areas (Schenck, 2004; Earle, 2008; Sithole, 2010; Calitz, Roux & Strydom, 2014). With regard to the aforesaid, the MPC model maintains that these are organisational factors impeding on the individual's aspirations to study further. Sithole (2010) as well went so far as to suggest that social work is without prestige as evidenced by the absence of basic infrastructure and equipment such as telephones, transport and computers that are critical to the delivery of quality and effective services. As such social workers' aspirations to study further in such conditions may be questionable. Similarly, other researchers brought to the fore that working conditions for most social workers in South Africa with only bachelor's degrees are generally very poor (Sithole, 2010; Calitz, Roux & Strydom, 2014; Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015).

The researcher is thus motivated to explore in depth, the vantage points of social workers who are employed in government institutions for their perceived unwillingness to improve their formative educational qualifications.

1.3 ROLE OF MODEL

1.3.1 Model of Maintaining Professional Competence

In this proposed study, the researcher will make use of the Maintaining Professional Competence model by Chan and Auster (2003). The model is defined as the process by which professionals keep abreast with contemporary knowledge, skills and abilities needed to function effectively in their profession. With the model's (MPC) tenets that follow in mind, it is assumed that to maintain competence, the professionals must participate in updating activities (qualifications). According to the model, participation in updating activities involves two aspects: *Individual characteristics* and *organisational factors.* Individual characteristics involve motivation, age, barriers to participation and professional commitment. Organisational factors include updating climate and managerial support.

Individual characteristics

- Motivation - This is the most salient determinant of participation in updating activities. Perceived benefits of training and participation encourage intrinsic (e.g. personal satisfaction) and extrinsic benefits of training (e.g. better pay) that are significant predictors of participation. Historically, the social work profession has a meagre salary compared to other helping professions. This low demotivating salary for some social workers may give them the zeal to study further. Social workers who improve their qualifications enjoy better and long-lasting benefits at the higher echelon than those at the lower echelon. These benefits include high salary, healthier lifestyle, elongated lifespan and general benefit to society.

- Age - This is a factor that is expected to affect an individual's motivation to improve himself or herself and the organisation's willingness to train the individual. Older individuals compared to the youth are seen as resistant to change, less interested in challenging jobs, and as a poor investment for training because they are nearing retirement and unlikely to update themselves. Social workers who consider themselves old may not see the significance of improving qualifications. Bursaries, scholarships and a number of sponsors have age restriction to candidates, thus sidelining a certain age group of social workers.

- Barriers to participation - These are factors that interfere with or restrict an individual's ability to participate in learning activities. The barriers are categorized as situational, institutional, dispositional and informational. These include lack of money/high costs; lack of time due to job responsibilities; family and childcare responsibilities; fear of losing benefits at work as well as difficulty in meeting academic demands. All these factors may contribute to social workers not having the desire to improve their qualifications.

- Professional commitment - Professional behaviour is associated with commitment to continuous learning. Social workers who have a strong personal identification or commitment to the profession, for example, are expected to engage in more continuing education activities than those who do not feel strongly about being in the profession.

Organisational factors

- Updating climate - These are the practices, procedures and policies that facilitate or place limits on opportunities for potential individuals in updating or improving their qualifications. A supportive updating climate is necessary in a learning environment. Organisational barriers include staff shortages, which may limit opportunities for learning, lack of knowledge about learning opportunities, prohibitive entry requirements to post-registration programmes, lack of appropriate programmes, difficulty in obtaining study leave and late advertising of professional educational events. These are cited as barriers to postgraduate education (and Continuing Professional Development) and they may impact on the social workers' time or preparedness to consider improving their qualifications.

- Managerial support - Managers and supervisors in the organisation actively support employees in their updating efforts by providing feedback about job performance, assigning opportunities to develop and strengthen new skills, and taking an interest in career goals. Managers act as gatekeepers to updating opportunities by interpreting and implementing organisational policies. Managers of social workers need to support their employees in their attempt to improve their qualifications. This implies that the management may identify certain employees and recommend or allow them (on request) to improve their qualifications based on work performance observed.

The next chapter will focus on Literature Review on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ON FACTORS UNDERMINING SOCIAL WORKERS' ATTEMPTS AT FURTHERING THEIR STUDIES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter illuminates available and recent literature on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. A model of Maintaining Professional Competence (hereafter referred to as MPC) by Chan and Auster (2003) was selected to guide the flow of the literature on factors that are more likely to undermine social workers' attempts in pursuit of postgraduate studies. Furthermore, an exposition of the benefits and ills aligned with further studies is proffered.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) define a theory as an organised body of concepts and principles intended to explain a particular phenomenon. Boss et *al.* (1993) hold the view that theorising is the process of systematically formulating and arranging ideas or concepts to understand a particular phenomenon of interest. Thus, a theory is a set of interconnected ideas that emerge from this process. Stepney and Ford (2012) posit that a theory attempts to explain why something is as it is.

Teater (2010), on the other hand, argues that a model itself is usually a theory or method depicted logically and/or graphically, and is concerned with what and how something happens. Thompson (2000:22) cited in Stepney and Ford (2012) maintains that "a model seeks to describe…..how certain factors interrelate". Based on the definitions above, the researcher has opted to allow the study to be guided by MPC model instead of a theory, this is so because of the relevancy found in the model's tenets which align well with the objective(s) of the study. Before getting deeper into the model, it is important to buttress it with an exposition of a pertinent theory that informs it.

The MPC model has got a positive relation (roots) or links with theories of motivation. Therefore, the author wishes to unpack the relevant theory and how it aligns with the MPC model. According to Westerman and Donoghue (1989), motivation is defined as a process which energises a person's behaviour and directs him or her towards attaining a goal. Schunk and Mullen (2013) explain motivation as a process where goal directed activities begin and then are eventually sustained. Now the following theory is considered

to have informed the MPC model (below): Hertzberg's Hygiene and Motivational Factors Theory (1959).

Hertzberg's Hygiene and Motivation Theory (1959) is also called Two Factor Theory. It is nearly parallel to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). However, it presents more factors of measuring how individuals are motivated in the workplace, which in essence provides a blueprint of what may motivate or demotivate (or be barriers to) social workers' aspirations to study further while at the workplace.

In his study, Hertzberg (1959) found that factors causing job satisfaction were different from those causing job dissatisfaction. He called the satisfiers (those causing motivation) *motivators* and the dissatisfiers (those causing dissatisfaction) *hygiene factors,* hence the name of the theory. He found that factors leading to job satisfaction included responsibility, advancement, work itself and growth. Factors leading to dissatisfaction included company policy, supervision, relationship with boss, work conditions and salary. All these factors are barriers which employees grapple with. For this reason, the MPC model embraces these issues as *barriers to participation* which are (mostly) organisational in nature.

Satisfiers include responsibility, advancement and growth all of which are, as mentioned in the model below, *individual characteristics.* Robbins (2009) supports this theorist by saying that to motivate employees, organisations need to put concentration on intrinsic factors, which are factors that increase employees' job satisfaction. As in the case of this present study, the employer(s) may not sufficiently motivate employees (given the poor working conditions and remunerations in social work). As a result, poor motivation would create intense barriers which may eventually lead social workers to be averse or reluctant towards undertaking postgraduate studies. In this way, the Two Factor theory has got a strong link with the MPC model.

Given the above narrative, the MPC model by Chan and Auster (2003) is suitable for this study. The work of Chan and Auster (2003) has been employed in various studies among African and western professionals to guide and comprehend how its fundamental tenets that follow align with an individual's aspirations to improve their knowledge or education (Susan, Baby & Sreerekha, 2011; Phuong, 2016). The model may be used to understand the process through which professionals keep abreast of contemporary knowledge, skills and abilities needed to function effectively in their profession. It is assumed that to

maintain competence, professionals must participate in updating activities; and this may include Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and higher qualifications. According to this model, participation in updating activities is influenced by two aspects: *individual characteristics* and *organisational factors.* Individual characteristics include motivation, age, barriers to participation and professional commitment, whereas organisational factors include updating climate and managerial support.

<u>Individual characteristics</u>

The MPC model identifies the following individual characteristics:

● Motivation - Singh (2011) defines motivation as an internal drive that activates behaviour and gives it direction; it is intrinsic or extrinsic. This is the salient determinant of participation in updating activities or furthering studies. Singh (2011) defines extrinsic motivation as coming from outside of the individual. This often includes promotion or money.

 Apart from extrinsic motivation, which is often pecuniary as indicated above, there is intrinsic motivation, which is defined by Ganta (2014) as motivation that comes from within; it comes from the personal enjoyment and educational achievement that people derive from doing that particular thing. With this definition, the incentive or finance does not dominate for participating in a particular activity. Deci and Ryan (1985) say that extrinsic motivation operates in opposition to intrinsic motivation which, according to the author, the two (extrinsic and intrinsic) may compete or occur simultaneously in pursuit of goal attainment.

● Age - The fundamental idea of this tenet is that the professionals' age is considered to play a pivotal role in the interest to improve one's level of education. For example, all candidates pursuing master's degrees in China may not be older than 35 years of age, a different age restriction is also placed that PhD candidates cannot be above 40 years of age when commencing the programme (Nuffic, 2015). The author views the age restrictions to be a distraction towards lifelong learning at higher institutions. However, according to the author, age restriction is never a big issue in South African context as the Sepedi saying goes "*Thuto ga e na bogolo",* meaning one is never too old to study*.* Moreover, the previous saying has got another contradiction that "*Thutela bogolo e ya roba",* meaning that it is difficult to learn/study at an old age. This saying is not doing justice to lifelong learning. It could be a possible argument for China to place age

restrictions at higher education. In the same breadth, older individuals (45 years of age and over) compared to the youth (less than 35 years) are seen as resistant to change, less interested in challenging jobs, and as poor investment for training because they are nearing retirement and unlikely to update themselves.

● Barriers to participation - These are factors that interfere with or restrict an individual's ability to participate in learning activities. Such factors are situational, institutional, dispositional and informational. These include lack of money/high costs; lack of time due to job responsibilities; family and child care responsibilities; and difficulty in meeting academic demands.

● Professional commitment - According to Morrow and Wirth (1989), professional commitment refers to the degree to which individuals identify with their profession, while Giffords (2009:388) define professional commitment as "individuals' attachment to their employing organisation or to individuals' attachment to their profession". Professional behaviour is associated with commitment to continuous learning. Giffords (2009) found that social workers may be more committed to their work if they experience promotional opportunities (extrinsic motivation), autonomy and others' attributes. She further emphasises that professional commitment is vital for social workers to effectively meet their professional mission.

Organisational factors

Social workers grapple with factors (or barriers) wrought by the employers (company), hence furthering studies may be difficult. The discussion of such factors follows.

● Updating climate - These are the practices, procedures and policies that facilitate or place limits on opportunities for potential individuals to update or improve their qualifications. A supportive updating climate is necessary in a learning environment. Organisational barriers include staff shortages whereby managers may not easily allow subordinates to take some days off to attend to their studies when needed (Ritt, 2008; Lloyd *et al.,* 2014); lack of knowledge about learning opportunities; prohibitive entry requirements to post-registration programmes; lack of appropriate programmes; and late advertising of professional educational events. These are cited as barriers to postgraduate education, and they may impact on the social workers' time or preparedness to consider improving their qualifications.

- Managerial support - Managers and supervisors in the organisation actively support employees in their updating efforts by providing feedback about job performance, assigning opportunities to develop; strengthening new skills and taking interest in career goals. Some managers may act as gatekeepers to updating opportunities by interpreting and implementing organisational policies. In the best interests of performance and growth of the organisation, social work managers need to support their sub-ordinates in their attempt to improve their qualifications. This implies that management may identify certain employees and recommend or allow them (on request) to improve their qualifications based on observed work performance. Giffords (2009) concluded that managers must, amongst others things, promote fairness and supportive benefits for their employees, such as maternity and paternity leave, study leave and so forth.

This marks the end of the discussion of the MPC model. However, the model's tenets are employed in the next item(s) to further guide the flow of the thick literature review that stands to represents painstaking secondary data collection by the researcher on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies.

2.3 BARRIERS TO FURTHERING QUALIFICATIONS

In line with the primary objective of the study, which is to determine core factors or barriers that social workers grapple with in pursuit of postgraduate qualifications, the following barriers were identified:

2.3.1 INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

2.3.1.1 POOR CONFIDENCE, ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATION

One needs to find happiness if not interest in carrying out a voluntary duty or activity. This is because if one is not interested in doing something, there is often reluctance or hatred towards it. With regard to social workers, the researcher is of the view that there must be interest or willingness when deciding to improve one's qualifications or else confidence and wish may be lost along the way.

Mullen (2010) takes the position that to be successful in achieving higher education level qualifications, people need to possess a number of characteristics. These include the aspiration to improve their educational level, confidence in their ability to do so, and the drive and determination to succeed in higher education (The Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015; Academics-Anonymous at TheGurdian.com, 2017).

Furthermore, a large body of research maintain that candidates who are both personally and professionally motivated are more likely to persist (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Santicola, 2013; McCarthy, 2015; DePorres & Livingston, 2016). Singh (2011) as well shares the viewpoint that intrinsic motivation is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself, and exists within the individual rather than relying on any external pressure. It can also be regarded as the drive to achieve targets and the process to maintain the drive. DePorres and Livingston (2016) bring the understanding that it is largely personal or intrinsic motivations (for example passion) that will carry social workers through a successful defence and completion of a postgraduate study. Guay (2010) submits that motivation refers to the reasons underlying behaviour. Interestingly, it has been claimed that motivated employees tend to have better mental and physical health, and learn new job related tasks more quickly (Singh, 2011). Motivation is related to goals and achievement, with research suggesting that goals may change over the course of degree completion. For example, Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) found that many students enter programmes without a goal to conduct research. However, after being integrated into the programme, they found that they really enjoyed research and this became an academic goal.

According to Sithole (2010), social work is a female dominated profession. Thus it may make sense to devote a piece of writing to look into the issues associated with this dominating gender (which also dominates amongst South Africans). Despite this, the study focuses on both (genders or) men and women. As stated by Mushi (1998), women should take courage and believe that they can pursue their studies alongside other roles, which makes it difficult to undertake postgraduate studies. In a similar study by Yeba (2015), women from patriarchal families are increasingly accessing higher education and very few women as compared to men are retained at a doctorate level. The implication is that if a few women pursue postgraduate studies in social work, then the majority may be demotivated to follow suit.

Singh (2011) concurs with the idea that students' educational expectations about the highest level of education that they will attain represents a kind of expectation about future academic success. From this, it can be deduced that educational aspirations at the lower levels of schooling have an impact on future academic achievements of individuals. Social workers who lack (intrinsic) motivation and aspiration to further their qualifications beyond undergraduate degree level at early stages of schooling may have

difficulty in determining whether to further their studies or not. In certain instances, motivation can serve as an explanation and prediction of behaviour of a particular individual's work performance (Singh, 2011). According to expectancy-value theory (Eccles *et al.,* 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002), expectations of success are a crucial component influencing achievement-related performance, and are assumed to be influenced by perceptions of competence and by goals held by individuals. Such perceptions and goals are influenced by individuals' interpretations of their own previous achievements. Therefore, motivation or aspiration for social workers is important in deciding whether or not to pursue postgraduate studies.

2.3.1.2 FAMILY COMMITMENTS

Family is an important component of people's lives. Time and again when decisions are to be made, a family may not be ignored since children, parents and significant others have to be attended to. For instance, married couples or those whose heads over heels have to dedicate time to cultivate their marriage like spending time together, going out for a dinner and so forth. In other words, romantic relationships need to be maintained or well serviced to keep the fire burning. Children, parents and others may need extra care/time from one person or be fully dependent on that person. All these are referred to as family commitments. For this reason, when social workers contemplate to further their studies, the family needs to be considered as it may have an influence on the proposed studies, either positively or negatively.

Family commitment is a common barrier for individuals not to improve their qualifications (Habib, 2011; Baharudin, Murad & Mat, 2013; Ronnie & Wakelin, 2015; Cobbing *et al.,* 2017). As stated by Statistics Norway (2010) women make up the majority of the graduates at universities and university colleges. A large number of students at master's degree level are found to be women. It was noted that since 2004, more women than men have completed their master's degrees course (Statistics Norway, 2010). However, issues of balancing work and family are of great concern. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) reason that balancing postgraduate studies with family and work relationships is a challenge in particular for doctoral students across disciplines.

This barrier may be more pronounced among social workers, since the profession is perceived as female dominated (Sithole, 2010; Khunou, Pillay & Nethenonda, 2012). Yeba (2015) found that in Cameroon the majority of women in pursuit of doctoral or postgraduate studies are deterred by socio-cultural barriers. In her study, a lot of women perceived early marriage or marriage in general to be an obstacle to their disposition to undertake postgraduate education. This was largely due to the monotonous role of caring for the needs of husbands who are heads of families and have the last say in times of family conflicts, a view which one may consider misogynous.

Furthermore, household chores are noted to create barriers and always time consuming, while bearing children at an early age was seen as a barrier to ambition of earning a PhD. In case postgraduate studies were enrolled for, dropping out was likely to occur due to heavy household chores (Yeba, 2015). To add on this, it is posited that psychologically and physiologically, a pregnant woman needs some time to rest because it becomes impossible to endure the high academic demands. As a result, enrolling for postgraduate studies seems a fantasy (Yeba, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, the participation of PhD students is deemed episodic and is dependent on work or family commitments which make such studies difficult (Catalan Association of Public Universities, 2012).

A challenge noticed by Mushi (1998) in Tanzania is that women might be obliged to bear a child while a student and this would be a difficult situation during studies. In addition, she discovered that a minimum of one to eleven years was spent awaiting to improve qualifications, while on average five years was the norm. Interestingly, Bhalalusesa (1998) maintains that albeit the fact that the husband may be supportive in the family (during studies), it is axiomatic that he cannot perform the reproductive roles of the wife. With the interest of completing postgraduate studies, women choose to postpone marriage and consider getting married at a later stage when they have earned postgraduate qualifications (Bhalalusesa, 1998). Another factor believed to be impeding women's interests prior to furthering studies in Cameroon was the prioritisation of personal needs (Yeba, 2015). This included sending their children to schools before they undertake postgraduate education, which they believed was costly albeit they had income. That is, top priority was sending their children to school. The implication here is that women postponed postgraduate studies until their children had completed schooling.

Yeba (2015:197) puts emphasis that "women's low decision making power, particularly in developing countries, is more pronounced at household level. If women cannot take decisions it therefore means that the husbands can decide whether or not their wives should go to school." She further underlines that married women predominantly depend on their husbands for money; even if it is the wife's income, patriarchy dictates that husbands should take control. Suffice to say that the husband may still deny the wife an opportunity to further studies as others hold beliefs that educated women are not hesitant to file for a divorce, let alone the absurd view that women should not be above them; otherwise it may cause a mayhem in the family.

Women in South Africa have more responsibility for caring for young children and elderly parents than men (Cobbing *et al.,* 2017). With both genders in comparison, women with small children than men are less likely to take up fellowships and study leave opportunities because of family responsibilities or lack of support from their spouses (Rathgeber, 2013). However, with regard to the preceding information, an argument is extremely visible. Having said this, it is worth noting that in Sweden, parents are entitled to 480 days of parental leave when a child is born or adopted (Sweden.se, 2013). To make this more interesting, one of the parents of a new-born baby gets 10 extra days of leave in connection with the birth or 20 days if they are twins.

An extensive welfare system in Sweden makes it easier for both men and women to balance work and family life. It is underlined that "The overarching principle is that everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to work and support themselves, to balance career and family life, and to live without the fear of abuse or violence" (Sweden.se, 2013:1). Significantly more women than men also participate in adult education. Women comprise roughly 60 percent of all students in undergraduate university studies and almost two thirds of all degrees are awarded to women, an equal number of women and men now take part in postgraduate and doctoral studies.

Sweden upholds the ideology of a feminist government, with the implication that gender equality is of paramount importance in guiding government decisions (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The objective of gender equality policy is to ensure that women and men have the same power of shaping society, and the strategy to achieve this is *via* gender mainstreaming. Interestingly, it is pronounced that both mothers and fathers in Sweden are entitled to paid parental leave (Sweden.se, 2013). As stated by the Swedish law, higher education institutions shall always promote and consider gender

equality in their activities. Ministry of Education and Research (2017) and Sweden.se. (2013) hold the argument that world-leading figures point out that Sweden is leading in terms of equality. The long-term national objective is that by 2030, an equal number of women and men will be recruited as academics (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Despite a lengthy body of information about Sweden, a gap can be noticed in the private sectors in terms of employment and remuneration. Women's participation is low and higher positions are skewed in favour of men, with women comprising only 4% of board chairpersons and managing directors (Sweden.se, 2013). This may discourage certain individuals with interest in the private sectors not to study further as a result of the gender inequality. Nevertheless, it is contended that the proportion of women in top posts is increasing, which is more visible in government sector.

Marks and Edgington (2006) hold the view that more women than men express more concern about the commitment and sacrifices that they might need to improve their education. They perceive that it would severely limit the time they have for people who are important to them, and that it may require them to postpone marriage, having a child, or otherwise it will interfere with their personal plans. With regard to the aforesaid, HWSETA (2015) proves as factual where the majority (63.3%) of postgraduate students were found unmarried and a minority (36.7%) married. This means that most social workers in pursuit of postgraduate education prefer to avoid getting married, hence prioritising studies. In concluding this section, the commitments that social workers have to adhere to in their families have a bearing on the possibility of enrolling for postgraduate education.

2.3.1.3 FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Money is an important resource in the modern society. It is needed in many activities, including studying or enrolling at schools. For this reason, financial constraints refer to those demands which need money, and at times, money is not enough to meet these needs, with a specific reference to postgraduate qualifications in social work. Social workers who need to improve their qualifications may need money, be it from their own pockets or other sources. In the absence of money, further studies may be deterred or completely ignored.

Brandsma-Dieters (2013) highlights the fact that one of the often indicated reasons for withdrawal in postgraduate studies include financial burden. GTI Media (2015) brought to light the fact that in the UK, the top two reasons for not enrolling for a postgraduate course were the cost and lack of funding. Substantial studies have also found that internationally funding is a significant obstacle towards higher qualifications (Mullen, 2010; Pitchforth *et al.,* 2012; Tamilenthi & Junior, 2011; Rathgeber, 2013; Britton & Crawford, 2015; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015; Yeba, 2015).

This study focuses on social workers of all genders because the social work profession is believed to be female dominated (Sithole, 2010; Khunou, Pillay & Nethenonda, 2012). With that said, Mushi (1998) uncovered that sponsorship acquisition was a challenge for women in Tanzania (Africa). In case sponsorship was procured, it was not sufficient for postgraduate studies. She noticed that the financial predicament affected predominantly more women than men as they are in majority in the profession. Writing on this, Yeba (2015) reasoned that this is because in most developing countries, women, including social workers, do not have financial independence. Even if women work for their salaries, they are unable to take decisions which involve finance (Yeba, 2015). As a result, the researcher understands that only a few of them would be able to further studies in social work due to patriarchy.

Altbach and Bassett (2014) submit that the Indian governmental authorities, at both the state and central levels, have invested comparatively little in higher education. An inference can be made in this regard that government funding for postgraduate studies is a likely problem in this country. In certain parts of the world, including Nordic countries such as Denmark prior to 2006 used to provide free tuition from undergraduate to postgraduate level for every person in the country (West, 2013). This made furthering of education easy for those professionals with first degrees. However, Denmark and other Nordic countries have introduced tuition for non-European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) students, while continuing to offer free education to its citizens and members of EU/ EEA. This implies that education in these countries is free from foundation to PhD level for those willing, hence the lack of tuition fee to pursue postgraduate education is never an issue to the citizens.

Since 2012 Sweden has introduced tuition for non-EU citizens but made an exception for doctoral studies. That is, doctoral studies are free for everyone in and out of Sweden. West (2013) is of the opinion that in European countries such as Ireland, United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the idea of charging higher tuition fees for international students from outside the EU/EEA is nothing new. Hence, the furthering of qualifications becomes difficult in these countries for foreigners. This gives justification for social workers in South Africa not to further their studies in these countries in the absence of sponsorships.

In other countries, including Austria, France and Germany, public higher education is free (West, 2013; Lungu, 2017). This implies that social workers may earn postgraduate education free. Similarly, in Nordic countries such as Iceland and Norway, postgraduate social work tuition is free regardless of persons' national origin (West, 2013; Lungu, 2017). Lungu (2017) maintains that with no tuition to pay in Norway, social work students are expected to pay a small semester fee for the student union, which is responsible for covering health and counselling services, sports and cultural activities, while in Germany social work postgraduate students pay a small amount of money for some administration. In case one cannot afford such costs, studying may be difficult.

Norway believes that international students are contributing more than revenue to Norwegian society and higher education. With that said, one can suggest that in Nordic countries like Norway and Iceland, individuals with alacrity to pursue postgraduate qualifications are plain sailing. However, it is a general understanding that loans or debts are worrying. With that said, it is indicated that there is a foreseen risk and uncertainty faced by individuals in a student loan-based system in Norway (OECD, 2009). For social workers taking study loans is taking risks (as that free tuition is in reality a loan), because they may fail a course and not graduate or fail to secure a satisfactory and lucrative job after completion of studies. For this reason, the loan would still need to be repaid one way or another. As a result, an inference can be made that social workers who are averse to debts and feeling content with their present qualifications may not be eager to undertake postgraduate education in such countries.

Unlike the Nordic or certain AU countries, the BRICS countries still lag behind in terms of free higher education. As a result, with specific emphasis on social workers, in a country like China, postgraduate education fees are exorbitant while it also has poor reputation in terms of funding for postgraduate qualifications or general spending in terms of education (Wu & Zheng, 2008; Liu & Morgan, 2015). Nordic countries are said to have

the highest rates of public spending on education in the world (West, 2013). This includes funding for social workers pursuing postgraduate studies. In the European countries, for most of the citizens, education in higher institutions tuition is free. Albeit tuition is not a concern, there are visibly certain barriers which one considers minimal when compared to those on the African continent for social work students in pursuit of postgraduate studies.

In a country like Sweden, citizens enjoy free education from childhood until adulthood (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2014). Given that tuition is free in Sweden, financial barriers for pursuing postgraduate (and undergraduate) education becomes visible in students living expenses such as food, accommodation, and so forth, which can cost a fortune for someone with an unstable income or lot of family members to support. The Swedish Council for Higher Education (2014) further indicates that there are state grants to aid with the expensive living costs. However, these grants are insufficient, as such the last resort is taking a study loan to repay after completion of studies. With that said, to sustain the eligibility of the study loan, a postgraduate student needs to earn a certain number of credits every semester to be able to continue to receive student aid. This gives the implication that failure of certain modules may lead social workers in a financial puzzle to resume their studies.

With a specific focus on social workers, another visible Swedish barrier in pursuit of postgraduate education is that the student aid is available for a person until he or she reaches the age of 56, but the right to a study loan falls gradually from the day the person is aged 47 (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2014). Therefore, an inference can be made, as supported by the tenet of the MPC models, that age emphasises that a social worker who waits until middle or late adulthood to further studies may have difficulties in doing so as the Swedish study loan system hits a glass ceiling.

Research submits that candidates receiving funding (e.g., scholarships, assistantships, fellowships) experience lower levels of stress than those without funding (McAlpine & Norton, 2006; Patel & Rudd, 2012; Zacharias *et al.,* 2016). Ehrenberg, Zuckerman, Groen and Brucker (2010) and National Association of Social Workers (2011) found that attrition rates and the time taken to complete degrees are most improved by providing financial support to students, including tuition fees, scholarships, state grants and paid teaching positions. Cohen (2011) brings the understanding that social work students will more likely be retained when they have a significant amount of outside financial support.

In a study conducted by Ronnie and Wakelin (2015), finance was found a bigger potential barrier for those individuals without employer support for their tuition fees. Family contributions, accessing own savings and securing bank loans were common financial sources for full-time students without bursaries.

The insecure financial situation of postgraduate students increases the time needed to start improving qualifications and complete postgraduate degrees. Yorke (1999) cited in Brandsma-Dieters (2013) identified matters relating to financial need as one of the factors leading to student withdrawal in education. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2015) found that in the majority of cases, it is younger postgraduate students who are more likely to be in a financially weaker situation, with typically lower earnings, fewer savings and a lack of credit history compared to older students. For these younger students, access to sources of finance such as family and external institutions is the only hope for pursuing postgraduate studies. Past research as well reinforce contemporary research that the determination to undertake postgraduate studies is rationalised on costs (Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Brandsma-Dieters, 2013; Ronnie & Wakelin, 2015; Yeba, 2015).

Milburn (2012) argues that a myriad of professional careers now require postgraduate qualifications, and that the ability to pay upfront, rather than an individual's potential, risks becoming an increasingly strong factor in determining who can access postgraduate education. The report observed that it is increasingly better off individuals who engage in postgraduate education due to financial stability (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). This would be increasingly in developing countries, particularly those found in the African continent and beyond, as explicated above. In Scandinavia or Nordic countries, postgraduate education is (almost) free.

Calitz and Fourie (2016) assert that the rising cost of higher education in South Africa is clearly a global phenomenon. Tremblay, Lalancette and Roseveare (2012) pose an argument that a phenomenon of rising costs is a direct consequence of the expansion of higher education systems and wider participation, which have increased the financial burden of higher education as most countries have tried to expand their systems while limiting impact on unit costs and expenditure in order to maintain quality.

The University of the Witwatersrand (2016) asserts that the reality of higher education in South Africa is that it is funded below OECD and other African country levels as a proportion of GDP. Lately, the South African government spends just 4.7% of revenue, or 0.75% of GDP on the post-school education and training sector. This includes universities, technical vocational education and training (TVET) and other training institutions. The OECD on average spends 1.59% of GDP on higher education, with the UK spending 1.23% and Germany spending 1.31%. South African universities are said to receive vastly different levels of research funding from the Department of Higher Education and Training. This could be exemplified when the University of Pretoria received R148 million for research output and the University of Fort Hare R2 million, making the well-off universities richer and the poor universities poorer (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012).

The National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) was established to correct (some of) the abovementioned marginalisation in the social sciences/humanities across universities in South Africa. NIHSS was established on 5 December 2013 as an independent statutory body in terms of Gazette No. 37118 vol. 582. The main duty or scope of the institute currently remains (but not limited) to advance and co-ordinate scholarship, research and ethical practice in the fields of Humanities and the Social Sciences (HSS) within and through the existing public universities and those to be established or declared in future as public universities (NIHSS, 2018).

"The role of the NIHSS will be to broadly enhance and support the HSS in South Africa and beyond, as well as to advise government and civil society on HSS related matters. It will do so through its various programmes, including the Doctoral Schools, Catalytic Projects, African Pathways Programme, and by supporting the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in the implementation of the proposed corrective interventions." Given the fact that the institute may still be in its infancy, and therefore still developing/gaining momentum, it may not meet (most) demands of students/social scientists (including social workers). Despite this, the researcher agrees that the institute is making a positive move in supporting South Africans. With regard to the African Pathways Programme (APP) (in earlier quotation), the researcher can vouch that such programme is highly fruitful in supporting postgraduate students/social workers as this present study (Factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies…) was sponsored for an international conference by the institute. For this reason, it is fair

to argue that other programmes that have been put in place to support postgraduate studies may be working well. Although they may not cater for every soul in South Africa, the progress remains evident thus far.

Nevertheless, there is a need for greater support for postgraduate qualifications since the National Research Foundation (NRF) funding is insufficient (University of the Witwatersrand, 2016), and given the reality that funding for social sciences research is problematic (Rathgeber, 2013). To be more specific with the funding for social sciences, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2012) indicated that more resources are not made available for Humanities and Social Science (HSS) or to support the NIHSS, as expanded on earlier. In addition, it is stated that "in South Africa many decisions to squeeze the humanities and social sciences have been taken in the face of national policy which has prioritised Science, Technology, Engineering and Management (STEM) disciplines, as is reflected in the government's current higher education funding formula".

According to the recent NRF annual report for 2015-2016, only a proportion of R815 million was provided to assist South African postgraduate students. In the report, a total of 4 853 master's and 3 181 PhD students were supported. To pile up the financial predicament, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in South Africa does not support postgraduate higher qualifications (National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2016). The researcher is of the view that to minimise the financial predicaments, social workers (and other professionals/postgraduate students) grapple with the procurement of study funds. NSFAS should as well give a hand or be fully mandated to support postgraduate students as well (specifically for master's and doctoral degrees). This is not to mention the fact that NASFAS is more active/accessible in most institutions of higher learning (than other bodies as observed by the researcher).

A recent South African report indicated that in order for the country to achieve free higher education, it is recommended that there should be provision of study loans to students through commercial banks in partnership with the government regardless of parents' affordability of study costs (Commission of Enquiry into Higher Education, 2017). This is a situation virtually similar to the Nordic countries educational system as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. With specific reference to postgraduate students in the previous report, a recommendation was made that NRF bursaries be retained and increased. Nevertheless, another recommendation was made that postgraduate

students be given access to a cost-sharing model of government guaranteed Income-Contingency Loans (ICL) sourced from commercial banks.

Apropos what has been mentioned pertaining to the free higher education report in South African, a flaw is visible in the event the recommendations are put in place. Firstly, postgraduate studies are costly, and in instance where a student has to take such a study loan, the banks charge (high) interests as it is the nature of loans. This means that upon completion of such studies, the (post) graduates will be heavily indebted, not to mention the difficulties in repaying the loans due to the poor salaries confronted by the social work profession (Sithole, 2010; Good News Network, 2017). Secondly, candidates who are already in debts and struggling to repay may despair towards such opportunities. Another matter of great concern is that banks usually adhere to certain criteria in providing loans. For example, blacklisted persons are denied loan applications in some banks. In other words, not all candidates may qualify for such opportunities.

In the same vein, the former president of South Africa Jacob Zuma for the first time announced the provision of free tertiary education or tuition which is applicable to first year students only. This creates the impression that postgraduate funding remains an expense in the country for now (news24.com, 2017). On the other hand, NRF may not manage to offer every willing social worker (or prospective student) a bursary to pursue postgraduate studies even if it increases its funding. In fact, that the bulk of its funding is channeled into the natural and management sciences.

The Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) (2015) was mandated to train and develop skills in South Africa through funding. It was unraveled that the proportion of master's degrees holders (including social work) is marginal in the country. In addition, HWSETA argues that there is a shred of master's degree enrollment in the country, which negatively affects the PhD throughput. To present evidence of the aforementioned statement, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2016) made a finding that a figure of 38 117 graduated from master's degree while 2 258 were doctoral graduates. The two figures in terms of percentages stand at 22% (master's) and 13% (PhD). Axiomatically speaking, an inference can be made that as the two figures represent the country's general graduation rate across all disciplines (such as social work, law, psychology, sociology etc.) in a year, then we will have a dwindling percentage of postgraduates when attention is merely focused on social work master's and PhD degrees throughput.

In a study by HWSETA (2015:49), a postgraduate respondent mentioned that "What you are doing is good. I have got younger social workers who are not studying … They can't study because of funds. For me, I remember when I received the funds I was so excited … I am married. I've got children. I've got my own expenses. So getting a bursary means a lot not just for you but even for your family."

The researcher in the field learned that social workers in general do not engage in reading literature or other information that is likely to make them grow professionally, let alone formal training at the work place, which can be argued to be the fault of the employer. Other authors have also noted the previous worrisome revelation (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Sheldon & Chilvers, 2000; Cigno & Bourn, 2017). With emphasis on the previous writing, HWSETA (2015) as a sponsor of social workers as well made a remarkable finding that most professionals spend less than two hours a week on newspapers. This is sad because most of the scholarships or bursaries are advertised on newspapers (and magazines) for those with aspirations to improve their education and are unable to afford. Surprisingly, the majority of HWSETA postgraduate scholarship holders found out about financial aid at universities or by word of mouth. Again with regard to this, social workers' reading or information seeking habits and the type of persons they associate with to access information (or the people they network with) are questionable.

All the issues discussed above (2.3.1) were the *individual* issues that social workers have to deal with in considering postgraduate studies in their lifetime. Having unpacked this, the focus is shifted to *organisational* factors in the section that follows:

2.3.2 ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

2.3.2.1 WORK COMMITMENTS

Social workers (and others) prepare themselves to go to the workplace and discharge their duties on a daily basis. Having said this, it is important for them to pay full attention to work duties/expectations such as writing reports, attending meetings and court cases, going to the field and so forth which are often challenging and arduous, leaving little time for personal interests such as attending to studies and other things. These are work commitments referred to.

In a study of potential postgraduate students, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2015) found that 49% of individuals reported having difficulty in enrolling for postgraduate studies due to existing work commitments, while 38% showed concern about committing to a number of years to a postgraduate study. Certain persons feel that attending a postgraduate school would require them to delay accepting an attractive job opportunity (Marks & Edgington, 2006). Likewise, in the UK GTI Media (2015) found that the financial barriers to postgraduate study were reinforced by a sizable number of individuals who consider accepting a job offer as a factor stopping them from continuing their postgraduate studies. Cobbing *et al.* (2017) argue that time is also the most common factor militating against certain individuals who wish to study. In like manner, Ronnie and Wakelin (2015) concluded that a postgraduate qualification may be time-consuming. It is understood that emphasis and devotion that could be placed on work and family must be shared now with study demands (Baruch, 2009, cited in Ronnie & Wakelin, 2015). Yeba (2015) warns against the aforesaid statement.

Hart (2012) is of the view that the demands of postgraduate study inhibit couples' leisure time, resulting in less energy to cultivate their marital relationship. In similar study, it is posited that the time needed to devote to postgraduate education and the time away from family results in feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety, leading to elevated levels of stress (Smith *et al.,* 2006; Bitsika, Sharpley & Rubenstein, 2010; Labosier & Labosier, 2011). Other authors are perturbed by marital discordance arising in the process (Horany & Hassan, 2012). In a quantitative study surveying 619 students across 78 doctoral programmes, Wasburn-Moses (2008) revealed that doctoral students feel least satisfied with their ability to manage work and family with their overall workload.

Postgraduate students reported that being a student means contributing to a full day on campus or at community sites from 08:30 to 17:00 (Hart, 2012). Concomitant to the aforementioned writing, students were often separated from their partners, family and friends, resulting in more time spent with fellow students and lecturers (Guse, 2010). With regard to social workers, it is argued that the separation from family, friends and spouses is extremely stressful during postgraduate studies (Bitsika, Sharpley & Rubenstein, 2010). Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern (2010) observed that marriage in the early stages leads to conflicts, which include balancing work and family commitments and frequency of sexual relations. These common areas of conflict are particularly relevant to married postgraduates (social workers) in particular females, as postgraduate

study is time-consuming and a costly endeavour (Kulik and Havusha-Morgenstern, 2010).

Ford Sori *et al.* (1996) cling to the view that graduate students (social workers) and spouses reach a conundrum in terms of negotiation and integration of the roles both have to adjust to, such as academic demands, financial burdens, major changes in schedules, recreation, social life and insufficient time and energy, which have a negative impact on marriage. Research uncovers that the pursuit of graduate studies in a social work context can involve a substantial amount of personal effort, especially for married graduate students having to balance the demands of work commitment and parenting, as well as relationships with their spouses (Gerstein & Russell, 1990; Nedleman, 1991, cited in Horany & Hassan, 2011; Ghoroghi, Hassan & Baba, 2015). Sokolski (1995) is of the view that stressors such as gender roles, housework, leisure, and communication are likely to contribute to low marital adjustment among married graduate couples. Sanderson *et al.* (2000) hold the view that these issues are the reason for the relatively high divorce rate amid graduate students, hence shed light on aversion to joining postgraduate education by married social workers.

A recent study shows that there is a positive relationship between marital maladjustment, divorce rate and studying in higher education (Ghoroghi, Hassan & Baba, 2015). Harkonen and Dronkers (2006) studied the relationship between educational achievement of women and divorce risk among marriage partners in 17 mostly European countries. The results showed that females with higher formal education had a higher marital maladjustment risk, and consequently, divorce in countries with high social and economic costs of divorce. In a study on education and divorce patterns in Taiwan, Chen (2012) revealed that divorce was noticeably more likely to happen amidst women (social workers) who had higher formal education than men. On a different note, Naidoo (2004) noted that staff development in South Africa is largely ineffectual and poorly considered due to high workloads and family commitment. Therefore, this portion of writing has revealed that meeting high demands of the employer may be a challenge in balancing postgraduate studies amongst social workers.

2.3.2.2 LOW SALARY AND PRESTIGE

Social workers need money to be able to pursue postgraduate educational interests. However, it is imperative that they have enough income to cater for study costs which may often be overpriced. This gives the impression that a positive salary would suffice in affording study fees/costs. Of central importance is also the image of the profession they want to further studies in, meaning there is a correlation between the interest/type of postgraduate qualification social workers may follow in their lifetime. If social workers' salaries are generally satisfying, it may be different from when there is a discontentment in salaries between employers and employees. Hence, the desire to undertake postgraduate studies may be based on such thinking/image of the profession as well as satisfaction in salary.

Social work has historically been a low paid profession (Sheafor, Horejsi & Horejsi, 2000; Patel, 2007; Sithole, 2010; Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015). A large body of research support that social workers earn a meagre income and have limited opportunities for social mobility and improved economic opportunities (McPhail, 2004; Earle, 2008; Sithole, 2010; Makofane & Nhedzi, 2015). In its website, News24.com (2017) in South Africa says: "*i have heard stories of how some NGOs (not all of them) ill-treat social service professionals but because I had a 6 month old daughter and was in dire need of a job, I found myself working for a mere R8000 a month before deductions. This was good enough for the day to day expenses but it was not enough to support the family of 14 that raised me to be the woman that I was. At the beginning of 2013, we got a call from the department that they were ready to place social workers. We were excited as this meant no more poverty, or so we thought. R12 000 per month would have been enough to make anyone happy, especially if they had no responsibilities and no one waiting to be fed and clothed.*

…………that salary has increased to R15 000. Half of social service professionals have more than 10 people to support on this salary; they have to pay school fees, pay home loans and still manage to invest and save for future generations. I am a social worker with an Honours degree and according to my qualification, I have an NQF level 8 qualification but earn a salary that is at salary scale 7. As a social worker, I earn as much income as a personal assistant in all departments. I earn the same salary as sales consultants in the country and at times know they earn a better wage as they get

commission. As a social worker healing the nation I am unable to afford a house and a car and still manage to take care of my family".

Gibelman and Schervish (1993; 1995) in Peeler (2015) argue that women appear to be valued less in the profession of social work and beyond. Bearing in mind that the profession itself is female dominated, this may account for the poor salaries associated with it (Perry & Cree, 2003; McPhail, 2004; Sithole, 2010). Consistent with the previous writing, Peeler (2015) emphasises that a handful of literature suggests that women simply have a tendency to monetarily value themselves less than men. In line with the aforementioned study, Bozek *et al.* (2017) in Belgium discovered that aspirations of management positions accompanied by higher wages were highly noted among male social workers than female students. In the US increases in social work salaries have been slow and inconsistent in comparison to inflation and cost of living adjustments over the years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

For over half a decade, social work in South Africa remains marginalised to date, as epitomised by dilapidated and absence of basic infrastructure and equipment in the workplace (Sithole, 2010; 2017). Having written extensively on social work, this scholar underlines that the situation has contributed to low motivation of social workers, particularly new entrants to the profession, and to a large turnover of staff and loss of social workers to the profession. The researcher argues that for a social worker with merely pecuniary interest in pursuing postgraduate education, may account for the reluctance to consider improving their qualification because it would mean having to return to the same work again and discharge duties under similar work conditions, which will be coupled with poor salary, let alone attractive incentives.

This is not different from poorly paid academics. Without competitive remunerations, they are as well anticipated to be lured away to lucrative institutions (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012; Higher Education South Africa, 2014). Again, Hertzberg's Hygiene and Motivational Factors Theory (1959) (discussed earlier) cautions that in order to increase employees' performance or productivity, motivation factors must be addressed. For this reason, the author argues that if the employer(s) fails to sufficiently motivate the employees by positively reviewing these poor salaries, the work output is apt to be unsatisfactory. An African data by Tettey (2010) and the International Association of Universities (2010) report that the best educational opportunities, working conditions and remuneration abroad promote migration.

A study by Naidoo (2004) found that the majority of social workers (with postgraduate qualifications) who found work abroad were unwilling to continue with social work in South Africa after the expiry of their work permits in countries such as the United Kingdom. This finding is as well supported by Holm (2012). This may be due to the fact that in the UK, postgraduate qualifications are recognised (or paid) by most employers or state institutions, whereas in RSA this is not the case. Hence social workers were discouraged to continue practising in the profession with their postgraduate qualifications (Naidoo, 2004; Naidoo & Kasiram, 2006; Engelbrecht, 2006; De Jager, 2013). The aversion to practise social work in RSA, according to the study, was fueled by poor salaries, limited resources and poor upward mobility. Albeit the study is dated, it is largely relevant and consistent with substantial recent findings that social work remains epitomised by low salaries and poor working conditions (Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority, 2014; Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015; Sithole, 2010, 2017; Sikhitha, 2018).

The preceding discussion is indicative of how little and non-prestigious social work is perceived by certain practitioners, which is the nature of the beast as intimated by Sithole (2010). The Good News Network (2017) reported that after taking a study loan, social workers find it difficult to repay it on their "typical social work salary— a significant hurdle that discourages many talented people from entering or staying in the profession". This was mentioned after a man donated 25 million dollars in the US for the Department of Social Work at the University of Texas. It can therefore be understood that certain social workers in South Africa may have lost or are to lose interest to improve their qualifications, let alone the risk of burnout presented by the profession's working conditions (Banks, 1998; Lloyd, King & Chenoweth, 2002; Calitz, Roux & Strydom, 2014; Moriarty, Baginsky & Manthorpe, 2015).

A study by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission (2009) documented that lower-paid workers experience a greater stress because they have fewer financial resources to cope with everyday challenges and contingencies. Sikhitha (2018) also found that social work programmes that were meant to support and sustain professional matters, such as supervision and training, were either non-existent, not funded, or not funded at the correct levels or lacked the human resources to drive them.

Olshansky *et al.* (2012) are adamant that the level of education correlates with an individuals' socioeconomic status. The researcher notes that upon graduation, social work students exit with a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 8. With such an embarrassing status and financially embarrassed profession, suffice to say that only a few social workers may wish to undertake postgraduate studies (as the future may still not proffer greener pastures).

The researcher argues further about the low prestige of the profession after observing that the SACSSP that is meant to enforce or promote continuous learning is as well failing to execute its cardinal mandate to monitor the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of social workers. The researcher observed (in 2018) that SACSSP (council) does nothing to monitor or promote CPD. The researcher reveals that the council's demand of CPD evidence from social workers/professionals was last seen in 2012. An interesting question may be raised to the council to find out how many social workers are motivated or make efforts to partake in CPD given that no one seems to care to make follow up or enforce CPD.

It is also important to understand if the problem is wrought by the fact that the council per se claims control of more than one helping profession, and therefore cannot manage the heavy load; and this opens a platform for the social work profession to establish its own council or body. With that said, in other (helping) professions, without the annual submission of CPD evidence, one cannot continue to practise until the CPD evidence is presented before the council. Adanu (2007) underlines that "the organisation for which the professional works must take the lead in planning for the professional's CPD". Given this background, the researcher maintains that the marginalisation of the social work profession can equally be located at the employers' and councils' (SACSSP) level. This notwithstanding, the study is not about CPD. However, furthering qualifications marries up with CPD, hence SACSSP provides certain points for postgraduate qualifications or studies undertaken.

At a recent meeting (16/03/18) of the Department of Social Work (University of Limpopo) with students and Member of Executive Committee (MEC) for DSD Mrs Mapula Mokaba-Phukwana, a social worker by profession, the MEC was grilled by anxious social work students where she finally revealed and acknowledged that DSD is 'overpopulated' by extremely underqualified officials at senior positions and that these individuals need to be replaced by qualified social workers to restore the dignity of the profession. She further

lamented the fact that the disregard of postgraduate qualifications by the employer (DSD) was an issue of great concern. Given this position, the author argues that it is such instances which greatly emasculates the profession, hence it is presented by poor image in South Africa. In conclusion, it is apparent that the image of the profession has got some influence in undertaking postgraduate studies in social work, coupled with dissatisfaction with poor salaries.

2.3.2.3 POOR INCENTIVES BY THE EMPLOYER

Incentives in the workplace are often provided to motivate employees to work hard, stay in the profession and for other reasons. However, such incentives need to be aligned or competitive with other employers/fellow professionals so as to bring satisfaction or confidence among social workers (employees); which may easily affect the decision to enrol for further studies with better/more incentives in mind. With the aforementioned being the opposite, the decisions to improve one's education may be disturbing amongst social workers.

One of the major factors that contributes to the delay in social workers improving their qualifications is the Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) wage agreement adopted by the Department of Social Development in 2009 (backdated to 2008). In a recent study, it was argued that the OSD is a form of (general state) incentive used by the Department of Social Development in South Africa to retain social workers (Mavimbela, 2015). It is observed to be paying attention particularly to the employees' years of experience, while disregarding postgraduate qualifications such as PhDs and master's degrees in social work. In his study Mavimbela (2015) sees the OSD as demotivating social workers from improving their qualifications because those postgraduate qualifications will not be recognised in terms of the OSD grade progression and salary grading. In addition, he argues that the higher qualifications are most recognised in the higher institutions of learning.

Delving straight into the OSD in order to get a sense of the previous author's argument, the Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council (2009) document was found to pursue this core OSD objective as clarified on the DSD website (2018): *To introduce an occupational specific remuneration and career progression for social workers* that cater for:

- Grade progression and Career path, according to DSD, implies that social workers will spend longer time working without having to necessarily apply for higher positions to get a raise. At times the social workers will be remunerated equal to their managers or even more. However, the document is silent on the recognition of postgraduate qualifications in getting a raise. Again, in the absence of recognition of postgraduate qualifications, one can still climb the ladder and outrun colleagues possessing more advanced qualifications.

- Accelerated Grade Progression allows hardworking social workers to progress speedily than their colleagues without having to apply for posts. Again, by merely working hard, one can be promoted to a better position/salary scale. For this reason, postgraduate qualifications can never guarantee upward mobility in DSD (and this may not promote quality services in the interest of promotions from social workers).

- Recognition of experience and overlaps in salary notches. As it is self-explanatory, experience is considered vital rather than the social workers' level of qualifications. Again, the OSD in pursuit of this objective is silent on the need for postgraduate qualifications; hence supporting Mavimbela's (2015) opinion that postgraduate qualifications are replaced by the necessity of experience to enjoy upward mobility in the department.

Based on the discussion above, the researcher notices that social workers in the employ of DSD are compensated according to the years of their experience and performance. Simply put, the department merely remunerates the practitioners according to the minimum requirement of social work posts aligned with their experience and performance. More often than not, the minimum educational requirement is an undergraduate degree. With effect from 01 January 2013, it was stated that the employer (DSD) pays a once-off cash bonus of 10% (in the form of money) for postgraduate studies (or further qualifications) based on the practitioner's annual salary notch *"provided this does not exceed the minimum notch of salary level 8"* (which in 2014 was R252 828 per annum) (Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council, 2014). In addition, it is stipulated that the qualification studied should take a duration of more than a year (PHSDSBC, 2014) which mostly will fit postgraduate studies/enrollment. However, the real point of these restrictions on the duration of studies remain questionable given the fact that social work postgraduate qualifications are not a necessity for employment.

With the 10% payback mentioned before, one could argue that it is indeed an incentive from DSD, hence debunking the myth or perceptions that the DSD does not incentivise further qualifications. On the other hand, it is quite clear that there is completely no 10% payback or monetary gain for improving qualifications. It is worth noting that the 10% incentive referred to here is only applicable to social workers who had to dig deeper into their pockets to fund their studies. Those who had financial support from government (scholarships) or private sponsors are not eligible for the 10% payback (as they did not lose anything from their purse while pursuing further studies). In essence, this implies that there is no incentive from the employer for having attained postgraduate qualifications. It is more of a carrot and stick approach by the employer. Thus, there are no financial gains for possessing postgraduate qualifications in DSD; but the employer (DSD) would freely continue to enjoy the fruits of postgraduate education from social workers.

The researcher again wishes to align himself with the conviction that such state of affairs may have a negative effect on social workers' retention and desire to improve their qualifications, given the tough competition from other helping professions (unless extreme intrinsic motivation is at play). For not incentivising postgraduate qualifications in social work, the researcher notices that this is not an error but further marginalisation of the profession by employer(s). The researcher is of the view that postgraduate qualifications are of paramount importance to the profession and must be incentivised, just like in other professions/disciplines where they are recognised in monetary terms because they add value.

The DSD as expanded above offers (almost) no incentive for improving qualifications. This is not good even for social workers in non-governmental organisations (NGO) as disincentives are the order of the day (Sithole, 2010). As stated by DePorres and Livingston (2016) as well as Cobbing *et al.* (2017), the dearth of financial incentives towards achieving a postgraduate qualification in terms of salary raise, promotion or provision of medical aid is a hindrance. Cathro (2011) also holds the view that individuals undertake postgraduate education as a consequence of being motivated by employer incentives. Hertzberg (1966), in his theory of Hygiene and Motivational Factors, argues that the presence of extrinsic factors (incentives) will only eliminate employees' or social workers' dissatisfaction. This implies that social workers would never be satisfied with disincentives or the employer who does not incentivise postgraduate education.

The researcher believes that there should be standardised or fixed incentives to encourage the pursuit of postgraduate studies by South African social workers, an opinion supported by DePorres and Livingston (2016). Beeston *et al.* (1998) found that the majority of respondents in the UK would have been more likely to consider studying for a higher degree if it were recognised in terms of better pay or promotion. It is obvious that organisations need to consider social workers (or employees) as extremely important and fruitful assets. Therefore, if it is not managed properly, it can lead to failure of the organisation and high staff turnover (Fisher, 2012). The aforementioned is consistent with Sithole's (2010) observation that the social work profession is marginalised, and that this has led to low motivation of social workers, in particular new entrants to the profession and to a large turnover of staff and loss of social workers to the profession.

The researcher supports the viewpoints of the aforementioned scholar. As buttressed by the DSD training, a considerable number of social workers are allowed to serve a 12 months internship (which follows a breach of contract) upon graduation. Upon completion of this internship, social workers are again introduced to another 12 months internship by the Department of Education (in collaboration with DSD), a back-to-back internship indeed. This is truly exploitation and marginalisation of the profession. As documented by the previous author, what motivation is given to these fully qualified social workers by the employer? Will they have the energy to study further given the poor incentive mentioned above? In answering these questions, the researcher believes that it would be preponderantly intrinsic motivation.

It is said that when extrinsic motivation is poor, the drive to undertake new initiatives such as furthering education is as well decreased (Nyambegera & Gicheru, 2016). It can further be inferred that employers are faced with the task of motivating employees and creating high job satisfaction among their staff (Ran, 2009). Ganta (2014) and Gurland and Lam (2008) hold the view that it is of great significance for a manager to understand what really motivates employees without making assumptions and use different tactics to motivate them. Ganta (2014:221) says: "unmotivated employees are likely to spend little or no effort in their jobs, avoid the workplace as much as possible, exit the organisation if given the opportunity and produce low quality work".

Thus, social workers become demotivated and uninterested when there is no provision for upward mobility or incentives in undertaking postgraduate education. A study by Naidoo (2004) uncovered that individuals are dedicated and highly motivated to study further when assured of opportunities for upward mobility or incentives. This is particularly true because while practising as a social worker, the researcher observed that the policy does not allow for any promotion or incentives unless at least half a decade is spent in the field, all in the name of experience. This notwithstanding, the researcher, in wrapping up this discussion, further noted that colleagues and mentors who had been in the field for over a century were stagnant in their positions. This raises questions about the views of the profession from the departmental corridors of power (DSD).

2.3.2.4 DISTANCE EDUCATION OBSTACLES

Education is an important resource to any employer to keep the work running professionally. Given earlier discussions on heavy workloads and family commitments (and others) which social workers grapple with in pursuit of postgraduate studies. Enrolment for part-time/distance learning may be seen to be the resort. Despite this, distance education system is as well presented with a plethora of challenges which may hamper such studies.

Pozdnyakova and Pozdnyakov (2017) say that distance learning is one of the most convenient forms of education for adult students who have priorities different from learning, such as work and family. They further stress that experience has shown that this form of learning is demanding and gives people who are not able to attend full-time or part-time courses due to certain circumstances a chance to obtain a university degree. The process of distance education also has problems (Galusha, 1997; Berge, 2013; Ennovate, 2017). The problems are primarily related to the lack of direct contact between students and lecturers or tutors. Due to the absence of direct contact, students may feel lonely and helpless. This fact also creates enormous difficulties for the tutor in terms of adequate estimation of the student's knowledge who the tutor has never met face to face.

Bušelić (2012) expresses the conviction that distance learning does not give students the opportunity to work on oral communication skills; students in distance learning courses do not get the experience of practising verbal interaction with professors and other students; email is the mostly the main mode of communication. Furthermore, distance learning in some individuals lead to social isolation. It is revealed that students

may feel isolated or miss the social-physical interaction that comes with attending a traditional classroom (Bušelić, 2012). There are certain difficulties related to the technical and technological support of online learning. The problems are caused by the fact that some students are not ready to enroll for distance learning (as this form of training requires peculiar personal properties and skills and is not suitable for everyone).

Distance learning leads to anxiety which may be caused by different reasons, among which it can be loss of learning skills, lack of experience in distance education, the financial cost of education, lack of support by the family or by the employer and others (Pozdnyakova & Pozdnyakov, 2017). Dabaj (2011) submits that technology is changing fast due to high varying demands of people; traditional educational systems and institutions have to provide additional educational alternatives. These include developing and offering distance education programmes. However, a plethora of barriers exists in establishing and maintaining distance education programmes (Dabaj, 2011).

Communication barriers exist in distance education because of such reasons as physical distance between members, the difficulties of dealing with new media, time constraints and restrictions, background knowledge of distance education, incompetence in skills of using technology, and the interactivity level of the process. Put all together, effective distance education process becomes almost impossible. Christensen, Anakwe and Kessler (2001) argue that if students do not perceive technology as useful, they will not be receptive to distance education. On the lecture or tutor's side, it is observed that the inability to develop the necessary skills, to adopt a positive attitude, and to develop the needed pedagogy are important problems affecting the operation of distance learning community (Bušelić, 2012). In addition, there is a connection with pedagogy, personal experience and distance learning. When lecturers are somewhat reluctant to use technology or views it in a negative way, pedagogy is likely to suffer and may have a detrimental effect on students' retention or aspirations to pursue such education.

Berge (2013) holds the view that the main challenges to distance education are centred on lack of access to the instructor and lack of timely, two-way communication. The change from an in-person classroom venue to online communication is perceived by many candidates and instructors as a significant loss (of dedicated uninterrupted learning space), and the differences in how social interactions occur online versus in-person is of great concern. In support of this argument, it was found that certain individuals are reluctant to undertake distance learning since it is believed that such a mode of study

does not offer immediate feedback; a student has to wait for feedback until the instructor has reviewed his or her work and responded to it. Unlike in a traditional classroom setting, a student's performance may be immediately assessed through questions and informal testing (Bušelić, 2012). The aforementioned author further argues that distance learning does not always offer all the required online coursework for every degree programme.

Sarrafzadeh and Williamson (2012) maintain that learners define content and handle learning events differently, depending on such things as their beliefs, religion, ideas, local customs, and language. For most people, collaboration, discussion and communication at times create isolation, and generally become more difficult with persons perceived as strangers or instructors from one culture teaching learners to a different culture (Shen, 2004, cited in Berger, 2013; Bušelić, 2012). Many participants in distance education become concerned about miscommunication, being misinterpreted through their online posts, or inadvertently offending someone (Valaitis, Sword, Jones & Hodges, 2005, cited in Berger, 2013). In diverse groups, language is considered the most recognisable cultural characteristic. Students express concern about lack of proficiency in English. For instance, fearing that they will be misunderstood or misinterpreted, especially during collaborative work and discussion (Berge, 2013).

According to Ennovate (2017), problems such as efficiency, equity, quality and benchmarking are strongly linked to the distance learning system. One of the reasons practitioners may fear taking distance learning education is that such qualification may not be acknowledged by all employers although most employers do (Bušelić, 2012). Students who want to work for a specific employer upon graduation may need to be sure of that employer's perspective about online education.

2.3.2.5 THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BURSARY

The Department of Social Development (DSD) is a large employer of social workers working for government in South Africa. The DSD continues to increase the number of social workers, which is a good approach for the development of the country and this would also help expedite the National Development Plan (2010-2030) of training/targeting 60 000 social workers (in 2012 they were 9 456) by 2030 to attend to the social ills of the country. Notwithstanding, the researcher notices that the DSD in its mission to train more social workers to develop the country is somehow one step forward, two steps back, which is very disturbing.

In 2007 the DSD initiated a scholarship for social workers as part of a drive to address the shortage of social workers in the country. Although this undertaking by the department has been viewed as significant and timely, it has created unforeseen challenges for the profession. The scholarship creates problems as it allows just anyone even those without passion to get access to training as social workers (Khunou, Pillay & Nethenonda, 2012). In such cases it has been found that these individuals will use their social work degrees as a stepping stone to other careers. As a result, most social work graduates do not study any further in the profession of social work (for example master's or PhD) because it is not a passion for them but an opportunity to employment (Khunou *et al.,* 2012).

The researcher is of the opinion that a social worker who is passionate about his or her profession may demonstrate a strong personal identification or commitment to the profession. As a result, he or she may have (future) intentions to improve one's current qualification, that is, a bachelor's degree (mostly). The MPC model argues that professional commitment is very important in continuing education or further studies.

2.3.2.6 PROHIBITIVE ACADEMIC DEMANDS AND HISTORY

After earning their bachelor's degrees, the understanding is that social workers are well equipped, hence they survived high academic demands in the form of extensive studying and sometimes the difficult student-relationship with lecturers/supervisors. At times the relationship with some supervisors or lecturers may be depressing to such an extent that further return to the academia is never contemplated. Again, the way tests and exams are passed at times represent the competence/characteristics/potential/mediocrity of a particular student, not necessarily the way tests/exams were set. Therefore, social workers may look back and have a difficulty in deciding whether or not to pursue postgraduate studies because certain requirements/criteria have to be met before or on enrollment of such studies.

A plethora of studies have reported that university entry scores and admission examinations remain the strongest predictor of student academic persistence and success (Mushi, 1998; Dickson, Fleet & Watt, 2000; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Wimshurst & Wortley, 2004). Lovik (2004) asserts that personal characteristics, academic history and areas of study are important considerations for individuals when deciding to take postgraduate studies. The researcher is of the proposition that Tinto's

(1993) model on entry could shed some light on social workers' entry to further studies. In his model of "institutional departure", he states that to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic and social systems.

He proposes that individuals get into institutions of higher education with a range of differing family and community backgrounds (for example social status, parental education), a variety of personal attributes (for example sex, race), skills (social, intellectual), financial resources, dispositions (for example motivations, political references), and various types of precollege educational experiences and achievements. These attributes are filtered through the students' commitment to the institution and their personal goal to graduate. Each attribute is posited as having a direct impact upon departure (or withdrawal) from institution (Tillman & Charles, 2002; Manik, 2015).

The inability to cope with the demands of the programme (stress related programme, difficulty and work load) is an important factor and may lead to voluntary or involuntary departure in academia (Tinto, 1993; Yorke, 1999). If the academic demands cannot be met, it may lead to involuntary departure. It is therefore important for prospective candidates to select a programme compatible with their personal and professional goals and expectations (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Castro *et al.,* 2011). On the other hand, the student may also decide to leave voluntarily if the academic level is perceived to be too high. In his study of 2234 students in a higher education institute in the Netherlands, Van Onzenoort (2009) cited in Brandsma-Dieters (2013) found that 33.8% of students found their academic achievements disappointing. The main reasons identified were lack of motivation and lack of self-study. Difficulty coping can be related to different factors, including a wrong choice of programme, unhappiness with the social environment or the demands of the programme. A poor choice relates to wrong choice of study, but also to a gap between expectations and actual programmes (Brandsma-Dieters, 2013).

The researcher is of the idea that if a social work postgraduate student selects or had selected a difficult topic, for example, one that is not researchable, at a later stage such student may despair or feel incompetent and withdraw (or even change the topic which may prove incompetent for such student). The researcher has observed that some postgraduate students deregister because of difficulty in undertaking research projects, while other projects had gone beyond stipulated duration by universities, and paying for study costs becomes difficult. On the other hand, it happens that a student enrolls for a

postgraduate degree and expects to learn something completely new from undergraduate studies, only to find the opposite. In such instances, a student may not feel inspired, and this may lead to boredom and eventually withdrawal because there is no room from growth or breaking the mold. At times, a social worker who has enrolled for a postgraduate study may expect to be challenged by the course/module, hence widening one's horizons (which will help in social work office). The opposite of such expectation may result in discontentment, and such student social worker (postgraduate) eventually dropping out.

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2015) reported that the most commonly cited reasons given in particular by older students for furthering education relates to the fit or suitability of the study such as course structure and institutional choice. It has been identified that there is a gap between student expectations and actual experience in higher education. Tinto (1993) refers to this mismatch between the needs and expectations of the individual and the institution as incongruence, which can be both social and academic. Academic incongruence can be either because the academic demands are too high or not high enough, leaving the individual either too challenged or unchallenged. When they are too high, it will lead to involuntary departure. When the individuals are unchallenged, it may lead to voluntary departure. Those students who made a choice of course not closely related to the career aspirations were often discouraged to continue (Tinto, 1993). Liu and Morgan (2015) contend that apart from consideration of some benefits associated with postgraduate education, individuals with aspirations to undertake postgraduate studies often consider the reputation of the institution and the quality of education in the faculty concerned. Thus if one is discontent with a certain university, a daunting feeling may overwhelm the idea of furthering studies in that disreputable institution.

Altbach and Bassett (2014:31) point out that Russia and China for higher qualifications "…rely on the questionable practice of dual-track enrollments: admitting the best-qualified students—as determined by one-off high-stakes examinations". The latter may be perceived as a threat to social workers with intention to undertake postgraduate studies in their lifetime, for the mere reason that not everyone may pass the exam poses a threat to the desired studies. Russia and China are criticised for high plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. It is also observed that they offer low quality in the higher education system (Altbach & Bassett, 2014). Such criticisms may create barriers

to certain individuals with interests to pursue postgraduate studies. Liu and Morgan (2015) maintain that certain individuals do consider the reputation of the institution prior to pursuing their studies. The latter may also be reinforced by a large migration of students out of China and India to western countries in quest for higher education as discontentment at home countries was not evident or deemed poor (OECD, 2014). Despite these criticisms, the researcher acknowledges that these countries are technologically advanced and seem way too advanced technologically compared to other members of BRICS league where South Africa is included.

Zhou *et al.* (2017) conclude that master of social work students are convinced that the social work curriculum in China is not up to standard nor share common qualities with other countries (considered to have better curriculum or education), hence described inappropriate. Such a situation is demonstrated by negative attitudes towards the profession by the postgraduates and understanding that they were not sufficiently trained. An extension of the aforesaid finding is that social work education in China is perceived to be not well established and to be poor and still developing after its suspension from 1949 to 1980s. Therefore, it creates woes amidst students who believe that the social work curriculum needs serious improvement as it does not equip them to address complicated professional problems and to cope with unpredictable challenges during their careers (Liu, Sun, & Anderson, 2013). The suspension of social work in China was due to the assumption that there would be no social problems in the socialist system, and the country followed the Soviet Union's lead in abandoning social work education (Yingsheng, Wen-Jui & Chien-Chun, 2012).

Another study identified that master's students in China emphasise that field education is not well incorporated in the curriculum, and there are gaps between theory and practice (Liu *et al.,* 2013). Li *et al.* (2012) realise that the lack of a practical curriculum may be impacting the effectiveness of master's level social workers in China as little variation in content or skills may not address the diverse client populations. Given the aforesaid, Wang *et al.*, (2015) note that for the quality issues evident in the curriculum, it is important to foster the curriculum so as to prepare master's social work students for practice.

In China, it is highlighted that there are both two year and three-year master of social work programmes (Wang *et al.*, 2015; Nuffic, 2015; OECD, 2016). The researcher considers the duration long compared to other countries such as South Africa and Denmark with a minimum of one to two years. Surprisingly, all candidates pursuing

master's degrees in China may not be older than 35 years of age (Nuffic, 2015). From this, it is worth noting that the MPC model used in the study supports the idea that age can be a barrier in improving one's education. In a similar manner, it is emphasised that PhD candidates should not be older than 40 years of age when commencing the programme, which in the eyes of the researcher, is not the case in South African institutions as exemplified by the University of Limpopo (researcher's institution), which allows social workers over the age of 40 years to enroll for master's and PhD degrees. To narrow the admission process, an entrance examination and recommendations from at least two professors or senior lecturers in the field is a requirement (Nuffic, 2015). Nevertheless, candidates without a master's degree may still gain admission via an entrance examination, which sounds better.

As it can be noted in the MPC model that age is perceived an obstacle in the improvement of a person's knowledge or education. It is evident in the Chinese education system that a social worker above the age limit stipulated above for any programme may not undertake postgraduate studies, which is a barrier. Furthermore, with regard to PhD studies, there is a bottleneck, as it can be observed that the candidates' history at master's level is of paramount importance, *viz.,* the previous supervisors and lecturers seem to carry the keys to the doctoral world of a prospective student since the recommendations are prerequisite to PhD enrollment. As stated above, the examination prior to registration may also be noted as an impediment to the aspired career path for social workers in the Chinese system.

Despite the free tuition in the higher education system, the Brazilian system is highly criticised for extremely high entry standards (in undergraduate and postgraduate level) but pay little attention to building high quality universities (Altbach & Bassett, 2014). Such conditions may deter social workers (and others) to improve their qualifications in the country because it is axiomatic that people seek access to resources but also prefer quality (assurance) in the process. Furthermore, Altbach and Bassett (2014) present the view that the medium of instruction in Brazil is largely Portuguese. The language can be seen as a barrier for Brazilian social workers seeking to study abroad because for most institutions, English is used as a medium of instruction. It is acknowledged that citizens (or students) in Brazil, Russia and China (as BRICS members) experience language barrier when going to study abroad.

The implementation of the Bologna Agreement in Russia radically changed the educational process (Interactive Collaborative Learning, 2015). The main objective of the Bologna process was the convergence and harmonisation of higher education systems in Europe to create a unified European Higher Education Area. Nevertheless, this change brought challenges in the higher education system, in particular with master's and PhD programmes, and was found to be doing the opposite by the Interactive Collaborative Learning (2015). The source also maintains that "The introduction of bachelor and master degrees caused certain difficulties for the Russian's labour market. This is due to the fact that these degrees did not exist before, and therefore, many issues related to their compatibility with existing qualification requirements in the labour market arise. In practice, employment of a Russian bachelor or master degree holder in Europe is still impossible without the nostrification process".

The above quotation raises interesting question as the Bologna process was never strangled at birth. That is to say, before the introduction of master's and doctoral degrees, there were no qualifications mentioned above, and now that they are present, there are worries if indeed the new higher education system sufficiently accommodates the qualifications from the old system. Simply put, the researcher contemplates that social workers who earned certificates or diplomas in the old system may experience problems following a doctoral route, not to mention making attempts to study further in other countries such as South Africa where a qualification is measured in terms of credits or outputs, a model that is adopted by many countries in the modern society.

It is stated that some of the companies in Russia refuse to employ a specialist with a bachelor's degree or master's degree because the "requirement for that vacancy is a specialist degree" (Interactive Collaborative Learning, 2015:1). The understanding is that a bachelor's degree holder is perceived as a person with college education while a specialist with a master's degree is perceived as half-taught (as a fallacy). The researcher vouches that is way off the mark and may be observed as a barrier by others (including social workers) to postgraduate studies for fear of risking the qualification being not recognised by employers. Interactive Collaborative Learning (2015) mentions that the procedures for transfer of academic credits from one university to another is problematic in the Russian higher education system.

Nevertheless, it is mentioned that the number of credits awarded to each course differs from those of other universities. "In case of transferring to another university, the student

has to take the course again if the course title or the course credit is different at another university." The international degrees remain almost unrecognised in Russia while the new higher education system is perceived to further devaluate education in Russia (Interactive Collaborative Learning, 2015). From this point of view, one can see that furthering studies may be a serious challenge if the desired university is not where the initial degree was awarded. Furthermore, upon completion of a master's degree, certain employers may devalue or not recognise such a qualification on the basis that it is not familiar.

Deloitte (2012) posits the idea that in India there is inadequate focus on research in higher education institutes (which is not different from Russia). The causes include insufficient resources and facilities as well as limited numbers of quality faculty to supervise postgraduate students (as this involves great research). It is highlighted that the enrollment in master's and PhD degrees in 2009 stood at 0.48%, which is indicative of problems in higher education for individuals in pursuit of postgraduate education. In India a significant proportion of the country's population is improperly educated or taught due to the "entire" poor quality of the higher education system in the country. This state of affairs is manifested by only one university, which makes it in the top 500 list of institutions rankings (Deloitte, 2012; Altbach & Bassett, 2014; Stolarick, 2014). This is a similar case with Russia (Ivanov, 2006; Pelikhov, 2009; Sadlak, 2007; Karimov, 2014).

In addition, India's enrollment of foreign students is extremely small and indicative of how little the world values higher education in India (Stolarick, 2014). A figure of merely 31 632 (0.13%) of international students were seen in India. It is also worth noting that the figure represents both undergraduate and post graduate enrollment (Department of Higher Education, 2013). In comparison, the number of international students enrolled for master's degree in South Africa was 1 599 while PhD stood at 1 191. Also in 2014 more than 72 000 international students enrolled (for undergraduate) at the higher institutions where the majority were found to be Zimbabweans (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016).

Stolarick (2014) notes that the challenges of higher education system in India result in a significant educational trade imbalance and brain drain. The implication of the latter may be that postgraduate studies are difficult to undertake in the country given that the higher education system is crippled, resulting in exodus to other countries. Additionally, the three greatest challenges in India have been described as access, equity and quality

(Deloitte, 2012). On the basis of these hurdles, the researcher assumes that in India access to postgraduate studies is predominantly difficult because to enroll for postgraduate studies, one needs to have access and a sense of equity within the system. Nuffic (2015) reveals that the majority of master's programmes in India do not generally devote any attention to research methods and techniques, which are of paramount importance to PhD enrollment. This is unsettling as it may be a barrier for social workers and other professionals not to improve their qualifications because PhD studies demand excessive knowledge of research methodology and techniques than only subject knowledge or coursework.

According to University of Johannesburg (2017) in RSA, candidates for postgraduate education are challenged to submit a draft of research proposal to assess their critical thinking and analytical skills, ability to conceptualise a research study and the ability to write in a scientific and structured manner, including the candidates' perceptions pertaining to his or her selected title of the study. Furthermore, the institution holds that the candidate selected for postgraduate qualification has to undergo interviews with a postgraduate team in the academia (which may have negative outcomes). In the event a social worker enrolls for a master's degree with the University of Johannesburg, he or she must comprehend and foresee that the programme lasts for at least one year, and can extend up to two years for full time and three years for part time students.

Additionally, the social worker undertaking a doctorate degree must as well comprehend and foresee that the qualification takes at least two to four years. Failure to complete all these qualifications in record time may result in adverse consequences for the postgraduate student. However, the student may resume only with special permission from the Dean on the recommendation of the Head of Department (which is not guaranteed). Therefore, the timeframe set for the completion of the qualification by the university is as well a major determinant to consider when deciding to undertake postgraduate qualifications (University of Johannesburg, 2017).

Social workers seeking to register a master's degree with the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg need to know that the institution seeks a minimum average mark of 65%, including the research report and further expects the candidate to write a dissertation of 50 000 words on an approved topic. On the other hand, social workers possessing master's degrees and aspiring to improve their qualifications further to doctorate have to satisfy a twofold criterion: (a) obtain a mark of 70% from the previous

research component; and (b) have capacity to write a thesis of approximately 100 000 words on an approved topic (University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg, 2017). Given the requirements of the two degrees, if the social worker perceives them as a conundrum, withdrawal may be the resort (Tinto, 1993; Yorke, 1999). Nevertheless, the programme further demands the social work postgraduate candidate to engage with the academic setting for a minimum period of two years fulltime or four years part-time. These demands have to be met by social workers in pursuit of these higher qualifications, hence some individuals may perceive as a major hindrance.

According to the University of Pretoria (2017), a maximum of 10 social work postgraduate students yearly are allowed for only research based master's and doctoral programmes in social work. Furthermore, an even average mark of 65% from previous level is needed for both master's and doctorate qualifications. However, upon application there is still a departmental selection for the candidates, which may be a barrier to desired postgraduate education. In the same way, the University of Western Cape (2017) requires 65% minimum pass mark in social work postgraduate, accepts a limited number of candidates, followed by an interview and assessment task. All this limits the avenue of attaining postgraduate qualifications aspired by social workers. This can also be based on the availability of the institution's human resource. Nonetheless, it fuels impediments to enrolling for postgraduate studies.

Poignantly, apart from entry requirements perceived as a hindrance to undertaking postgraduate studies by social workers, contemporary research has found that there is a tendency of supervisors to imbue fears into (undergraduate) students' minds, discouraging them from returning to academia in the future. The students further describe supervisors as inconsistent and at times lacking appropriate knowledge to supervise them (Sithole, 2016; Bacwayo, Nampala & Oteyo, 2017). Doğan and Bikmaz (2015) in support of the previous statement, maintain that the relationship between the supervisor and the student is important in shaping the emotional development of the student. Thus poor relationship or support by the supervisor may dissuade students from undertaking postgraduate studies in the future.

Vos (2013) maintains that in the United Kingdom, writing a dissertation is a challenge, and the skills in writing at that level are not generally included in the curriculum of most master's programmes. A study on postgraduate students revealed that there was a huge gap between students' understanding of research and the expectations of supervisors

(McCormack, 2004). Other studies emphasise that there are often differences in the expectations of students and their supervisors (Woolhouse, 2002; Armitage, 2006). Vos (2013) puts forth the notion that if the supervisory process is prone to problems of communication and understanding, poignantly the end result thereof is failure. It can be argued that social workers who had unpleasant relationships with their previous supervisors at the undergraduate or postgraduate levels, where failure resulted, may be less inclined to improve their qualifications.

This marks the end of the discussion on barriers social workers grapple with in pursuit of postgraduate qualifications. Having dwelled on the barriers/challenges to postgraduate education, with specific reference to social workers, it is helpful to look at the core benefits of postgraduate qualifications that social workers may enjoy.

2.4 BENEFITS OF POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION

This study seeks to determine the significance of postgraduate qualifications as one of the objectives. This would help social workers understand the benefits involved in furthering studies. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2015) argues that a postgraduate qualification benefits the individual student intellectually through personal stimulation, and instrumentally, through enhanced skills and employment prospects. Similarly, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission (2009) uncovered that education can increase people's knowledge and cognitive skills, enabling them to make better-informed choices among the health related options available for themselves and their families, including those related to obtaining and managing medical care. Additionally, greater educational attainment is typically associated with higher social standing, which in turn has been linked with better health status (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009). Postgraduates are vital to the higher education sector, through their contribution to current research and as researchers of the future. Outside academia, postgraduates provide employers with the highest levels of knowledge, innovation and technical skills (McMahon 1998; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015).

Diamond *et al.* (2014) discovered that employers value doctoral graduates' deep and specialist subject knowledge. Employers across sectors value graduates' excellent research and analytical skills, particularly their capacity for critical thinking and ability to solve problems by bringing fresh perspectives and a systematic approach. The personal

qualities of confidence, dedication, resilience and motivation are all recognised, and valued by employers on higher qualification employees. Employers also emphasise that doctoral graduates excel at report writing and presenting information to others (which is also critical in the public service). At the most fundamental level, earning a master's and doctoral degrees brings a new set of skills and understanding. It helps an individual to think strategically and long term. With improved qualifications, one is able to apply a critical approach to problem solving, project management ability and innovation to researching work-place problems (Bryan & Guccione, 2014). The researcher maintains that the latter is necessary at the lower and higher echelons of government to foster efficiency and effectiveness, with specific reference to social work or DSD.

Individual earnings are directly related to educational attainment. Those with higher levels of education earn more and are more likely than others to be employed in healthier working conditions with better employment-based benefits (Baum *et al.,* 2013; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009; Hill, Hoffman & Rex, 2005). One of the respondents in Bozek *et al.* (2017) said: "You require a bachelor's degree to find a job, you require a master's degree to find a better job, with a higher wage". Baum *et al.* (2013) hold the position that in 2011, employers in the USA provided pension plans to 52% of fulltime workers with high school diplomas, 65% of those with bachelor's degrees, and 73% of those with advanced degrees. Individuals with higher qualifications also give their children benefits that increase the prospects that the next generation will prosper and will be in a position to contribute to society in a variety of ways. Similarly, Cohen (2011) submits that obtaining a postgraduate qualification such as a doctoral degree, especially for those students who are parents, serve as a role model for lifelong learning for their children.

Higher qualifications not only provide valued credentials but also increase skills and knowledge, and changes the way people approach their lives. Beyond the economic return to individuals and to society as a whole, higher education improves quality of life in a variety of ways. This includes high levels of labour force participation, employment, and earnings increase the material well-being of individuals and the wealth of society, and carry psychological benefits (Baum *et al.*, 2013; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). People with higher qualifications strongly agree that their jobs require them to keep learning new things and are highly satisfied with their jobs (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015).

Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) argue that the socio-economic status and educational background of parents affect the education of their children. Pupils from families where parents have less education tend to systematically perform worse in schools than pupils whose parents have more education. Traditionally, family status variables such as socio-economic status and parents' level of education have been regarded as predictors of children's academic achievement. Musgrave (2000) cited in Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) say that a child who comes from an educated home would like to follow the steps of his or her family and by this, work actively in his or her studies. Parents who have more than a minimum level of education are expected to have a favoured attitude to the child's education and to encourage the child with school work. The parents provide library facilities to encourage the child to show examples in activities of intellectual type such as reading of newspapers, magazines and journals. They are likely to have wider vocabulary by which the children can benefit and develop language fluency (Musgrave, 2000, cited in Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013).

The influence of socioeconomic and educational background of the parents on their children's education cannot be undermined. It is believed that low educational background negatively affects academic achievement of children because it prevents access to vital resources, and creates additional stress at home (Eamon, 2005; Jeynes, 2002, cited in Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). High academic attainment of the parents significantly reduces chances of primary school drop out of children. The major reasons parents offer not to educate their children or remove them from school are no more than the fees for registration and admission, examination and cost of books (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). The improvement of income potential and financial stability are important factors in graduate education benefit. Marks and Edington (2006) mention that financial stability is beneficial in terms of its ability to facilitate and enhance economic processes, manage risks, and absorb unexpected shocks. Advantages of long term financial stability include decreasing risks, obtaining power to plan future life, obtaining power to purchase high cost goods, the feeling of security, and being more confident.

Job promotion is another benefit for an individual who possesses postgraduate education. It is usually associated with more responsibility, authority and earnings (Joubert & van Wyk, 2014). Furthermore, it is associated with better living standards and better physical environment both at work and at home (Teowkul *et al.,* 2009). With the latter improvement of qualifications, Sithole (2010) opined that social work in South Africa

is marginalised, and this is epitomised by the absence of basic infrastructure and equipment such as telephones, transport and computers that are critical to the delivery of quality and effective services. As one of the benefits, postgraduate education in particular master's and PhD introduces career switching (Marks & Edington, 2006).

The South African Council for Social Service Professions (2017) issued a gazette, which stipulates that social workers have twofold specialisations, *viz.,* clinical and forensic social work. Both areas of specialisation demand a social worker to be in possession of appropriate master's degree approved by the SACSSP related to clinical and forensic social work. According to Baum *et al.,* (2013) and Higher Education South Africa (2014), individuals with higher levels of education earn more money compared to individuals with lesser qualifications. Higher qualifications such as a PhD provide the summit of educational experience and the highest level of qualification. The PhD candidates are chosen from the most talented students and undergo a rigorous additional period of training and education before they graduate with a doctorate. As such, PhDs represent an elite group. Moreover, PhD education is expensive, and not just in money terms (Group Eight, 2013). A more specific benefit of postgraduate qualification positively influences mortality and health.

2.4.1 MORTALITY AND HEALTH EFFECTS IN RELATION TO POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

Postgraduate qualifications are important in the profession of social work. Social workers need to perform their duties in a way that is more advanced, and with insight of the environment that they live in. This is because such an understanding has a positive influence on their own lives, families and clients. To put it simply, social workers with postgraduate qualifications or aspiring to have one may be more likely knowledgeable on health and mortality issues, which is an important aspect that will help elongate their lifespan and those of their clients. Olshansky *et al.* (2012) assert that educational disparities were shown to be substantial when comparing the least educated population with those who have postgraduate degrees. Hummer and Hernandez (2013) are of the view that educational attainment appears to be very important in differentiating adults' prospects for long life. Individuals' educational attainment has the unusual advantage of appearing on death certificates, thus permitting the links between life expectancy and education (Olshansky *et al.,* 2012).

Corsini (2010) argues that in all countries, mortality, health and the age that people die at are strongly influenced by socio-economic factors such as educational attainment, employment status and income level. She goes on to say that at any age, life expectancy is less among persons with the lowest educational attainment and increases with educational level; higher educated people live longer than lower educated people, both men and women. Surprisingly, life expectancy for women at a given educational attainment level is always higher than that of men at the same level. However, differences between the sexes decline as educational attainment increases (Corsini, 2010; Olshansky *et al.,* 2012).

The study holds the assumption that there are hazards linked to failure to improve qualifications by social workers. For this reason, Hummer and Hernandez (2013) express the view that adults with 12 to 16 years of education have higher mortality rates than those with 17 or more years of schooling for causes with high preventability. Thus, educational attainment is most closely associated with mortality rates for causes under greater human control. However, for all major causes of death, highly educated persons die at lower rates than persons with lower levels of education (Hummer & Hernandez, 2013). This is consistent with the findings of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission (2009) that more educated individuals are more likely to live in health-promoting environments that encourage and enable them to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours, hence extending their lifespan. Statistics South Africa (2014) reported that the highest number of deaths that occurred in the year 2013 was amidst those aged 60–64, followed by those aged 35–39 with level of education contributing to the death. Other dimensions of socioeconomic status, such as occupational status, income, and wealth, are as well strongly associated with mortality and longevity in the United States and many other countries (South Africa could be one).

Baum *et al.* (2013) discovered that postgraduate studies (including social work) lead to healthier lifestyles, reducing health care costs, and that the lower level of educational attainment is associated with increased risk of adverse health outcomes in individuals. Additionally, previous similar research uncovered that individuals with higher levels of education have improved wellbeing and healthier behaviours (Feinstein, Sabates, Anderson, Sorhaindo & Hammond, 2006). Parents' education is strongly linked to their children's health and development. Parents with lower educational attainment typically face greater obstacles, including lack of knowledge, skills, time, money and other

resources for creating healthy home environments and modeling healthy behaviours for their children (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009). The quality of children's health and development in turn influences health later in life through both direct and indirect pathways. On preventable diseases, research continues to link stroke, hypertension, diabetes, and obesity with low educational attainment (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009; Anyanwu *et al.,* 2010 & Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

Parents' education levels can affect their children's education prospects both directly, through the kinds of support and resources parents are able to provide at home, and indirectly, through the quality of schools their children are likely to attend. Less educated parents are less likely to have high educational expectations and to create stimulating and nurturing environments for their children. In addition, they are more likely to live in lower-income neighborhoods in which schools may have insufficient resources. The level of educational attainment children eventually achieve affects their health as adults, through the same pathways experienced by their parents. It also affects the health of their own children, in turn perpetuating a vicious intergenerational cycle of low educational attainment and poorer health (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009).

Adults with higher levels of education are more likely to live healthy lifestyles, which is of paramount importance for social workers in discharging their duties at workplace and leading by example to clients or a point of reference (Bhalotra & Clarke, 2013; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009). The issue is not just that they earn more and have better access to health care; highly educated adults smoke less, exercise more, and have lower obesity rates. In support of the latter information, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission (2009) maintain that greater educational attainment has been associated with health-promoting behaviours, including increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and other aspects of healthy eating, engaging in regular physical activity, and refraining from excessive consumption of alcohol and from smoking. These differences not only affect the lifestyles and life expectancies of individuals but also reduce medical costs for society as a whole.

The educational attainment does not only result in good socioeconomic status; it also influences many other aspects of the life course as well, including cognitive functioning, and the development of social and psychological resources (Hummer & Hernandez, 2013). Bhalotra and Clarke (2013) indicate that every day, approximately 800 women

with lower or no education die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, 99% of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries (including South Africa) and they are largely preventable (World Health Organisation, 2012). Interestingly, changes in health-related behaviour in response to new evidence, health advice and public health campaigns tend to occur earlier among highly educated people (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009).

2.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

The following is a summary of findings from literature:

- Individual and organisational factors influence the decision to further studies and obtain postgraduate qualifications.
- Heavy work and family commitments correlate with social workers' aspirations to improve their qualifications.
- Family and financial constraints have a bearing towards the pursuit of post-graduate qualifications.
- Low salaries and poor image discourage social workers from pursuing further qualifications.
- Poor incentives as well as challenges associated with distance education are seen as obstacles towards furthering studies among social worker.
- Social work qualifications are used as stepping stones to other careers, while barriers towards further studies manifest in the academia.
- A more specific benefit of postgraduate qualification positively influences mortality and health.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The information obtained from the literature study in the previous chapter has shed some light on factors militating against social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. In this chapter, the researcher elaborates on the methodology employed in the study to contribute to research on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. An emphasis is placed on the following: research design and approach, population and sampling procedures, quality criteria, significance of the study, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.2 PURPOSE

3.2.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

3.2.2 Objectives

This study pursued the following objectives:

3.2.2.1 To identify core factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies;

3.2.2.2 To examine the significance of improving qualifications from social workers' point of view;

3.2.2.3 To generate recommendations that will assist in addressing social workers' reluctance to further their studies.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN, APPROACH AND STRATEGY

3.3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

De Vos *et al.* (2002) maintain that a research design pays attention to the end product of formulating a research problem as a point of departure and focuses on the logic of the whole study. According to Mouton (2001), research design is perceived as a plan or blueprint of how the researcher intends conducting a study, while the researcher

considers it a large and comprehensive toolbox for the research journey to be undertaken. This study's goal was descriptive and empirical in nature; with the intention to provide a clear description of the hurdles that encircle social workers in their attempts to pursue postgraduate education, followed by exposition of the significance of undertaking such studies.

3.3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The researcher selected the qualitative approach to guide the study. According to Myers (2013), qualitative research methods are designed to help the researcher get a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations. It seeks to understand how the participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behaviour. The approach was selected and deemed fit for the study since the researcher wanted to investigate impediments leading social workers not to pursue postgraduate education, not the figures of the phenomenon. For the qualitative approach chosen in the study, a case study design was further selected due to its flexibility which allowed the researcher to be guided by what was seen and said in the field by the sample of social workers with the hope of gaining their in-depth understanding of situations, meanings and live experiences (Becker, 1970).

3.4 SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

A purposive sample of ten (20) social workers was constituted. The inclusion criteria of the sample included only social workers with bachelor's degrees who had been employed for more than five years after graduating from various institutions and never endeavoured to improve their qualifications or had attempted and dropped out (from postgraduate education). The exclusion criteria side-lined social workers who had retired from the profession and those possessing advanced degrees such as master's and PhDs. Furthermore, social workers who had registered for postgraduate degrees (or studies) in institutions and resumed their studies, and those employed in other settings but are not practising social workers were excluded from the study.

The employer was approached for permission to interview 20 social workers as the participants of the study (and the sample size/number was seen an opportunity to reach data saturation). Upon receiving approval, the researcher visited the targeted social

workers where the aim of the study was fully explained and a request to participate made. Those who had interest in the study were interviewed. However, data saturation was reached where nothing new was emerging from the participants. Hence the researcher decided not to continue with the interview process. As stated by O'Reilly and Parker (2012) as well as Walker (2012), data saturation is visible when there is sufficient data to replicate the whole study.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data from the participants. This enabled the researcher to gain a detailed picture of the participants' beliefs, perceptions and accounts of a particular topic while giving the researcher and the participant much flexibility (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011).

Prior to the data collection process, a request to conduct the study was made by the researcher and approved by the Department of Social Development (Lebowakgomo). Thereafter, all ten (10) participants (due thematic data saturation) were interviewed in Driekop (Sekhukhune District, Burgersfort) by the researcher using a list of questions carefully constructed before the interview. The interview processes lasted almost 45 minutes each, generating an entire duration of 440 minutes in two days. With regard to the aforesaid number of interviews, Groenewald (2004) posits that an in-depth interview between two (2) and ten (10) respondents should suffice for data saturation. A total response rate of hundred percent (100%) was successfully achieved. An audio recorder was utilised with permission of the participants to record their responses. Field notes were utilised to back-up the process.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The study sourced primary data from the interviews, while secondary data was a thick literature study which shed greater light on this research project. A thematic analysis method was selected in the study, and is defined as a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis organises and describes data set in detail. It gives an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely (Marks & Yardley, 2004). However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and talk, and is

aimed at generating descriptions of strategies and behaviours (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). After the data had been transcribed, the researcher conducted a six phased content thematic analysis as follows (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with data

The researcher started by collecting data, thereafter immersed himself within it by frequently reading and searching for themes.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

After the researcher had familiarised himself with the raw data, he began synthesising codes in order to identify interesting aspects emerging from the data (Tuckett, 2005). The codes were produced from the data and collated.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Given the plenty of codes identified and collated in the above phase, a close examination was made to create overarching themes. This was achieved through the use of tables and mind-maps.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

Based on the number of themes that had emerged, the researcher began to review the themes at hand to refine them so as to remain with the most interesting and salient themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Having reviewed and refined the themes, the researcher named the emergent themes and paraphrased the most interesting and pertinent content of the data extracts. For each theme, the researcher made an analysis and put it in writing.

Phase 6: Producing the report

After identifying a set of fully worked-out themes, the researcher made a final analysis and compiled a report to present findings. The themes and sub-themes were presented.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

Yeasmin and Rahman (2012:156) indicate that triangulation is of paramount importance in research, and is defined as "a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods". They further submit that "In the social sciences, it refers to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct, and can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies".

Schurink, Founche and De Vos (2011) used the work of Lincoln and Guba (1999) who submitted that in order to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative data, a certain criterion needs to be adopted which the researcher aligned himself to as fully explained underneath:

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Macnee & McCabe, 2008). Credibility helps to establish whether or not the findings will represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and that it is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. The researcher immersed himself into the participants' world, which assisted in understanding the context of the study, eliminating the distortions of information that might arise due to the presence of the researcher in the field.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of a study can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim, 2006). The researcher enhanced confirmability by documenting all the procedures used for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Critical to this process is the audit trail, which allows any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via decisions made and procedures described. Beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted were acknowledged within the research report, and the reasons for favouring one approach when others could have been taken were mentioned.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the findings over time (Bitsch, 2005). It involves the participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from the informants of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Tobin & Begley, 2004). The research methodology and the context of the study were described to enhance dependability (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010). The audit trail and code-recode strategies were used to ensure and enhance dependability of the study. Firstly, during the code-recode strategy the researcher coded the same data twice by giving at least one or two weeks' gestation period between each coding. Secondly, with the audit trail strategy, the researcher examined the inquiry process and the results to validate the data, and to account for all research decisions and activities to show how data was collected, recorded and analysed (Bowen, 2009; Li, 2004).

Transferability

Bless *et al.* (2013) are convinced that in qualitative research, external validity is referred to as transferability, and that the latter examines the degree to which the results of the study can be generalised. The transferability of a study is the extent to which its findings can be applied in other similar contexts or with other respondents (Botma *et al.,* 2010). To ensure transferability, a thick description strategy was adopted. The researcher fully explained all research processes from data collection, the context of the study to production of the final report. Thick description will help other researchers to replicate the study using similar conditions in other contexts or settings. Therefore, in enhancing transferability, the researcher gathered thick descriptive data that allowed the comparison of this context to other possible contexts to which transfer might be contemplated (Li, 2004).

3.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at delving into factors that lead social workers to be reluctant and unwilling to further their qualifications after obtaining their bachelor's degrees (or qualifications). Therefore, it is the researcher's conviction that the findings of the study might assist the Department of Social Development and other employers in improving the profile of social workers in order to advance their retention.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations relate to the moral standards that the researcher should consider in all research methods in all stages of the research (De Vos *et al.,* 2011). The researcher took into account the following ethical considerations when conducting the research:

3.9.1 Permission to conduct the study

Permission to collect data was requested from the University of Limpopo Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) (see appendix). Thereafter, the researcher began conducting interviews with social workers, a process which was as well contingent upon approval of the request that was made to the employer by the researcher.

3.9.2 Voluntary participation

The researcher, after exposition of the study's purpose to the participants, allowed them to partake in the study out of their own free will. Strydom (2011) argues that participants should be free to either partake or withdraw from a study.

3.9.3 Informed consent

Social research, according to Babbie (2013), represents an intrusion into people's lives. The participants were all informed of the study's purpose and significance. They were requested to fill consent forms for their voluntary participation in the study. The participants were informed of their right to decline or withdraw from participating in the study at any time.

3.9.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are very important in research. Thus, the researcher is expected to respect confidentiality and anonymity of the participants partaking in the study. Babbie (2013:65) holds the view that "a research project guarantees confidentiality when the researcher can identify a given person's responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly." Anonymity means that no person must be able to identify participants or recognise the participants who provided the data (Bless *et al.,* 2006; Babbie, 2007). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity in the study, the identity of the participants are not disclosed in any way in the resulting report, as stated in their consent forms. The researcher assured all respondents of confidentiality, both verbally and in the letter of informed consent.

3.9.5 Protection from harm

The researcher ensured that the participants were not hurt in any way by the researcher himself, or anything related to the research throughout the duration of the research process (De Vos *et al.,* 2011). None of the participants were harmed from the outset until the completion of the research project.

3.9.6 Benefit and compensation

In partaking in this study, the participants proffered an opportunity to share their personal knowledge and experience as a benefit (in contributing to research project aligned to their profession), hence quenching the curiosity of researchers by bringing to the fore problems that lead social workers to put their postgraduate qualifications in abeyance. There was no compensation or any pecuniary benefit for the participants in the research project.

3.9.7 Plagiarism

Plagiarism includes directly copying the work of others in a report without acknowledging the source (Beauchamp & Bowie, 2004). Welman *et al.* (2006) posit that in all research activities, some ethical considerations must be factored in when dealing with plagiarism and honesty in reporting research findings. The researcher made all efforts to ensure that all sources cited in the study are well acknowledged by means of complete references.

3.9.8 Publication of the findings

The researcher ensured that the research findings are formally released to everyone's disposal. The University of Limpopo, the Department of Social Development and the researcher's project sponsor, *viz.,* Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority were given top priority in receiving the findings of the research project.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations to the study:

- There was qualified literature in South Africa that precisely addressed issues relating to factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies.
- The study was conducted only in one province, therefore the results thereof cannot necessarily represent social workers convictions of all other eight (8) provinces within the borders of South Africa.
- Sample size was too small to do full justification to the notion of thick description.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATON OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher brings to the fore rigorous empirical findings from data collected on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies in Limpopo Province, *viz.*, Driekop (Sekhukhune District RSA). In line with the preceding chapters, the researcher was heavily motivated to comprehend social workers' apparent lack of desire to pursue postgraduate studies related to their profession. This was observed by the researcher at work, hence the motivation to examine this issue.

Revisiting questions posed in the study is at the heart of this chapter. According to Groenewald (2004), an in-depth interview with between two (2) and ten (10) respondents is adequate to reach data saturation. The data saturation referred to herein is termed *inductive thematic saturation* by Saunders *et al.* (2017). In the data collection process, ten (10) social workers were interviewed in-depth as a primary source of data collection. In addition, a myriad of global and local literature was studied to gain insight into factors undermining social workers' endeavours to pursue postgraduate education, which formed secondary data collection. This study, as indicated in the preceding chapter, deployed a qualitative approach, which is descriptive in nature.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF RESPONDENTS

MALE	FEMALE
2	8
MARRITAL STATUS	MARRITAL STATUS
0	6
AGE DISTRIBUTION	
25-30	
31-35	
36-40	
41-45	
46-50	
51-55	
56-60	
WORK EXPERIENCE RANGE IN YEARS	
5-10	
11-15	

The majority of the respondents were (married) women, implying that women are dominating the social work profession (Sithole, 2010; Khunou, Pillay & Nethenonda, 2012).

4.3 THICK DESCRIPTION

It is important for the researcher to give a full description of the nature of this study, with focus on the methodology and exposition of parameters so that it could be easy for the study to be replicated by any researcher (or for transferability purposes). The description is as follows:

- This was a qualitative study whose aim was to investigate factors that social workers grapple with in pursuit of further studies. The focus was placed on social workers who were employed in DSD and who had not made attempts to improve their bachelor's degrees.

- Literature review was a secondary data which the researcher relied on to gain an understanding of the factors/barriers that impede social workers' interests to undertake postgraduate studies, or to understand factors underpinning their reluctance to further their studies.

- For triangulation purposes, a sample of 10 social workers were interviewed (audio records/field notes used) in Driekop, Limpopo Province (Burgersfort, RSA) as primary data collection. Ethical considerations applicable to the study were adhered to (see chapter 3).

- The data elicited from the respondents was considered for content thematic analysis, and was read several times and coded. The codes were collated until new themes emerged to represent the findings of the study. The analysis was discontinued when data saturation was reached. The researcher further paid a visit to the sample interviewed to confirm the themes/findings that came out from the analysis as part of ensuring dependability and validity of the study. Thereafter, the confirmed data/findings were considered for reporting on this research report.

4.4 EXPOSITION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS IN THE FORM OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The data gathered by the researcher was analysed by means of data reduction or coding, and arranged into themes. An illustration of how the themes were developed (or coded) is proffered in the table below:

Table 1: Synopsis of the development of themes and subthemes

Resultant themes	Coded text (sub-themes)
Lack of motivation and professional prestige due to derecognition of postgraduate qualifications by the employer	Demoralised and demotivated No upward mobility and same salary scale Social work is disreputable
Heavy work and family commitments	Heavy workload Many family responsibilities, little time and fatigue
Financial constraints due to poor social work salary	Meagre salary a financial barrier to studies
Poor reading habits and lack of information on postgraduate sponsors such as HWSETA and NIHSS	Newspapers rarely read HWSETA and NIHSS unknown
Significance of postgraduate qualifications	Mitigation of poor supervision/mediocrity Increases marketability Improving one's skills

4.4.1 Lack of motivation and professional prestige due to derecognition of postgraduate qualifications by the employer

4.4.1.1 Demoralised and demotivated

The respondents revealed that they have lost confidence and are less enthusiastic about pursing postgraduate qualifications in social work because the employer was not giving them monetary incentives. The following was mentioned:

"Most of us regard furthering studies as useless.…...".

"I think people who further their studies in social work field are not well-informed".

"I don't see myself pursuing anything in social work".

"Social workers must go back to school and start a new career".

"I will never encourage someone to further studies in social work, I just feel like it is a waste of time……people must think twice".

The MPC model views incentives as vital for employees in the workplace. Ganta (2014), whose work is corroborated by DePorres and Livingston (2016), states that particular individuals (social workers) are motivated by money while others accept recognition in the form of promotions and other personally motivating rewards.

This theme is in accord with the MPC model used in this study; the model on *individual characteristics* emphasises that individuals need to be motivated to improve their skills at work. In this case it can be argued that social workers ignore further studies largely due to disincentives. Hence, extrinsic motivation plays a central role in the participant's decision to improve their qualifications. Nyambegera and Gicheru (2016) make it clear that when extrinsic motivation (for example, better salary) is poor, the drive to undertake new initiatives such as furthering education is as well decreased. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) and DePorres and Livingston (2016) maintain that candidates who are both personally and professionally motivated are more likely to persist in postgraduate studies.

4.4.1.2 No upward mobility and same salary scale

It was found that being on the lowest rung of the ladder was a worrisome issue at the workplace, hence contemplation of postgraduate studies was a reality. Nevertheless, aspirations to improve bachelor's degrees were disturbed by disincentives. The perception was that when one has improved qualifications and obtained a master's degree, for example, the person should get a promotion or better benefits as it is a practice in other helping professions. However, in DSD none of the aforementioned happens. The respondents had the following to say regarding this issue:

"It's just the same, others with master's degrees are working with us……. they are not managers".

"In other department if you pass master's the salary level increases but in social work if you pass your master's one gets the same salary".

"After completing postgraduate there is no promotion".

"They are the same as social workers who are in salary grade 1".

The respondents indicated that they were paid a very little salary, and thus cannot afford postgraduate education. To add to the problem, the Department of Social Development as the employer does not consider postgraduate qualifications (NQF 8-10) for upward mobility, which is the same issue in terms of remuneration. All of this demotivate them to improve their qualifications. Simply put, the respondents do not take kindly the fact of being on the same lower salary scale while holding postgraduate qualifications, hence they perceive postgraduate qualifications as useless.

This is an appalling situation. It resembles a hard-working fisherman who continuously throws a fishing net into the river without catching any fish upon the return of the fishing net, then later heads back home empty-handed. Enaigbe (2009) indicates that professionals/supervisors are more likely to be motivated when incentivised for doing something at work. Dublin City University (2008) asserts that in the majority of countries that are still developing such as South Africa, postgraduate degree holders get poor remuneration and are confronted with many disincentives with regard to postgraduate education. Giffords (2009) found that social workers may be more committed to their work if they are promoted or get a positive salary raise, which is in line with the MPC model that extrinsic motivation is important for employees (social workers).

4.4.1.3 Social work is disreputable

It was maintained that the social work profession lacks dignity/respect. This could be illustrated by derecognition of postgraduate qualifications by the employer. The following quotations are a testimony to this:

"There is never a post requiring master's…..if you go to the district or provincial office and ask to see the head, you will be surprised to see the lower qualification that person has…sometimes not even related to social work".

The respondents associated postgraduate qualifications with pecuniary benefits. They expressed frustration of how the social work profession lacks prestige. This is also attested by Sithole (2010) as well as Dlamini and Sewpaul (2015). A respondent noted

that even top social work management officials do not have bachelor's degrees in social work or postgraduate qualifications in social work. This is a deplorable situation which Sithole (2017:302) observed as "*analogous to a former good tennis player who is deployed to coach a soccer team, despite never having kicked a soccer ball*".

The MEC (2018) for DSD in Limpopo province Mrs Mapula Mokaba-Phukwana revealed that the department is rife with a large number of "underqualified" officials holding senior positions. This is an extremely disturbing situation because qualified social workers are available to fill these positions. The MPC model is not silent on employee's professional commitment, which in this may be disturbed by unqualified persons who hold senior positions while qualified social workers are not considered. The commitment is also found to correlate with the treatment of the employer.

4.4.2 Heavy work and family commitments

4.4.2.1 Heavy workloads

The respondents were worried by heavy workload in terms of improving their qualifications. One respondent said:

"The work pressure, poor working conditions affect you as a human being……I am always tired".

Work pressures or commitments are also seen to be extremely disturbing towards undertaking postgraduate studies (Sheldon & Chilvers, 2000; Naidoo, 2004; Wasburn-Moses, 2008). The MPC model sheds some light about the fact that work or organisational factors may create a barrier to participation in further studies. Heavy workloads temper with the time to attend to postgraduate studies while at work. Calitz, Roux and Strydom (2014) concluded that this resulted in burnout. Noteworthy is the fact that in countries like Sweden, a maternity leave of over 12 months is given (Sweden.se, 2013). As such heavy workloads that would impede on the interest to study may not survive. Therefore, management support is important, hence the MPC model encourages the support of employees by the employer. In essence, this means that when social workers need time or support in furthering studies, at least the employer should meet them half way.

4.4.2.2 Many family responsibilities, little time and fatigue

The family was found to have a huge bearing on the participants' aspirations to pursue postgraduate studies in their lifetime. The aforesaid is buttressed by the next accounts:

"I have a small child…I don't think I will be able to juggle the two…family commitment is a barrier".

"The main obstacle lies in family commitments when I want to further my studies".

A handful of female respondents indicated that they were not lazy to improve their education, were overwhelmed by pressure at work (and many family responsibilities). It was also revealed that after work, they have little time to attend to any work as fatigue sets in. As one peruses through the relevant literature, it becomes clear that individuals are under great pressure to earn a salary and support family members (Habib, 2011).

Cobbing *et al.* (2017) assert that women (dominating in this study/sample) have the responsibility of caring for children and elderly parents, which may make it harder to undertake postgraduate education. The researcher is of the view that the previous assertion is reasonable given the fact that social work is still a female dominated profession (Sithole, 2010; Khunou, Pillay & Nethenonda, 2012). For this reason, women in the majority of patriarchal societies, including South Africa, have to deal with the challenges of raising children and taking care of other people in the family. It is worth noting that this information is contradictory in social democratic societies such as Sweden (in Scandinavia), where women and men have more or less equal rights. An extensive welfare system in Sweden makes it easier for both men and women to balance work and family life (Sweden.se, 2013).

Additionally, in the literature review it was found that both (social workers) men and women in Sweden are entitled to 480 days of parental leave when a child is born or adopted (Sweden.se, 2013). This is done so in light of gender equality policy, ensuring that women and men have the same power to shape society. The strategy to achieve this is through gender mainstreaming. Sweden upholds the ideology of a feminist government, with the implication that gender equality is of paramount importance in guiding government decisions (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). With that said, Statistics Norway (2010) reported that many students (including social workers) at

master's degree level are women. Such trends began since the year 2004, more women than men have completed master's degrees.

Nevertheless, Yeba (2015) found that the demands of marriage in Africa are preventing women of pursuing postgraduate education. This meant confining themselves to female or gender roles, which envisage taking care of their husband's needs. Patriarchy, being largely the cause of the latter, the researcher is of the view that some husbands hold views that (more) educated women are not hesitant to file for divorce (see Chen, 2012). This is despite that fact that women should not be above them, otherwise it may cause trouble in the family. In such predicament, a larger proportion of social workers dominating the profession may struggle to undertake postgraduate studies.

Hart (2012) clings to the perception that the demands of postgraduate studies inhibit couples' leisure time and result in less energy to cultivate the marital relationship. Al Horany and Hassan (2011) agree that postgraduate education may attract marital discordance. With that said, social workers may be worried of leaving behind their families or not spending enough time with them just to satisfy the demands of postgraduate studies.

Quite interestingly, the empirical findings of this study are clearly contradictory with some of what has been gathered in the literature review. The contradiction referred to herein is that the secondary data provides that the Scandinavian population (including social workers) in particular women, obtain postgraduate education in large numbers compared to their male counterparts. They do not experience marriage induced commitments according to a certain gender or trapped in patriarchal relationships.

4.4.3 Financial constraints due to poor social work salary

4.4.3.1 Meagre salary a financial barrier to studies

A considerable proportion of the respondents reported that money was a scarce resource to them. For those with aspirations to pursue postgraduate studies, it was a huge problem. The following accounts bear evidence to the aforesaid:

"Not getting enough salary to further studies…".

"Money! We are earning less……peanuts".

"Because in social work we don't get more………we are not left with anything to register for postgraduate studies".

"We are being paid little with more responsibilities, I'd rather pay for my child school fees….I am always postponing due to financial issues, I once applied, more than twice, hence was unable to register due to financial constraints".

The accounts above are indicative that the major barrier for not undertaking postgraduate studies lies in lack of finance to pay for tuition and other study costs. Albeit certain respondents wished to enrol for postgraduate studies, they were often discouraged by lack of money. According to the respondents, this was fuelled by little salaries in social work (Sithole, 2010; Alpaslan & Schenck, 2012; Dlamini & Sewpaul, 2015). The respondents reported that they were just keeping their heads above water. As a result, they could not afford postgraduate fees which they considered exorbitant. With that said, a large body of research illuminates that funding in postgraduate studies is a solemn predicament deterring such studies (Tamilenthi & Junior, 2011; Pitchforth *et al.,* 2012; Rathgeber, 2013; Britton & Crawford, 2015; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). Zacharias *et al.* (2016:8) noted that "the receipt of a scholarship reportedly reduced stress, boosted morale and allowed scholarship holders to dedicate more time to their studies".

Yeba (2015) supports the sentiment that married women (with social workers included) predominantly depend on their husbands for money. From this, the researcher is of the view that even if it is a social worker's income, patriarchy often dictates that husbands should take control. Therefore, suffice to say that the husband may still deny the wife opportunity to further studies; hence a financial barrier evident to the aspired goal of furthering one's study.

The MPC model employed in this study as well reaffirms that a potential barrier for individuals not to improve their education level lies in low financial power. The literature review also reinforces that with poor remunerations in the profession, the social service providers (for example DSD) are apt to experience brain drain (Alpaslan & Schenck, 2012). Given this background, social work in South Africa is clearly no land of milk and honey as compared to other nation-states.

4.4.4 Poor reading habits and lack of information on postgraduate sponsors such as HWSETA and NIHSS

4.4.4.1 Newspapers rarely read

The researcher found that reading newspapers was not the respondent's habits at all. The underneath quotations are evidence to this discovery:

"I don't read a newspaper for about six months, I don't buy it".

"Maybe twice a month I read newspaper…because I stay far from town and is not easy to access newspaper".

"I just browse the newspaper, it is time consuming….I just check the front page".

"I read newspaper once a week…the main reason to look for posts".

"I don't buy newspaper…I only rely on my phone for news….I only read the headlines on the news….I buy newspaper on Sundays to view vacancies".

"I don't want to lie, once in a while if I go to town…I read a newspaper once in three months".

Horder (2007) found that lack of reading was greatly visible amongst social workers in the UK after they have qualified for permanent positions or no longer on probation periods. Coming back to South Africa, it has been discovered that social workers' efforts to read newspapers are virtually absent. Simply put, social worker's information-seeking habits are profoundly poor.

The researcher is of the view that social work practitioners in the majority do not engage with literature as observed in the field (or while at workplace). For this reason, it may be disturbing to think of such professionals claiming to have aspirations to further their studies. Yet they revealed that they do not even read a newspaper daily or at least in a week (even via their gadgets). The MPC model is not silent on professional commitment, which in essence, implies that (passionate) social workers must always be up to date information-wise (or CPD). However, the researcher contends that they may not be blamed for their poor information seeking habits (or culture) if the council (SACSSP) meant to enforce, assure and promote such reading habits has last demanded CPD evidence from social workers more than half a decade ago. The aforementioned was observed by the researcher during the period of this study (2017-2018).

Social workers do not read newspapers as indicated earlier. This is a contradiction to aspirations to pursue postgraduate studies by the respondents. It is so because the researcher vouches that postgraduate study demands 'excessive reading'. Hence, it is questionable that these social workers have aspirations to improve their qualifications. The reading culture being worrisome among social workers, the Sepedi saying goes *"tlogatloga e tloga kgale, modiša wa dikgomo o tšwa natšo šakeng"* which in relation to the subject implies that the reading culture must be imbued by social workers at an early stage in order to excel in academic activities at a later stage (if other barriers such as patriarchy are absent, for example). In the same reasoning, a study by Beddoe and Duke (2013) on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) found that social workers scholarly activities and research is extremely poor.

Given the fact that this study was not focused on CPD, such a finding sheds some light in terms of the extent to which social workers do training or reading, that is, their reading habits. In addition, some authors have undertaken studies on the reading habits of social workers and had reached an extremely disturbing conclusions that social workers' reading habits are absent (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Sheldon & Chilvers, 2000; Cigno & Bourn, 2017), that is to say, social workers dislike reading. An extremely sad revelation which the researcher perceives that it is because such social workers at times think they have reached their destination (which is finding employment) hence the aversion to reading.

4.4.4.2 HWSETA and NIHSS unknown

The respondents' knowledge of HWSETA and NIHSS organisations or bodies that sponsor postgraduate studies was poor. The following quotations lend support to this:

"I have never heard anything about HWSETA".

"I know nothing about HWSETA, I know SEDA".

"I have heard about HWSETA, don't know what it does".

"What I know about it is that social work interns are sponsored by HWSETA".

"Never heard of NIHSS".

"NIHSS………this one I don't know".

The overwhelming majority of the respondents disclosed that they do not have sufficient or any information of bursaries or scholarships that may assist them to pursue or fund postgraduate studies. This information was divulged when the researcher asked whether they knew of the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) and Health and Welfare Sector Education Training Authority (HWSETA) which aid in funding. The MPC model argues that managerial support is of paramount importance. This means giving information about bursaries and other sources of funding so that those who are willing to further studies may grab the opportunity. With that said, it is important to comprehend that social workers would be either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to further their studies. However, it is also their responsibility to be up to date as the model stipulates that they need to be committed to the profession as well. This means that they should personally make efforts to find information about postgraduate financial support.

To some extent, the finding of this study corroborates the finding by Health and Welfare Sector Education Training Authority (2015) that less time is spent on newspapers than other modes of news dissemination. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the respondents of this study having poor/worrisome reading habits with regard to newspapers, it does not necessarily mean that other modes of news or information dissemination (for example online news updates, academic articles, journals and so forth) are exhausted/read. From the respondents, there was not much of other information seeking or learning mode to disclose, except for one respondent that uttered: *"more than a month without accessing newspaper… I rely on cell phone for updates".*

4.4.5 Significance of postgraduate qualifications

When asked about their views on postgraduate education, the respondents acknowledged some benefits aligned to postgraduate qualifications. Apart from the challenges expanded on earlier, some respondents do value postgraduate qualifications in social work.

4.4.5.1 Mitigation of poor supervision/mediocrity

Social work supervision was found to be a bit challenging, needing some extra training in order to improve supervision skills. Postgraduate qualification was considered a valuable resource in this regard. The following was mentioned by respondents:

"You don't have confidence as a supervisor….despite your experience supervisees will undermine you at work…..you need postgraduate qualification".

"The clients would get better services from us social workers with postgraduate qualifications".

"Postgraduate studies enrich mind".

"It is important for professional growth……it's a must have thing".

The respondents found that postgraduate qualifications may serve well in supervisory positions and beyond. It was believed that postgraduate degrees/qualifications would save them from mediocrity or incompetence and give them prestige. The MPC model reports that professionals (including social work supervisors) must improve their qualifications to enhance quality in service delivery. The respondents also prefigured that postgraduate degree holders were better equipped to help turn around the marginalised social work profession. Enaigbe (2009) maintains that the training and retraining of supervisors is important to deal with mediocracy or incompetence sometimes found in supervision. He further argues that "supervisors with higher qualifications are more likely to perform better in the field than those with lower qualifications" (Enaigbe, 2009:242). This is well supported by Okoro (2004) that such supervisors are confident and remain unshakable when challenges arise at work.

4.4.5.2 Improving marketability and skills

The improvement of bachelor's degrees qualifications was seen to have some advantages. The sentiments of the respondents are as follows:

"Opportunities are limited with just a bachelor's degree in social work".

"I will be knowledgeable about social work".

"Social workers with postgraduate qualifications are the better ones to change the poor conditions of the profession".

Postgraduate qualifications are seen as important for personal growth or improving one's skills, which eventually contribute in the office with clients. The respondents also noted that postgraduate qualifications would increase one's marketability when seeking greener pastures, especially outside the profession.

The literature review in this study indicates that earning a postgraduate qualification such as a master's and doctoral degree brings a new set of skills and understanding (Bryan & Guccione, 2014). It helps individuals to think strategically and long term. Bryan and Guccione (2014) further argue that with a postgraduate qualification, one is able to apply a critical approach to problem solving, project management ability and innovation to researching work-place problems. In this assertion, the researcher can vouch that he had gained new skills which he did not have prior to undertaking this postgraduate study. With these skills, the researcher can argue that rather than transient, the skills are useful in day to day social work practice or service delivery that he had been exposed to for some time.

He further argues that postgraduate studies or qualifications expand one's horizons. Simply put, they sharpen one's intellect and would mitigate some of the challenges faced by social workers in discharging their duties, such as asserting themselves, preparation of court cases/reports and so forth (De Jager, 2013). The writing skills, the way cases may be approached, argued (in courts/reports) and solved in the field, is to a large extent, amplified by postgraduate qualifications versatility, including the gains of the interaction with scholars or professors; it is just a pulsating experience. In essence, a postgraduate study/qualification is a *sine-qua-non* than just a mere educational improvement. However, the researcher considers passion/intrinsic motivation central in undertaking such studies. As for the detractors, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Given the fact that postgraduate studies involve extensive reading, one author sums it up by laying a firm argument that reading loads the mind with a new software (Satija, 2002). Therefore, the researcher argues further that social workers aspiring for postgraduate qualifications 'shall' be loaded and 'rebooted' with new software that would help them to make more sound and informed decisions than before in certain cases if not all.

The literature review underlines that parents with high levels of education are apt to have wider vocabulary by which children can benefit and develop language fluency (Musgrave, 2000, cited in Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). The researcher believes that it is the nature of the beast and those around the highly educated other than just the children can always benefit a lot. It is believed that low educational background negatively affects academic achievement of children because it prevents access to vital resources, and creates additional stress at home (Eamon, 2005; Jeynes, 2002, cited in Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). High academic attainment of parents significantly reduces chances of primary school

drop out of children. Therefore, the researcher understands that social workers who further their studies may be acting as agents of the motive for children or family members to study and progress at school level. More interestingly, health-wise it said that changes in health-related behaviour in response to new evidence, health advice and public health campaigns tend to occur earlier among highly educated people (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission, 2009), an important thing that can also be shared amongst clients in social work offices.

4.5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This research study aimed to investigate factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. To this end, the primary objective was purely to determine factors that social workers grapple with in pursuit of further studies.

The study sampled ten (10) participants which deviated from the initial target of 20 social workers/participants. As shown in table 4.2, the participants included eight women and two men. A simplistic view/finding that women dominate the profession, this is also supported by Sithole (2010). Being in the majority implies that even when it comes to furthering their studies, women may stand a better chance of improving their bachelor's degrees in large numbers than their male counterparts. However, in patriarchal societies, women may be less inclined to study further as a result of decisions largely made by husbands. Again, this implies that men may stand a better chance of improving their qualifications because they are often the heads of families and do not necessarily have to ask for second opinions from their wives to enrol for a master's degree as an example. Of all the participants, eight (8) females reported being married, and the remainder of four (4) reported their marital status as single.

The respondents' years of employment in the profession varied greatly. A significant number of them were in the employ of government for five to ten (5-10) years while a handful were employed for ten to fifteen years (10-15). Having stressed that in patriarchal societies, women do not take big decisions such as enrolling for a postgraduate degree, it becomes apparent that men would have the last say, hence a possible barrier for their reluctance towards postgraduate studies.

A finding in the study shows that all the respondents are dissatisfied with the employer not incentivising postgraduate qualifications upon attainment. The absence of monetary incentives aligned to postgraduate qualifications is found to underpin poor motivation to further studies in the profession. The derecognition of these qualifications in terms of financial rewards seems to be emasculating the profession, hence lacking prestige. Speaking of prestige, the MPC model is not silent about professional commitment or loyalty. For example, it indicates that social workers are expected to engage in more continuing education activities (like postgraduate) than those who do not feel strongly about being in the profession. Surprisingly, empirical findings reveal that the majority of respondents do not demonstrate professional commitment, and this is exacerbated by disincentives. The MPC model further underlines that motivation in the form of incentives plays a huge role.

The respondents' differences in terms of age, gender or years of experience did not present any difference in the above writing (paragraph). Social work is female dominated, and most respondents were married women who candidly disclosed that apart from other barriers, marriage and work were impediments to furthering their studies. Men were less worried about the barriers women grappled with such as taking care of children, supporting the family and so on. From a patriarchal viewpoint, men are better than women and women must forever submit, which in essence means that women will spend most of their times serving men or the whole family while harbouring the same dreams with men such as pursuing postgraduate studies, but not given the opportunity to do so. Women respondents had better prioritise their children's studies than risk failure or waste money with heavy commitments on their shoulder.

Money is another factor and a scarce resource found to be impeding on the interests of some respondents who aspired to improve their qualifications. This is also supported by the MPC model that money may be a barrier to participation in postgraduate studies. It was underlined that social workers' salaries are poor. To add to the problem, they were not paid at the correct levels as per their social work qualifications or National Qualifications Framework level. This was evidenced by clear differences between remunerations in other helping professions with more or less the same qualifications. As a result of little salaries and misalignment of salary scales, they could not afford study costs from their own means as they were living beyond their means or just keeping their

heads above water. A higher salary raise would perhaps leave them with some savings to pay for their studies.

The respondents' efforts to peruse newspapers and literature in general was almost absent. They have not developed information-seeking habits, in particular on the newspapers. Their reading habits in other modes of news or information dissemination was questionable. Reading seemed almost not done as a rule of thumb in the profession, because sound decisions are necessary. This is only aligned with regular access to recent (or trending) information. Given the fact that the respondents' information seeking efforts were disappointing, it is not a surprise that although some wished to improve their studies, they lacked information regarding sponsorships. Because of their poor reading or information-seeking habits, they do not have any information about the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) as well as Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) as some of the major sponsors of postgraduate studies. The MPC model emphasises that management support is vital in continuing studies, meaning that the employer as well needs to lay a hand in providing or sourcing scholarships for deserving or interested social workers for the betterment of the company or better service delivery. However, it is wrong for social workers to fold their arms and expect to be breastfed; they must make efforts to procure funding for postgraduate studies.

The sponsors cannot just be blamed for not marketing or promoting their services to the public because newspapers are always there as large mediums of information sharing. The general understanding of the researcher is that social workers must always know what is happening around them or in their country (with specific focus to sponsorships on undergraduate and postgraduate). Despite this, it may be interesting to research more on the effectiveness of the methods that the sponsors rely on to promote or market their services, considering the fact that social workers (sampled) do not read newspapers and cannot find their information anywhere else. The researcher notes that time and again learners visit social workers' offices to seek information about bursaries/funding, although it may be largely on undergraduate studies. However, social workers' knowledge or information is highly questionable in this regard, hence the foregoing proposed recommendation. With pupils who knock in social workers' offices to enquire about post-matric funding/sponsorships, it may be observed that undergraduate sponsorships are not way apart from postgraduate. Perhaps it is a question of social

workers 'using-the-self' or making a point of self-reference when intervening in such cases if not relying on referrals to other professionals. Thus, all the respondents sampled knew nothing about NIHSS, HWSETA and other organisations that sponsor postgraduate studies.

The respondents need to be personally engaged in literature to be able to undertake or withstand the high demands of postgraduate education as it is the nature of the beast. This notwithstanding, the results are worryingly the opposite as the majority of respondents do not read newspapers daily/frequently. Poignantly, even if newspapers were rarely bought and perused, the main reason was to "scan" vacancies. Again, since the SACSSP was not instilling or perpetuating the culture of reading amongst social workers in terms of CPD that has got a relationship with postgraduate studies, the researcher remarks that they were not reminded to keep abreast of developments relating to their practice to enhance service delivery.

As mentioned in several chapters, the study sought to discover the importance of furthering studies as an objective as well. It was unearthed that the majority of the respondents have a number of burning issues with the employer/profession such as discontentment with postgraduate qualifications not being incentivised, poor salaries and so forth. However, the respondents acknowledged the fact that postgraduate qualifications are of paramount importance to their personal growth and that of the company; an intrinsic motivation taking place. With postgraduate qualifications, the respondents were of the view that they would discharge their duties better than with their current undergraduate qualifications or degrees. Furthermore, they did not forget the fact that postgraduate qualifications are by nature, fluid and would allow them to look for greener pastures.

4.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

The summary of the findings is as follows:

- Meagre salaries, poor image and monetary disincentives in the profession correlate with the low motivation to undertake postgraduate studies.

- Heavy workloads and family commitments have a negative impact on social workers' aspirations to undertake postgraduate studies.

- Poor reading habits exist amongst social workers.

- Social workers' lack of information pertaining to organisations that sponsor postgraduate studies is evident.

- Notwithstanding, social workers acknowledge some benefits of earning postgraduate qualifications in their profession.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. This qualitative research in concert with a descriptive design intended to present predicaments that social workers are confronted with when considering postgraduate education in the profession. Hence, a summary of the study and conclusion, coupled with recommendations on barriers are presented in this chapter.

5.2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study sought to investigate factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. A descriptive qualitative study was undertaken to gather full data on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. This was after the researcher noticed dearth of literature in this area. Literature was reviewed on factors that undermine social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. The literature review explicitly outlined the factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. Moreover, the dissertation expanded on the benefits of postgraduate education in all spheres.

A total of ten (10) participants were selected purposively and interviewed by the researcher. The aim and objectives of the study were successfully attained as follows:

5.2.1 To identify core factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies.

The researcher consulted a plethora of literature, which buttressed the fact that indeed in pursuit of postgraduate studies, social workers do face impediments. That was secondary data gathered. As for primary data, the researcher interviewed 10 social workers guided by an interview tool structured carefully beforehand (in a way that would be closer to data saturation as argued by Bernard, 2012). The interview took place smoothly and rich information (on barriers) was elicited from the respondents on factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies. Due to data saturation, ten (10) participants were interviewed, which was not the initial sample/size of 20 participants targeted by the study. According to Saunders *et al.* (2017), the type of data saturation reached in this study is termed *inductive thematic saturation,* which focuses chiefly on analysis.

It is argued that where no new data is added or emerges during data collection or analysis, then one has also most likely arrived at a point of no new themes; therefore, one has reached data saturation (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Urqhart (2013) is of the view that this implies the termination of analysis. The researcher had aligned himself to the assertion of the aforementioned authors. Moreover, according to Bernard (2012), the number of interviews necessary for a qualitative study to reach data saturation was a number not to be contemplated, instead the researcher takes *what he can get in the field*.

Similarly, Burmeister and Aitken (2012) also make it clear that data saturation has nothing to do with numbers, what matters is the depth of the data. With all this said, the researcher got to a point where no new information was coming out after unearthing data at every corner, hence aligns himself with the arguments of all the aforesaid authors. Therefore, the researcher could not proceed with the initial targeted sample of 20, which was thought to have an opportunity to reach data saturation. However, the researcher maintains that the sample of 20 (initial target) could have been exceeded provided different responses kept on emerging until such a point that nothing new was shared by the respondents.

5.2.2 To examine the significance of improving qualification in social workers' views

From the literature review, the researcher identified data on the significance of furthering studies by social workers. Furthermore, an interview guide was prepared to gain understanding of the phenomenon. All the respondents were interviewed on the importance of furthering studies and all responded. Both primary and secondary data allowed the researcher to fully attain the above objective.

5.2.3 To generate recommendations that will assist in addressing social workers' reluctance and unwillingness to further their qualifications.

After both the primary and secondary data was studied and fully analysed, the researcher, based on the barriers or concerns that were pinpointed, was able to come up with recommendations that would pave the way for the social workers to further their studies, and most importantly, for the employers' cooperation in terms of motivating these social workers.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The study on factors undermining social workers' attempts to further their studies is helpful, hence this research. The focus of the study was on core barriers that social workers grapple with in pursuit of postgraduate education while in the employ of government. The study's objectives were successfully attained. The study conclusively found that factors that undermine social workers' attempts to further their studies are: Lack of motivation and professional prestige due to the derecognition of postgraduate qualifications by the employer(s), heavy workload and family commitments, financial constraints due to poor social work salary, poor reading habits and lack of information on postgraduate sponsors such as HWSETA and NIHSS.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations apply: Social workers need to make efforts to inculcate reading habits amongst themselves; Social workers must strive to balance work and family commitments to make time for further studies; Postgraduate qualifications in social work need to be incentivised as a sovereign remedy; Social work salaries need to be improved and commensurate with qualifications and more competitive incentives provided as well; Social workers' heavy workloads need to be reviewed; And social workers as well as the employers should seek or source scholarships for post-graduate studies.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER AREAS OF RESEARCH

The title of the study "Factors Undermining Social Workers' Attempts at Furthering their Studies in Driekop, Limpopo Province, South Africa" merely investigated factors that practitioners grapple with in pursuit of postgraduate education in Sekhukhune District. Practitioners from other districts within Limpopo Province and nationally still need further research in relation to this study.

Given the foregoing and bearing in mind the findings of this study, the researcher further sees the need for additional studies that examine the following areas/issues: The reading culture amongst social workers: a snapshot in their modes of skills improvement; Participation of rural social workers in Continuous Professional Development (CPD); Motivation and burnout among social workers in the Department of Social Development (DSD) at present; Factors underpinning the ignorance of Occupation Specific

Dispensation (OSD) to accommodate postgraduate qualifications in the Department of Social Development (DSD); The effectiveness of South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) managing more than one helping profession: an insight into social workers' benefits from the council; The effectiveness of marketing methods that postgraduate sponsors rely on to recruit postgraduate students; More social workers are leaving the profession: an insight in developed countries; Scholarships for social workers has ended. What is happening here? And the statistics of women in master's classes.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENCE A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. PERSONAL INFORMATION

Gender: ………………………….

Age: ………………………….

Marital Status: ………………………….

Years of employment: ………………………….

SECTION B

1. Significance of improving qualification from a social worker's point of view.

- What is your view about furthering qualifications in the social work profession?

- What do you think about social workers who have senior degrees in social work?

- What is your opinion about obtaining a higher qualification in social work?

- How does lack of higher qualifications affect your lifestyle?

2. Core factors undermining social workers' attempts to further their studies.

- What obstacles prevent you from improving your qualifications?

- Which obstacle(s) undermine you the most from furthering qualifications?

- How often do you read (national) newspapers?

- What do you know about Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) scholarships?

- Who does the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) fund?

3. Recommendations that will assist in addressing social workers' reluctance and unwillingness to further their qualifications.

- What could be done to encourage more social workers to improve their qualifications?

- What would be your comment on social workers intention to further their studies in the profession?

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TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS
COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING:	07 February 2018
PROJECT NUMBER:	TREC/05/2018: PG

PROJECT:

Title: Factors undermining social worker's attempts at furthering their studies
                            in Limpopo Province, South Africa.
Researcher: PJ Mmadi
Supervisor: Prof SL Sithole
Co-Supervisors: N/A
School: Social Sciences
Degree: Masters in Social Work

PROF TAB MASHEGO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics
Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

Note:
i)   Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the
        researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
ii)   The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.
        PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Finding solutions for Africa

Department of Social Work

Private Bag x 1106

Sovenga, 0727

SOUTH AFRICA

Cell: xxx xxx xxxx

Email: Mmadijames@gmail.com

Dear Social Worker

I am James Mmadi, a Master's student from the Department of Social Work at the University of Limpopo. I am pursuing a study entitled "**Factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies in Driekop, Limpopo Province, South Africa".**

As part of the study, I have to interview social workers as my participants in this scientific research project. You are requested to be open and honest as much as possible in the interview with me. You are also requested to give answers freely and provide information to the best of your knowledge. Confidentiality will be preserved at all costs.

_____

Mr. P.J Mmadi (Researcher)

Declaration of consent by the participant

I……………………………………………hereby agree to partake in the research project. The research purpose and my participation have been thoroughly explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that by agreeing to take part in the research study, I am willing to:

➢ Be interviewed by the researcher; and

➢ Agree to have the outcomes of the research used by other researchers in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this research can be recognised.

I understand that:

➢ The information provided by me shall remain confidential.

➢ My participation is voluntary.

➢ I can withdraw at any time and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing, nor will I be questioned on the reasons for doing so.

Thank you

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Department of Social Development

Polokwane

Limpopo

0700

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

I am James Mmadi, a registered master's student at the University of Limpopo. I hereby apply for permission to conduct a research study at your department facilities in Sekhukhune area. The research study is a prerequisite for the completion of the master's degree. The study is entitled **"Factors Undermining Social Workers' Attempts at Furthering their Studies in Driekop, Limpopo Province, South Africa."** The purpose of the study is to explore in depth factors that hinder social workers from furthering their qualifications, and to further publish the findings with recommendations to aid the profession. The social workers' participation will be voluntary and occur during lunch time and after hours, whichever time suits them during that particular day.

The social worker(s) may withdraw at any stage of the study without any consequences for them.

The data received will by all means be treated as confidential in the research report document. Please note that the collection of data is further contingent upon approval of the Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) at University of Limpopo.
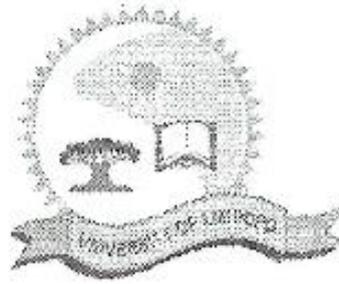
I hope to receive your approval to conduct this study.

Yours Sincerely

Mmadi P.J

Researcher: Mr. P.J Mmadi (Email: Mmadijames@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Prof. S.L Sithole (Tel: 015 268 2683 Email: Sello.Sithole@ul.ac.za)

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14 May 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

SUBJECT: EDITING OF MASTER'S DISSERTATION

This is to certify that the masters dissertation entitled 'Factors undermining social workers' attempts at furthering their studies in Driekop, Limpopo Province, South Africa' by Pontsho James Mmaci was proofread and edited by me, and that unless further tampered with, I am content that all grammatical errors have been eliminated.

Kind regards

Dr SJ Kubayi (DLitt et Phil - Unisa)

Senior Lecturer (Department of Translation Studies and Linguistics – UL)

SATI Membership No. 1002606

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SAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPTION

THEMES	NOTES
Lack of motivation and professional prestige due to derecognition of postgraduate qualifications by the employer	- In other departments if you obtain a master's degree, you get incentivised but in social work is the opposite - Most of us regard postgraduate in social work as useless, because after earning it there is no promotion - Peer pressure is a problem in deciding to pursue postgraduate studies in social work, we speak negatively about master's and doctorate in social work - For example, in teaching if you earn a certificate you get something, but social work nothing - I will never encourage someone to further studies in social work, I just feel like is a waste of time and people must think twice - I think people who further their studies in social work are not well-informed and I do not see myself furthering studies in social work - Postgraduate qualifications are not necessary in social work because you are just treated the same as if you do not have them - I rather switch to other disciplines, than to further studies in social work - I do not have the zeal to study further in social work - There is never a post requiring master's degree in social work - Senior officials are employed without qualifications in social work posts - Social workers must just go back to school and start a new career
Heavy work and family commitments	- Work pressure is high in social work, for this reason one is always exhausted to have time to attend studies - There is too much work for one person at work - Paid little with more responsibilities, I rather pay for my child's school fees - I always have fatigue due to too much work and family responsibilities - I have a small child to take care of and do not have time for studies
Financial constraints due to poor social work salary	- In social work we do not get much salary, one cannot afford postgraduate study costs. - The money we get is only enough for family needs - Finance is a major obstacle when contemplating postgraduate studies in social work - I always postpone enrolling postgraduate qualification because I cannot afford it
Poor reading habits and lack of information on postgraduate sponsors such as HWSETA and NIHSS	- Lying is not good, I only read newspaper in a while if I go to town - I just browse newspaper twice a week, it is time consuming… I just check the front page only - I read newspaper once a week - I read newspapers sometimes - I do not read a newspaper for about 6 months, I just do not buy it - A month would pass without accessing a newspaper, I rely on a cell phone for updates - I only read headlines on the newspaper - I only buy a newspaper to look for vacancies

	• I only know that intern social workers are paid by HWSETA, apart from that I do not know what it does • I just heard about HWSETA at a workshop that it provides scholarships to social workers • I heard about HWSETA, do not know what it does • I know nothing about HWSETA, instead I know SEDA • I only know HWSETA sponsored me during internship, do not have other information
	• I do not have (or know) any information about NIHSS (All respondents)
Significance of postgraduate qualifications	• For personal growth postgraduate qualifications are good, the clients would get better services from us social workers • Furthering studies is a good thing, it enriches mind • We need improvement nowadays, if you do not study you risk being left behind • Those pursuing further studies are moving positively in the profession • You do not have confidence as a supervisor with just a bachelor's degree; supervisees will undermine you • Master's degree is a must have thing; it is important for efficiency • A postgraduate qualification would increase one's marketability • I would be more competent with postgraduate qualifications in social work • Opportunities are limited with just a bachelor's degree in social work • Social workers with postgraduate qualifications are the better ones to change the marginalised profession; their efforts show that we do not give up in the profession