

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

(MAFIKENG CAMPUS)

FACULTY OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

MAKWELA M.M

STUDENT NUMBER: 21807655

SUPERVISOR: DR. DE CHAVONNES VRUGT

RESEARCH TITLE:

**BURNOUT AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS IN MAFIKENG, NORTH WEST
PROVINCE.**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FUFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE MASTER'S DEGREE OF SOCIAL WORK.**

MAY 2015

DECLARATION

I, Matthews Makwela, declare that this dissertation submitted for the Master's Degree of Social Work is my own unaided work. That all references used have been duly acknowledged, and that this research study has not previously been submitted for any degree or examination at any university.

Signature.....MAKWELA M.M.....

Date.....22/09/15.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special measure of thanks extended to:

- The Almighty God for making it all possible through His Love, Guidance, and for being the source of Wisdom and Knowledge, for I would not have achieved anything without His Grace.
- My family for being supportive through all spheres of my studies.
- My inspirational lecturer and research supervisor, Dr. De Chavonnes Vrugt for being the pillar of guidance, support and encouragement.
- The HSS Faculty and the research committee for granting an opportunity to conduct this study.
- The Head of the Department of Social Development, North West province, Mrs Hessie Wessie, for granting the permission to conduct the study with social workers in Mafikeng, North West province.
- Social workers and social work managers at the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services, and the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA) in Mafikeng, North West province, for deeming it necessary to accord permission to conduct the study.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. The study took into cognisance factors contributing to burnout, its effects, as well as alleviative and preventative strategies.

Burnout is regarded as one of the detrimental problems faced by most social service providers globally. It has an adverse effect on the functionality of social workers in performing their roles in the most effective and efficient manner, which subsequently, has a detrimental effect on their professional development and general well-being.

According to Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005: 491), social workers are regarded as being at high risk for burnout. Meyerson (cited by Compton et al., 2005: 491) notes that “social workers face ambiguity in their technologies (e.g. talking to clients), their goals (e.g. to provide empathy and caring), their evaluation criteria (e.g. sensitivity) and occupational boundaries (e.g. who is and is not a social worker)”. Social workers often enter the profession with an idealized sense of mission to help others and yet they must work within, sometimes, severe bureaucratic constraints (Compton et al., 2005: 491); heavy workloads and demanding caregiving responsibilities and as a result become vulnerable to burnout (Landy and Conte, 2007: 428).

In response to the situation faced by social workers in Mafikeng, a research project was undertaken with the purpose of exploring and describing the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province inclusive of its causes, effects, as well as the alleviative and preventative strategies that can be implemented to address the manifestation of burnout among social workers.

A qualitative approach was employed following an explorative-descriptive research design. The study was conducted with social workers at the Department of Social Development, Department Correctional Services and the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA), in Mafikeng, North West Province. A sample of participants was selected using purposive

sampling technique from a population of social workers working at the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA in Mafikeng. Data was analysed using Tesch's framework for data analysis and Guba's model was employed for data verification.

The research findings indicate that burnout is a serious problem being faced by most social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. It was stated that burnout has a detrimental effect on the professional development and general well-being of social workers in Mafikeng. According to the research participants, its causes include lack of resources, high workload, role ambiguity, lack of trainings and professional development, as well as low incentives, inter alia. It was further highlighted that burnout affects the smooth and efficient running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment, which subsequently, impair on the quality of care and services rendered to clients.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	(ii)
Acknowledgement	(iii)
Abstract	(iv)
Acronyms	(x)
Key words	(xi)
Chapter 1 - Orientation of the study	1
1.1. Background of the study	1
1.2. Problem statement	3
1.3. Research questions	7
1.4. Research assumptions	8
1.5. Research aims and objectives	8
1.6. Significance of the study	8
1.6.1. Policy	8
1.6.2. Practice	9
1.6.3. Theory	9
1.7. Demarcation of the field of study	9
1.8. Structure of the research report	10
1.9. Conclusion	10
Chapter 2 - Literature review and theoretical framework	11
2.1. Literature review	11
2.1.1. Definition of terms	11
2.1.1.1. Social work	11
2.1.1.2. Burnout	12
2.1.1.3. Job satisfaction	12
2.1.1.4. Social support	13
2.1.2. Conceptualization of burnout	13
2.1.3. Burnout in social work	16
2.1.4. Stressors that contribute to burnout	19

2.1.5. The effects of burnout	25
2.1.5.1. Behavioural consequences of stress	25
2.1.5.2. Psychological consequences of stress	26
2.1.6. Strategies for alleviating and preventing burnout	27
2.2. Theoretical framework	34
2.2.1. Systems theory	34
2.2.2. Person-in-environment fit model	36
2.2.3. Conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout	38
2.2.4. Strengths perspective	39
2.2.5. Conclusion	40
 Chapter 3 - Research methodology and Data analysis	 41
 3.1. Introduction	 41
3.1.1. Research approach	41
3.1.2. Research design	42
3.1.3. Type of research	43
 3.2. Population and sampling	 44
3.2.1. Population	44
3.2.2. Sampling	46
3.2.3. Recruitment and preparation of participants	48
 3.3. Data collection	 50
3.3.1. In-depth interview schedule	50
 3.4. Data analysis	 51
3.5. Data verification	52
 3.6. Research procedure	 54
3.6.1. Ethical clearance	54
3.6.2. Research permission	54
3.6.3. Participant's consent	54
 3.7. Field work	 54
3.8. Ethical consideration	54
3.9. Conclusion	56

Chapter 4 - Presentation of the findings	57
4.1. Introduction	57
4.2. Presentation of the findings	57
4.2.1. The meaning of burnout as conceptualized by social workers	57
4.2.2. The causes of burnout as conceptualized by social workers	59
4.2.3. The effects of burnout	61
4.2.3.1. The effects of burnout on social workers	61
4.2.3.2. The effects of burnout on the client system	62
4.2.3.3. The effects of burnout on the organisation	64
4.2.4. Strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout	65
4.3. Conclusion	72
 Chapter 5 – Summary, Limitations, Conclusion and Recommendations	 74
5.1. Introduction	74
5.2. Major findings of the research pertaining to objectives of the Study	75
5.2.1. Meaning of burnout among social workers	75
5.2.2. Factors contributing to burnout among social workers	76
5.2.3. The effects of burnout among social workers	76
5.2.4. Strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout	77
5.3. Theoretical framework	78
5.3.1. Systems theory	78
5.3.2. Strengths perspective	79
5.3.3. Person-in-environment fit Model	79
5.3.4. Revised conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout	81
5.4. Achievement of research aim	82
5.4.1. In terms of policy	82
5.4.2. In terms of theory and practice	82
6. Limitations of the study	83
7. Conclusion	84
8. Recommendations	85
9. Bibliography	86

10. Annexures	90
10.1. Annexure 1 – North West province map	91
10.2. Annexure 2 – Application for ethical clearance	92
10.3. Annexure 3 – Application for conducting research	93
10.4. Annexure 4 – Participants' consent form	94
10.5. Annexure 5 – Participation letter	95
10.6. Annexure 6 – In-depth interview schedule	96
 11. Figures	
11.1. Figure 1 – Conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout	38
11.2. Figure 2 – Revised conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout	81
 12. Tables	
12.1. Table 1 – Number of SACSSP registered social worker and social workers involved in formal welfare practice	44
12.2. Table 2 – Number of social workers employed by the formal social work agencies in Mafikeng	45
12.3. Table 3 – Participant's profile	48

ACCRONYMS

EAP	- Employee Assistance Programs
FAMSA	- Family and Marriage Society of South Africa.
NASW	- National Association of Social Workers.
PIE Model	- Person-in-Environment Fit Model
SACSSP	- South African Council for Social Service Professions.
SAPS	- South African Police Services.

Key words

Burnout, social work, job autonomy, retention and job satisfaction.

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Burnout is one of the crucial problems being faced by most social service professionals globally. It has an adverse effect on the functionality of workers in performing their roles in the most effective and efficient manner, which subsequently has a detrimental effect on their general development and well-being. For the purpose of this study, the focus was on the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province.

Burnout is conceptualized by Kahn and Byosier (cited by Landy and Conte, 2007: 428) as a psychological consequence of stress. It is defined as an extreme state of psychological strain which results from a prolonged response to chronic job stressors that exceeds an individual's resources to cope with them. Burnout can occur in any context, but has been mainly studied in the care giving professions. Several studies indicate that social workers form one of the main risk groups since they are exposed to a variety of workplace events that could negatively impact them (Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 229).

Adams, Dominelli and Payne (2009: 1) postulates that social workers aims to improve and facilitate the working of society and the environment of relationships and social institutions developed from relationships in which human beings live. In addition, Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005: 3) infer that social work practice promotes human well-being by strengthening opportunities, resources, and capacities of people in their environments and by creating policies and services to correct conditions that limits human rights and the quality of life. The social work profession works to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and oppression, basing its notion on the enhancement of social functioning of individuals, groups and communities at large (Compton et al., 2005: 3).

Social workers face the busy and complex world of human behaviour in social contexts, a world in which relationships break down, emotions run high, and personal needs go unmet (Howe; cited by Hamama, 2012: 113). As a consequence, social workers are vulnerable to a sense of burnout.

Maslach et al. (cited by Hamaideh, 2011: 234) further conceptualize burnout as a “physical, emotional and psychological responses to work related stress”. Physical responses include low energy, chronic fatigue, and weakness. Emotional responses include depression, helplessness, and hopelessness. Psychological responses include detached concern for patients, intellectualization of stressful situations, and withdrawal from clients and co-workers (Maslach et al.; cited by Hamaideh, 2011: 234).

In addition, Cherniss (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 299) explains burnout as a process in which the attitudes and behaviour of social workers change negatively in response to job stress. Furthermore, Prince and Murphy (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 299) define burnout as a process of adaptation to situations of job stress characterized by feelings of failure or professional disorientation, emotional exhaustion and volatile emotions, guilt feelings due to lack of professional success, emotional distance and isolation. Similarly, Farber (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 299-230) infers that burnout arises from the perceived discrepancy between effort and reward at work which are influenced by organisational, individual, and social factors.

Recent developments in theory and research emphasize that social workers' burnout is a developmental and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Söderfeldt, Söderfeldt and Warg (cited by Kim and Stoner, 2008: 8) are of the opinion that social workers are more likely to feel burnt-out when they perceive higher levels of role-related stress, which is characterized by a worker's high role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload. Furthermore, Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 230) refers to Maslach and Jackson who postulates that burnout refers to a cluster of physical, emotional and interactional symptoms related to job stress and includes emotional exhaustion, a sense of lacking personal accomplishment and the depersonalization of clients.

Burnout is regarded as a response to chronic job stress that manifests as a three-dimensional construct characterized by emotional exhaustion or the loss of emotional resources; depersonalization or the development of negative attitudes, insensitivity and cynicism toward those receiving the service provided, the value of the work itself and the body to which one belongs; as well as low personal accomplishment understood as a tendency to evaluate one's work negatively as well as low professional self-esteem (Maslach, cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 230).

In agreement, Hamama (2012: 114) argues that the consequences of burnout components are potentially very serious for workers, clients, and agencies. Burnout can lead to deterioration in the quality of care and services the worker provides, as well as creating an adverse effect on the efficient and effective functioning of the agency towards achieving its objectives.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Burnout is being regarded as one of the crucial problems being faced by most social workers globally. It has an adverse effect on the functionality of workers in performing organisational duties in the most efficient and effective manner. According to Bateman (cited by Hamama, 2012: 113) social workers are committed to the protection and empowerment of populations at risk. They help these populations to improve their physical and mental well-being within a society characterised by great economic inequality and high potential for vulnerability.

In definition, social work is the profession that seeks to 'enhance the social functioning of individuals, singly and in groups, by activities focused upon their social relationships which constitute the interaction between man and his environment. These activities can be grouped into three functions: restoration of the impaired capacity, the provision of individual and social resources, and the prevention of social dysfunction' (Farley, Smith and Boyle, 2009: 5).

According to the Center for Workforce Studies, National Association of Social Workers (NASW), (cited by Kim and Stoner, 2008: 6) social workers have demanding jobs. The recent report on the difficulties of the social work profession involved job demands which included increasing paperwork, unmanageable caseloads, and problems with difficult clients, as well as staff shortages and reduced availability of adequate supervision. At the same time, confusing legislation and concomitant guidelines have increased the conflicting and incompatible demands on social workers. These demanding job conditions are significant antecedents of social workers' burnout.

In addition, Hamama (2012: 113) refers to Howe and postulates that, daily, social workers face the busy and complex world of human behaviour in the social contexts, a world in which relationships break down, emotions run high, and personal needs go unmet, which subsequently leads to social workers being vulnerable to burnout.

Social workers in Mafikeng sum up to the total number of social workers experiencing burnout globally. This is influenced by uncondusive working conditions, workload, lack of resources and low incentives, inter alia. Mafikeng area, being mostly rural, is characterised by a high variety of social problems. These include high level of unemployment, which subsequently constitute to high level of poverty, social-ills and dysfunctional families. Social workers in this area work with clients to analyse and address the deep-rooted causes of social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, social-ills, antisocial behaviour and other social inadequacies, and to help those concerned to overcome them. In performing these tasks, social workers in Mafikeng area face detrimental factors which include role confusion, lack of resources, and high case load. These factors inhibit the effective functioning of social workers towards achieving professional and organisational goals and objectives.

Other problems peculiar to social workers in Mafikeng area include having to travel long distances to remote rural areas of Mafikeng to render social services; lack of offices whereby three or more social workers have to share one office, and this has a negative impact on the client-worker relationship, as well as on the quality of services rendered to the client-system. These working conditions are strenuous and not conducive for social workers, thus making them vulnerable to burnout.

According to Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (cited by Hatinen, Kinnunen, Makikangas, Kalimo, Tolvanen and Pekkonen, 2009: 341) burnout is a consequence of prolonged job stress, and is most often characterised by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. Exhaustion represents the individual strain dimension of burnout, describing feelings of fatigue and depletion of emotional energy.

Cynicism and reduced professional efficacy go beyond the individual stress and experience by adding the employee's attitude towards the job (cynicism) and towards the self (feelings of inefficacy), into the conceptualization of burnout. The components of cynicism refers to a distant and cynical attitude toward one's work, whereas reduced professional efficacy describes the loss of competence and productivity, as well as the tendency to evaluate negatively one's past and present accomplishments at work (Maslach et al.; cited by Hatinen et al., 2009: 341).

In addition, Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu (2011: 1066) refer to Maslach who is of the opinion that burnout is commonly recognized as exhaustion and reduced interest in work tasks or activities. It is further highlighted that various types of job-related stressors, such as work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, limited job autonomy, and client demands have been shown to contribute to burnout. The social worker experiences stress, and without adequate resources for coping, may face strain, exhaustion, and attitudinal as well as behavioural changes indicative of burnout (Maslach; cited by Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu, 2011: 1066).

Social workers experiencing burnout manifest a sense of emotional depletion, de-professionalization, and diminution of personal competence. Burnout is characterized by symptoms of psycho-physiological arousal, aggression, physical and mental exhaustion, pessimism, problematic work relationships, and decreased performance (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter; cited by Hamama, 2012: 114).

In line with Maslach and Jackson (cited by Hamama, 2012: 114) other problems peculiar with social workers' burnout include:

- **Emotional exhaustion** – the depletion of mental energy involved in professional obligation;
- **Depersonalization** – the development of negative attitudes, emotional numbness, apathy, and cynicism towards the client; and
- **Reduced personal accomplishment** – the diminution of self-esteem and ambition.

The consequences of these burnout components are potentially very serious for workers, clients, and agencies. Burnout can affect the social workers' abilities in enabling the smooth and efficient running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment. It can lead to deterioration in the quality of care or services that social workers provides, and subsequently it can further affect the solutions offered to clients' problems and impair the treatment outcomes (Maslach and Jackson; cited by Hamama, 2012: 114).

Social workers who experience burnout in agencies lose the desire to perform effectively in carrying out their mandate. In the South African context, this is caused by lack of resources, role confusion and high caseloads where social workers are expected to work with many clients than anticipated, and as a result this lead to high level of turnover, inability to develop as professionals and the deterioration on the quality of care and services rendered to clients.

In support of this argument, Cherinss, et al. (cited by Cohen and Gagin, 2005: 84) is of the opinion that burnout is a dynamic process that exerts gradually increasing negative effect on professionals' morale and well-being, on their self-concept, on the quality of care provided for clients, as well as on the client's emotional and functional well-being.

In addition, Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005: 491) postulate that burnout is costly to practitioners, organisations, and clients. On individual practitioners, burnout can mean physical and emotional exhaustion; depression and general malaise; feelings of hopelessness; physical problems such as headaches, ulcers, hypertension, fatigue, and backaches; and the development of personal problems such as marital conflict, as well as drug and alcohol abuse. On organisations, burnout can results in inefficient workers, low morale, absenteeism, and high turnover; and on the client-system, burnout among service providers means impersonal, dehumanized, and uncaring services (Maslach; cited by Compton et al., 2005: 491).

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the research problem the following research questions gave direction to the investigation:

- What is burnout?
- What causes burnout among social workers in Mafikeng?
- What are the effects of burnout among social workers, organisations and clients in Mafikeng?
- What can be done to prevent and alleviate the prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng?

1.4. RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The research assumptions were conceptualized as follows:

- Burnout is correlated to job dissatisfaction.
- There is a significant relation between role ambiguity and organisational stress.
- Social support in organisations mediates the relationship between organisational stress and burnout.
- Stress in organisations and organisational strains correlate to burnout.

1.5. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study was aimed at exploring and describing burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. The aim of the study was achieved through the following specific objectives:

- To determine the meaning of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng.
- To investigate the factors contributing to burnout among social workers in Mafikeng.
- To examine the effects of burnout among social workers, organisations and clients in Mafikeng.
- To determine the strategies to prevent and alleviate the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The outcomes of the study are beneficial in contributing to the following areas:

1.6.1. Policy

The findings of the study will contribute to enriching the existing policies that deal with factors that contribute to burnout in social work agencies.

1.6.2. Practice

The findings of the study will inform social workers and managers in social work agencies to be aware of, and be sensitive to factors that contribute to burnout and resulting in less job-satisfaction and productivity. The findings will further enable social workers, social work managers and social work agencies to effectively alleviate and prevent further manifestation of burnout among social workers.

1.6.3. Theory

The findings of the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on factors that cause burnout among social workers, as well as its effects and preventative mechanisms that can be implemented to alleviate and prevent the inception and further manifestation of burnout among social workers.

1.7. DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

The study was conducted in Mafikeng, which is situated in the Ngaka Modiri-Molema District of the North West Province (See Annexure 1 on page 91).

Mafikeng, currently referred to as Mahikeng, is the capital city of the North-West Province of South Africa. It is best known internationally for the 'Siege of Mafikeng', which is the most famous engagement of the Second Boer War. It is located close to South Africa's border with Botswana. Mafikeng is reported to have a population of 250,000 of which the CBD constitutes between 69,000 and 75,000. (Mbenga and Manson, 2011: 1).

1.8. STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

- **CHAPTER 1:** Orientation of the study.
- **CHAPTER 2:** Literature review and Theoretical framework.
- **CHAPTER 3:** Research methodology and Data analysis
- **CHAPTER 4:** Presentation of the findings.
- **CHAPTER 5:** Summary, Limitations, Conclusion and Recommendations.
- **Bibliography.**
- **Annexures.**

1.9. CONCLUSION

Burnout is one of the crucial problems being faced by most social workers globally. It has an adverse effect on the functionality of workers in performing organisational duties in the most efficient and effective manner. It has detrimental effects on the psychological and physical functioning of social workers within the organisation. The effects of burnout is its contribution to the high level of turnover and low job performance, among others, which in-turn affects the effective functioning of the organisation towards accomplishing its goals.

It is within the workers and managers of various social work agencies to create an enabling and conducive working environment in which stressors are identified and addressed constructively, before impacting negatively on the professional development and growth of social workers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this study was to investigate burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. Burnout is regarded as one of the crucial problems being faced by most social service providers globally. According to Shirom (cited by Sulsky and Smith, 2005: 157), burnout refers to the human service professionals' reaction to a stressful environment.

The literature review of this study focuses on burnout and its dynamics which include factors contributing to burnout among social workers, the effects of burnout, and measures that can be implemented by organisations and social workers to prevent its prevalence. Relevant journals, books, research reports and articles were consulted for the literature review.

2.1.1. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The study was conceptualised in terms of, and based on the following concepts:

2.1.1.1. Social work

Kirst-Ashman (2007: 5) refers to the National Association of Social Workers and explains social work as the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating the societal conditions favorable to this goal. It consists of the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends:

- Helping people obtain tangible services.
- Providing counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups.
- Helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services.
- Participating in relevant legislative process (NASW; cited by Kirst-Ashman, 2007: 5).

2.1.1.2. Burnout

Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 229) refer to Cherniss and define burnout as a process in which the attitudes and behaviour of professionals change negatively in response to job stress. It is further defined by Price and Murphy (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 229) as a process of adaptation to situations of job stress characterized by feelings of failure or professional disorientation, emotional exhaustion and volatile emotions, guilt feelings due to lack of professional success, emotional distance and isolation.

Similarly, Farber also in Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 229) states that burnout arises from the perceived discrepancy between effort and reward at work which are influenced by organisational, individual, and social factors.

2.1.1.3. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is best understood as a discrepancy between how much a person wants or expects from a job, and how much that person actually receives (Price, as cited by Hamaideh, 2011: 235). If the person's expectations are met, they become satisfied; if not met, they become dissatisfied. In their literature analysis about job satisfaction, Lu, While, and Barriball (cited by Hamaideh, 2011: 235) identified the sources of job satisfaction as being working conditions, interactions with clients and co-workers, workload, scheduling, task requirements,

professional training, personal achievement, praise, recognition, autonomy, job security, leadership style, physical working conditions, payment, and level of education.

2.1.1.4. Social support

According to Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 231), social support refers to interpersonal transaction of help from a support source to the help receiver that involves emotions, material assistance and information which takes place in a specific family, work or caregiving context. In addition, Laireiter and Baumann (cited Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 231) postulate that social support consists of five components: support networks, the quality of the relationships, the support provided and received, perceived support, and active participation in community life.

2.1.2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF BURNOUT

According Maslach et al. (cited by Landy and Conte, 2007: 428), burnout is a particularly important and well-researched consequence of stress. It is an extreme state of psychological strain that results from a prolonged response to chronic job stressors that exceeds an individual's resources to cope with them. In addition, Compton et al. (2005: 492) refer to Maslach and explain that burnout is further understood as a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people's work of some kind. It is a response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems."

Furthermore, burnout is being conceptualized by Lee and Ashforth (cited by Gonzalez-Morales, Peiro-Rodriguez and Bliese, 2012: 43) as a psychological syndrome derived from cumulative strain experienced by workers exposed to chronic job stressors. In addition, Hamaideh (2011: 234) makes reference to Maslach et al. and postulates that burnout is the physical, emotional and psychological responses to work related stress. Physical responses include low energy, chronic fatigue, and weakness. Emotional responses include

depression, helplessness, and hopelessness. Psychological responses include detached concern for patients, intellectualization of stressful situations, and withdrawal from clients and co-workers.

Cherniss (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 299), is of the opinion that burnout is a process in which the attitudes and the behaviour of social workers change negatively in response to job stress. In agreement, Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 299) refer to Prince and Murphy, and explains burnout as a process of adaptation to situations of job stress characterized by feelings of failure or professional disorientation, emotional exhaustion and volatile emotions, as well as guilt feelings due to a lack of professional success, emotional distance and isolation. Similarly, Farber (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 299-230) states that burnout arises from the perceived discrepancy between effort and reward at work which are influenced by organisational, individual, and social factors.

Burnout in social work refers to a response to chronic job stress that manifests as a three-dimensional construct. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion or the loss of emotional resources, depersonalization or the development of negative attitudes, insensitivity and cynicism toward those receiving the service provided, the value of the work itself and the body to which one belongs. Other manifestations include low personal accomplishment which is understood as a tendency to evaluate one's work negatively, as well as low professional self-esteem (Maslach, as cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 230).

From the above descriptive accounts, it can be deduced that burnout is a product of organisational stress resulting from uncondusive working environment. Three factors can be identified in regard to the definition of burnout; that is exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment. Sulsky and Smith (2005: 157-158) conceptualise them as follows:

- **Exhaustion** - It refers to the feelings of being drained or used up, unable to face a day's work, and totally unenthusiastic. Exhaustion can have intellectual, emotional, or physical components on social workers which has a detrimental effect on their sound personal and professional functionality.
- **Depersonalisation** – It refers to the act of putting psychological distance between the individual and others, as well as creating feelings of emotional detachment, callousness, and cynicism. Social workers who experience depersonalisation affect the working relationship they built with their clients, which subsequently lead to deterioration on the quality of care and service the client receives.
- **Decreased personal accomplishment** – It refers to the feeling of being unable to live up to the set standards, goals and expectations, which leads to feelings of helplessness and low self-esteem among social workers (Maslach and Jackson as cited by Sulsky and Smith, 2005: 157-158).

According to Maslach et al. (cited by Hatinen, Kinnunen, Makikangas, Kalimo, Tolvanen and Pekkonen, 2009: 341), burnout is a consequence of prolonged job stress, and is most often characterised by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. Exhaustion represents the individual strain dimension of burnout, describing feelings of fatigue and depletion of emotional energy.

In addition, Hatinen et al. (2009: 341) refer to Maslach et al. and assert that cynicism and reduced professional efficacy go beyond the individual stress and experience by adding the employee's attitude toward the job (cynicism) and towards the self (feelings of inefficacy), into the conceptualization of burnout. The components of cynicism refers to a distant and cynical attitude toward one's work, whereas reduced professional efficacy describes loss of competence and productivity, and the tendency to evaluate negatively one's past and present accomplishments at work.

Maslach (cited by Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu, 2011: 1066) is of the opinion that burnout is commonly recognized as exhaustion from and reduced interest in tasks or activities. It is further highlighted that various types of job-related stressors, such as work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, limited job autonomy, and client demands have been shown to contribute to burnout. The social worker experiences stress and, without adequate resources for coping, may face strain, exhaustion, as well as attitudinal and behavioural changes indicative of burnout.

2.1.3. BURNOUT IN SOCIAL WORK

Burnout can occur in any context, but has mainly been studied in the caregiving professions. Several studies identify social workers as one of the main risk groups since they are exposed to a variety of workplace events that could negatively impact them (Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 229).

According to Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005: 491), social workers are regarded as being high risk for burnout. Compton et al. (2005: 491) refer to Meyerson and assert that "social workers face ambiguity in their technologies (e.g. talking to clients), their goals (e.g. to provide empathy and caring), their evaluation criteria (e.g. sensitivity) and occupational boundaries (e.g. who is and is not a social worker)". In agreement, Landy and Conte (2007: 428) postulate that social workers often enter the profession with an idealized sense of mission to help others and yet they must work within, sometime severe bureaucratic constraints, heavy workloads and demanding caregiving responsibilities and as a result they become vulnerable to burnout.

Social workers experience stress and burnout in their professional practice which is defined by Zastrow (cited by Lloyd et al., 2002: 256) as the emotional and physiological reactions to stressors. A stressor is a demand, situation or circumstance that disrupts a person's equilibrium and initiates the stress response of increased autonomic arousal. Prolonged stress is associated with

chronic anxiety, psychosomatic illness and a variety of other emotional problems.

Burnout has an adverse effect on the functionality of social workers in performing organisational duties in the most efficient and effective manner. According to Bateman (cited by Hamama, 2012: 113) social workers are committed to the protection and empowerment of populations at risk as they help these populations improve their physical and mental well-being within a society characterised by great economic inequality and high potential for vulnerability.

In definition, Farley, Smith and Boyle (2009: 5) conceptualized social work as the profession that seeks to “enhance the social functioning of individuals, singly and in groups, by activities focused upon their social relationships which constitute the interaction between man and his environment. These activities can be grouped into three functions: restoration of impaired capacity, provision of individual and social resources, and prevention of social dysfunction.”

According to the Center for Workforce Studies and NASW (cited by Kim and Stoner, 2008: 6), social workers have demanding jobs. The recent report on the difficulties of the social work profession involved job demands which included increasing paperwork, unmanageable caseloads, and problems with difficult clients, as well as staff shortages and reduced availability of adequate supervision. At the same time, confusing legislation and concomitant guidelines have increased the conflicting and incompatible demands on social workers. These demanding job conditions are significant antecedents of burnout among social workers.

In addition, Hamama (2012: 113) makes reference to Howe and argues that social workers face the busy and complex world of human behaviour in social contexts, a world in which relationships break down, emotions run high, and personal needs go unmet, and as a result, social workers become vulnerable to burnout.

Maslach (cited by Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu, 2011: 1066) postulates that social workers experience stress and, without adequate resources for coping, may face strain, exhaustion, and attitudinal as well as behavioural changes indicative of burnout. Social workers experiencing burnout manifest a great sense of emotional depletion, de-professionalization, and diminution of personal competence. In addition, Maslach et al. (cited by Hamama, 2012: 114) assert that burnout among social workers is characterized by symptoms of psycho-physiological arousal, aggression, physical and mental exhaustion, pessimism, problematic work relationships, and decreased performance.

Hamama (2012: 114) refers to Maslach and explains that other problems peculiar with social workers' burnout includes:

- **Emotional exhaustion** – It includes the depletion of mental energy involved in professional obligation of social workers.
- **Depersonalization** – It includes the development of negative attitudes, emotional numbness, apathy, and cynicism towards the client.
- **Reduced personal accomplishment** – It is manifested in the diminution of self-esteem and ambition among social workers.

The consequences of these burnout components are potentially serious for social workers, clients, and agencies. Social workers who are experiencing burnout in agencies lose the desire to perform effectively in carrying out their mandate. In the South African context, this can be caused by the lack of resources, as well as role confusion and high caseloads, whereby social workers are expected to work with more clients than anticipated, which subsequently lead to high level of turnover, inability to develop as professionals and the deterioration on the quality of care and services rendered to clients. In support of this statement, Cherinss et al. (cited by Cohen and Gagin, 2005: 84) argues that burnout is a dynamic process that exerts gradually increasing negative effect on professional's morale and well-being, on their self-concept, as well as on the client's emotional and functional well-being.

In addition; Compton et al. (2005: 491) assert that burnout is costly to practitioners, organisations, and clients. For the individual practitioner, burnout can include physical and emotional exhaustion; depression and general malaise; feelings of hopelessness; physical problems such as headaches, ulcers, hypertension, fatigue, and backaches; and the development of personal problems such as marital conflict, as well as drug and alcohol abuse. For the organisation, burnout results in inefficient workers, low morale, absenteeism, and high turnover, and for the clients, burnout among social workers means impersonal, dehumanized, and uncaring services.

Burnout can lead to deterioration in the quality of care and services that social workers provide. It can affect the social worker's ability in helping the smooth and effective running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment. It can subsequently affect the solutions offered to clients' problems, as well as impairing treatment outcomes as indicated by Maslach and Jackson in Hamama (2012: 114).

2.1.4. STRESSORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO BURNOUT

Compton et al. (2005: 492) postulate that stressors that contribute to burnout may be identified in the individual, the helping relationship, the work environment, and society. These are conceptualised as follows:

- **The individual**

Compton et al. (2005: 492) postulate that the initial work on burnout focused on individual's psychological and personality structures. While excessive emotional demands in work situations put workers at risk for burnout, and personality characteristics make some individuals more vulnerable. Low self-esteem and lack of confidence increase social workers' vulnerability to burnout, as does a lack of understanding about self-limitations, strengths, and weaknesses.

In support of Compton et al., Hamama (2012: 115-116) further infers that the individual's psychological dimension includes intrinsic emotional and cognitive aspects. Among the emotional causes of work dissatisfaction are a low sense of meaning found in one's work and a low perceived potential for personal growth, development, and self-fulfillment. In the absence of meaning or opportunities for job challenge, self-fulfillment, and skill utilization, a sense of frustration develops, which can lead to social workers' burnout.

- **Worker's age**

In support of this statement, Hamama (2012: 114) make reference to Maslach; & Lauderdale, and explains that most research has shown that young employees, particularly those under the age of 30, are more prone to burnout than older employees. Furthermore, Hamama (2012: 114) states that these researchers suggested that older workers are more stable, mature, and balanced in their perspective about work and life in general. They often enjoy a better financial position, stronger financial support, and more life experience, which all enhance their sense of strength and security. In contrast, young workers generally have lower financial security, emotional support, self-confidence, mental strength, and sense of self-identity; furthermore, they tend to develop unrealistically high expectations of the workplace, thus making them vulnerable to burnout.

- **Job autonomy**

According to Liu, Spector, and Jex (cited by Kim and Stoner, 2008: 8) the concept of job autonomy can be defined as the degree of control a social worker has over his or her own immediate scheduling and tasks. Furthermore, Kim and Stoner (2008: 8) refer to Crodes and Doughty and postulate that several conceptual papers have indicated that the lack of lack of job autonomy reduces personal accomplishment, and creates a

depersonalized attitude among workers. In addition; Glass and McKnight (cited by Kim and Stoner, 2008: 9) states that burnout is triggered by the individual's perceptions or lack of control on the job as well as the lack of involvement in decision-making.

- **The helping process**

According to Compton et al. (2005: 493) the helping process is a major contributor to burnout. Burnout has been defined as the "result of constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time" (Pines et al., cited by Compton et al., 2005: 493).

The helping relationship exists for the primary benefit of the client, and the emotional giving in the relationship is exclusively from the practitioner to the client. Constant emotional giving and sharing the intense feelings of others may result in emotional depletion. Some client's problems are more emotionally draining than others: incest, child abuse, wife battering, and rape, for example, place tremendous emotional demands on the practitioner (Compton et al., 2005: 493).

Moreover, Compton et al. (2005: 493) postulate that what is emotionally stressful and depleting will be different for different individuals, depending on their previous life experiences. Nevertheless, unless practitioners have adequate knowledge base, a commitment to individualization, and sufficient awareness of personal responses, they may develop callous and hostile attitudes towards clients as a result of prolonged exposure to emotionally charged situations. Additionally, burnout is likely if practitioners over identify with clients and get caught up in their emotions (Koeske and Kelly, cited by Compton et al., 2005: 493).

- **The work environment**

Lauderdale and Pines (cited by Hamama, 2012: 115) are of the opinion that the physical work conditions comprises extrinsic physical conditions such as temperature, light, noise, crowdedness, workplace structure, and the organisation's space and flexibility for changing those physical characteristics. In addition, Hamama (2012: 115) argues that a correlation has been found between all these conditions and burnout

Compton et al. (2005: 493) make reference to Aches and postulates that two factors have been identified in relation to the work environment which is the worker's perceived lack of autonomy and the influence of funding sources on agencies. The focus is based on the impact of workload, role ambiguity, and role conflict; relationships with co-workers and supervisors; as well as agency goals and procedures.

Pines and Kafry (cited by Compton et al., 2005: 493) states that an early study identified caseload size as related to burnout, particularly the development of negative attitudes towards clients. Important stressors in the work environment are role ambiguity, defined as lack of clarity regarding a worker's rights, responsibilities, methods, goals, status, or accountability, and role in which the practitioner experiences conflict, inconsistent, incompatible , or inappropriate demands. Role ambiguity and role conflict reduce the clarity of goals and expectations in work with clients and impair relationships with co-worker and supervisors. (Farber, cited by Compton et al., 2005: 493).

In addition, Compton et al. (2005: 494), postulate that agency goals and procedures may foster burnout. If the agency goals are unclear or ambiguous, role ambiguity or role conflict results. Ambiguous goals contribute to difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of interventions and hinder the provision of helpful feedback from co-workers and supervisors. Agency procedures,

such as the mandatory collection of certain data on all clients, regardless of its relevance to the clients' problems, also interfere with the client-worker relationship and with the social worker's effectiveness.

- **The social environment**

According to Fineman and Pines (cited by Hamama, 2012: 116) the social dimension relates to the social environment at work, including all people who come in contact with the employee within the work framework: clients, colleagues, direct supervisors, and organisation managers.

In addition, Hamama (2012: 235) refers to Button and explains that social support can be defined as the combination of social relationships, emotional and behavioural interactions, and an individual perception about the adequacy or availability of different types of support. Social support involves empathy, care, love, and trust (emotional support); actual aid of time, money, and energy (instrumental support); information relevant to self-evaluation (appraisal support); and advice, information, and suggestions (informational support).

In support of this argument, Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 231) postulates that social support has potential effects on stress and protects against burnout. In the work context, interpersonal relationships can become a source of stress. If the relationships with the client system, peers, or colleagues in different positions are tense, conflictive and prolonged feelings of burnout increase.

- **Societal factors**

Three societal factors are particularly relevant to social work: social welfare policy, changing expectations of work and sexism. According to Compton et al. (2005: 494) the development of social welfare policy is primarily a political process. Although this is one of the strengths of a democratic society, the policy directions and programme goals that results are often vaguely stated, which may lead to conflicting, ambiguous, and excessive role demands on social workers.

Furthermore, Compton et al. (2005: 494) make reference to Dressel and explain that if legislation is intended as a symbolic statement and its objectives exceeds its funding, service providers must negotiate high consumer expectations with adequate resources. Ambiguous legislation results in a lack of proper job specification, lack of program structure, and excessive paperwork in pursuit of accountability.”

According to Edelwich and Sky (cited by Compton et al., 2005: 494), discrimination based on gender has been well documented in society and in social work. Sexism contributes to burnout among women though its influence on salary levels, promotions, organisational influence and power, job assignments, as well as on role expectations. In addition, Finn (also in Compton et al., 2005: 494) postulates that sexism in the workplace may foster a sense of helplessness and powerlessness, decrease the availability of feedback on performance, and interfere with social support from co-workers and supervisors.

2.1.5. THE EFFECTS OF BURNOUT

According to Humphrey (2013: 74), social work is a field that can be very rewarding. To enjoy the rewarding aspects of the profession, social workers must learn to manage the stress associated with their work. It has been presented by various authors that burnout is an adverse effect of organisational stress, and for a concise argument on the prevailing effects of burnout, the consequences of organisational stress will be the focal point. According to Landy and Conte (2010: 456), the negative consequences of chronic stress can be divided into three categories: behavioural, psychological and physiological. The following descriptive account summarizes literature on these concepts:

2.1.5.1. Behavioural consequences of stress

Kahn and Boysier (cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 456), are of the opinion that absenteeism, accidents, alcohol, drug abuse, poor job performance, and counterproductive behaviours including workplace violence can be manifestations of work related stress. Prolonged stress can be manifested in information processing and the performance of employees, which are conceptualised as follows:

- **Information processing**

Smith (cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 456), argues that chronic stress has detrimental effects on memory, reaction times, accuracy, and performance of variety of tasks. Individuals under stress often have difficulty focusing their attention. In addition; Svenson and Maule (cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 456) is of the opinion that stress leads to premature reactions to stimuli, restricted use of relevant cues, and increased errors on cognitive tasks.

Rastegary and Landy (cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 456), stated that because individuals have limited cognitive resources, stressful situations that restrict such resources will impair the ability to cope with the tasks at hand. They further stated that “stress is associated with lower creativity and poorer decision making, particularly under time pressure.”

- **Performance**

According to Landy and Conte (2010: 457), research in an organisational setting indicates that work stress at any level, including moderate levels, has a direct, negative impact on job performance. For example, in a sample of nurses, Motowidlo, Packard, and Manning (cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 457), found that stress was negatively correlated to several interpersonal aspects of job performance dimensions. Specifically, workers under stress showed lower sensitivity, warmth, and tolerance towards patients, which are described as interpersonal aspects of job performance.

2.1.5.2. Psychological consequences of stress

The psychological consequences of stress include anxiety, depression, burnout, fatigue, job tension, and dissatisfaction with one's job and life (Kahn and Byosiore, cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 458). Burnout is a particularly important and well researched consequence of stress. It is an extreme state of psychological strain and results from a prolonged response to chronic job that exceeds an individual's resources to cope with them (Maslach, Shaufeli and Leiter, cited by Landy and Conte, 2010: 458).

In addition, Landy and Conte (2010: 458) postulate that researchers have identified three psychological manifestations of burnout in the health and human service settings: thus being the emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion occurs when individuals feel emotionally drained by their work. Individuals who suffer from feelings of depersonalization have become hardened by their job and tend to treat clients or patients like objects.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that individuals who have feelings of low personal accomplishment cannot deal with problems effectively and cannot understand or identify with the problems of others. They feel powerless to have any actual impact on problems, and thus are unlikely to implement effective solutions (Landy and Conte, 2010: 458).

2.1.6. STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING AND ALLEVIATING BURNOUT

Compton et al. (2005: 494-495) state that techniques recommended for stress management and stress reduction include relaxation techniques, physical exercise, proper nutrition and rest, as well as the reduction of coffee, cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol consumption. Important as the burnout techniques are for the health promotion and well-being, these stress management and stress reduction methods address the symptoms of burnout, rather than the causes. Strategies for addressing burnout must focus on stressors at the individual level, thus including the client-worker relationship, as well as the organisational and societal level.

The following summarized literature on the strategies for alleviating and preventing burnout:

- **Individual strategies**

Compton et al. (2005: 495) make reference to Cherniss and explains that while the importance of organisational factors cannot be denied, individual practitioners bear some responsibility for burnout. New practitioners, driven by the idealized notions of professional performance, may experience a crisis of competence. Building on White's theory that a sense of competence may be developed by acting in the environment and meeting its challenges, Harrison in Compton et al. (2005: 495) suggest that "workers are able to develop positive effective responses to their jobs only if there is some certainty that what they do is valuable and makes a difference in the lives of clients".

According to Harrison (cited by Compton et al., 2005: 495), one aspect of competence is “the worker’s skill, including techniques, judgement, and the ability to use him or herself effectively”. Thus by developing skills, the individual contributes toward a positive work experience. Compton et al. (2005: 495) further highlighted that social workers have an on-going responsibility to expand their knowledge base by keeping up with the professional literature, participating in continued education programs and in-service trainings, and learning from clients, peers, and supervisors.

Research indicates that a fulfilling and enriching personal life contributes to more positive attitudes toward work. Maslach (cited by Compton et al., 2005: 495) notes that “when your whole world is your work and little else, then your whole world is likely to fall apart when problems arise on the job. Your sense of competence, your self-esteem, and your personal identity are all based on what you do in life, and they will be far more shaky and insecure if that base is a narrow one.”

- **Organisational culture**

According to Weinberg, Sutherland and Cooper (2010: 159), building a supportive and open climate and culture, and ensuring that the style of management is compatible with the goals and aims of the organisation, are important in the reduction of stress at work. It also means developing a culture that encourages staff to be more supportive of each other.

In addition, Compton et al. (2005: 495) are of the opinion that organisations must assume responsibility for creating work environments that decreases vulnerability to burnout. A strategy frequently suggested is the development of training programs. Programs in stress or time management are less important than programs designed to increase social workers’ skills and knowledge – in particular, interpersonal skills and information about the clients served, realistic goals for that population, and practice models appropriate for intervention, as well as information about evaluation techniques. This type of training enhances social workers’ sense of competency (Compton et al., 2005: 495-496).

To reduce burnout, agencies should review their policies. Firstly, agency policies and procedures must be responsive to client's needs. If the requirements regarding data collection and documentation or the mandated procedures for intervention interfere with the helping relationship, they will contribute to burnout. Secondly, agency policies and procedures, both formal and informal, must provide clarity of job function and tasks, to minimize role ambiguity and conflict for both supervisors and practitioners (Compton et al., 2005: 496).

Thirdly, an agency policy that fosters the development of supportive relationships with co-workers and supervisors will reduce burnout. Fourthly, agency policies and procedures, both formal and informal, should be non-sexist. All workers, regardless of gender, expect to be treated equally and equitably in the work environment (Compton et al., 2005: 496).

It is further highlighted that specific strategies have been proposed to deal with the emotional energy that work with clients' demands. One alternative is to rotate assignments and share responsibilities evenly among social workers. This allows practitioners to experience variety, and perhaps challenge, in their work but, unless employed with caution, it may undermine the development of competency. A more useful alternative is to balance work assignments so that particularly demanding cases are distributed among the staff. (Daley; Pines and Kafry; Zastrow; cited by Compton et al., 2005: 496).

Work assignments should also be flexible; so as to meet the individual practitioner's needs in terms of caseload composition. Providing a variety of case assignments reduces the risk of burnout. Another alternative is time-outs, which allow practitioners to assume less stressful work assignments for a time. As a general rule, agencies should make efforts to reduce caseload size if they want to minimize burnout, with its costly consequences of absenteeism, worker inefficiency, and turnover. Other options include job sharing, job splitting, quality circles for participatory management, and flexible benefit plans (McNeely; cited by Compton et al., 2005: 496).

- **Social support**

The social dimension relates to the social environment at work, including all the people who come into contact with the employee within the work framework: clients, colleagues, direct supervision, and organisation managers. An environment that provides social support can reduce and prevent burnout. (Fineman, cited by Hamama, 2012: 116)

Social support is defined as the combination of social relationships, emotional and behavioural interactions, as well as the individual's perception on the adequacy and availability of different types of support. Social support involves empathy, care, love, and trust (emotional support); actual aid of time, money, and energy (instrumental support); information relevant to self-evaluation (appraisal support); and advice, information and suggestions (Button; House; cited by Hamaideh, 2011: 235). The working environment has to be conducive and good work has to be noted.

Furthermore; Pines, Kafry and Etzion (cited by Hamama, 2012: 116) highlights that there is a reduced intensity of burnout among social workers who enjoys social support from work colleagues. It is further asserted that in an atmosphere of supportive working relationships, social workers under stress can turn to their work colleagues for advice and encouragement, thus lessening tension and reducing the development of burnout.

In addition, it can be asserted that a good relationship with, and support from direct supervisors, can influence worker satisfaction and diminish burnout. According to AbuAl-Rub (cited by Hamaideh, 2011: 235), social support enhances the level of job performance, decreases the level of job stress, and enhances work commitment. In agreement, Weinberg et al. (2010: 240) refers to Rook and explains that social support helps to moderate the stress-strain relationships in most social workers.

In relating to the above argument presented by Hamaideh and Weinberg; the researcher further asserts that it is through social support that coping mechanism and strategies for alleviating burnout can be developed, adopted and implemented. Social support can be unpacked as a

mechanism that enhances care, support, team work and concerted effort among social workers in addressing adverse personal and professional stress.

- **Assertiveness**

Assertiveness training helps social workers to deal with demands without becoming angry or upset. When workers are assertive, they are able to negotiate or say 'NO' to unreasonable demands without becoming aggressive or non-assertive. Thus, it is a useful stress management technique. A failure to handle difficult situations can make individuals to feel angry, anxious, frustrated and 'stressed' which can lead to burnout within the organisation (Weinberg et al., 2010: 201).

Assertive training teaches employees to be able to speak up and be taken seriously without damaging the rights of other people. The aim of assertive behaviour is to satisfy the needs and wants of both parties involved (Weinberg et al., 2010: 201).

- **Cognitive coping strategies**

Occupational strategy is now viewed as a transactional process whereby employees appraise and react to a potential source of stress. Cognitive style influences people's appraisal of a potentially stressful situation and the coping strategy subsequently used. The use of cognitive restructuring as a stress management technique aims to examine dysfunctional attitude and irrational thoughts. By examining the potentially faulty thought processes that exist when the individual is confronted with a stressful event; the process aims to improve the balance between perceptions of people's demand and their ability to cope. It involves thinking about stressful events to make them seem less threatening, and the challenging of irrational thoughts (Weinberg et al., 2010: 202).

- **Counselling services**

According to Weinberg et al. (2010: 232), counselling services typically help individual employees to deal with a particular personal or work related problem. Counselling is described by the British Association of Counselling (cited by Weinberg, 2010: 232), as the task of giving a client an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and towards a greater well-being. Counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction and purpose.

Furthermore, Weinberg et al. (2010: 233) states that the effectiveness of counselling programs in the workplace continues to be debated; however, McLeod (cited by Weinberg et al., 2010: 233) argues that the evidence leans towards the benefits of the individual employee, as well as on the organisation.

- **Staff orientation**

Orientation refers to the process of giving new employees the information they need to do their work comfortably, effectively, and efficiently. The primary reason organisations have orientation programme is that the sooner the employees know the basic information about their jobs, the sooner they become productive. They can work faster and with fewer errors, and their co-workers and supervisor can spend less time helping them (Certo; 2005: 449).

Certo (2003: 449) further state that orientation does not only give new employees the knowledge they need to carry out their work, it also reduces their nervousness and uncertainty. This frees new employees to focus on their jobs rather than their worries, which not only boosts employee's efficiency, but also reduces the likelihood of work stress, which ultimately leads to burnout.

According to Certo (2003: 449) the other fundamental factor for conducting orientation is to encourage employees to develop a positive attitude. The time spent on orientation sessions shows that the organisation values the new employees. This will certainly add to employees' feelings of satisfaction and the desire to cooperate as part of the organisation. It will make new employees feel more confident. In addition, work is more satisfying when we know how to do it. The organisation benefits because employees with positive attitudes tend to be more highly motivated, so they are likely to do good work, which prohibit the prevalence of burnout (Certo, 2003: 449-451).

- **Career sabbaticals**

According to Weinberg et al. (2010: 240) career sabbatical can help an individual recover from the effects of exposure to stress. With so many people today working to the point of exhaustion, organisations should try to encourage staff to take sabbaticals to recharge themselves. Ideally, this strategy should be used before the individual becomes a casualty of exposure to stress. The prevention of stress-related problems is both desirable and more cost-effective than waiting until need exists to cure the victim of work stress.

Sabbatical can also be used to help an employee reflect on their next career steps, if they have come to a career crossroads. A sabbatical as short as two months can be beneficial, although some people need up to a year to recharge fully. Sabbaticals should not be tied to the level of job or length of service, but should reflect people's needs to adapt to a changing and demanding work environment. Given the high cost of replacing the talented and experienced social workers, this can be a highly effective strategy for keeping workers who might otherwise leave the organisation (Weinberg, 2010: 240).

2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of a research project relates to the philosophical basis on which the research takes place, and forms the link between the theoretical aspects and practical components of the investigation. The following theories gave direction to this study:

2.2.1. Systems theory

Farley, Smith and Boyle (2009: 53) state that the systems theory addresses the impact that organisations, policies, communities, and groups have on individuals. Individuals are thought of as being involved in constant interaction with various systems in the environment. They further outline a system as a combination of elements with mutual reciprocity and identifiable boundaries that form a complex or unitary whole.

Systems may be physical and mechanical, living and social, or a combination of these. A system may also be defined as a complex of elements with interactions, these interactions being of an ordered (non-random) nature. Systems are not static but dynamic, and in a constant state of flux. An essential way in which a system maintains itself is through the constant exchange of information fed-back into the system. This information automatically triggers necessary changes to keep the system fluid and functional (Farley et al., 2009: 53).

In addition, Payne (2005: 142) refers to Anderson and explains that systems theory integrates the atomistic-holistic continuum. That is, it requires people to think about the social and personal elements in any social situations as well as, and at the same time, seeing how those elements interact with each other to integrate into a whole. It is further highlighted that systems theory focuses on individuals as part of, and incorporating other systems, and as such it integrates social with psychological elements of practice. Systems interact with each other in complex ways, and exploring these helps to understand how social workers interact with individuals, families, groups, colleagues and communities in a wider social environment (Payne, 2005: 142).

According to Zastrow (2011: 50), a systems perspective is based on systems theory. Key concepts of general systems theory are wholeness, relationship and homeostasis. The concept of wholeness means that the objects or elements within a system produce an entity that is greater than the additive sum of the separate parts. Systems theory is anti-reductionist, it asserts that no system can be adequately understood or totally explained once it has been broken down into components parts.

The concept of relationship asserts that the patterning and structuring among the elements in a system are as important as the elements themselves. The concept homeostasis suggests that most living systems seek a balance to maintain and preserve the system (Zastrow, 2011: 50). In their book, Farley et al. (2009: 53) state that the ecological theory is a subset of systems theory that makes some important contributions to social work. One contribution of this theory is the definition of the following three levels of the systems:

- **Micro level:** This system refers to an individual and incorporates the biological, psychological, and social systems that impact on the individual.
- **Mezzo level:** This system refers to small groups that impact the individual such as the family, work groups, and other social groups.
- **Macro level:** This system refers to groups and systems that are larger than families. Four important macro systems that impact individuals are organisations, institutions, community, and culture (Farley et al., 2009: 53).

In addition, Farley et al. (2009: 53) postulates that systems theory addresses the impact that organisations, policies, communities, and groups have on individuals. Individuals are thought of as being involved in constant interaction with various systems in the environment. Potgieter (2008: 54) further assert that systems can only be understood within the context of its environment,

time and space. Systems follow an internal logic. Their interactions and behavior make sense, and as such, are their response to specific events. As a principle it can be highlighted that humankind can only be understood within the context of its environment. "What we see in a person is always a reflection of his or her relationship with his or her immediate environment" (Potgieter, 2008: 54).

Systems theory was employed by the researcher in order to study and effectively comprehend those environmental, organisational and the social factors that contribute to social workers' burnout in Mafikeng, North West Province, as well as the preventative and alleviation strategies that can be implemented to empower social workers and organisations to address the burnout phenomenon constructively.

Social workers in their day-to-day practice are involved with various systems within their work environment, in their families and in their community at large. This interaction with various systems may impact social workers in functioning effectively within their set roles, task and social life, and thus leading to burnout. The systems theory enabled the researcher to be able identify those factors that may have detrimental effects on the functioning of social workers in relation to family, friends, colleagues and clients; and how such systems can be manipulated to respond to adverse situations leading to burnout.

2.2.2. Person-in-environment fit model

The person-in-environment fit model hypothesizes that the fit between a person and the environment determines the amount of stress that the person perceives. It is compatible with the open-systems view of the organisation. The environment makes demands and the person responds. A good person-in-environment fit occurs when a person's skills and abilities match the requirements of the job and work environment (French, Caplan and Harrison, cited by Landy and Conte, 2007: 436).

According to Payne (2005: 150), the person-in-environment fit model is conceptualized in relation to the life model. The life model is based on the metaphor of ecology, in which people are interdependent with each other and their environment; they are "people-in-environment" (PIE). The relationship between people and their environment is reciprocal; that is, each influences the other over time through exchanges.

The aim of practice in the life model is to improve the fit between social workers and their environment, by alleviating life stressors, increasing workers' personal and social resources to enable them to function effectively, to develop coping strategies, as well as manipulating environmental forces to be responsive to social workers' needs (Payne, 2005: 152).

In addition, Payne (2005: 152) is of the opinion that the person-in-environment model (PIE) guides social workers to come to shared agreements with clients about important issues, through listening to life stories and assessing ways that allow clients to make informed choices. Payne (2005: 152) further elaborates that social workers would work in eight modalities: with individuals, families, groups, social networks, communities, physical environments, organisations and political action. Building up personal and collective strengths should be the main focus of action which would emphasize workers to make decisions and take actions on their own account without depending on others. The environment and the demand of the life course should be a constant factor in making decisions. Practice should be evaluated, and accumulated experience should contribute to the professional knowledge base (Payne, 2005: 152).

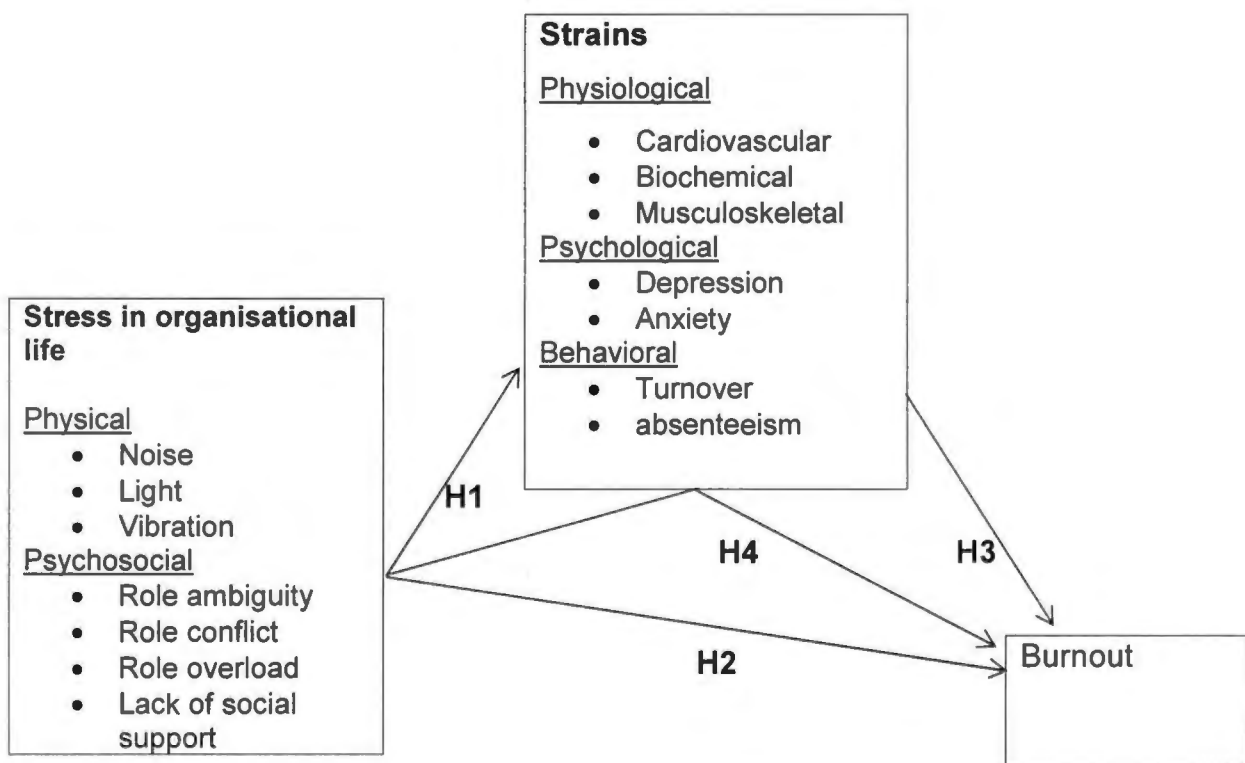
This theoretical model enabled the researcher to understand the fit between social workers and their environments, as well as the interaction between the two. The person-in-environment fit model helped the researcher to stipulate factors that contribute to negative interaction between social workers and environmental systems such as friends, families, work demands and community at large that contribute to work stress, as well as mechanisms which social workers can employ to protect themselves from the stress that

accompanies a mismatch between workers and their environment (Landy and Conte, 2007: 237).

2.2.3. Conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout

This study employed the following conceptual model as adopted in Landy and Conte (2007: 420).

Figure 1 – Conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout



The conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout is a structural illustration of the relationship as hypothesized in this research. Organisational stress leads to organisational strain, which ultimately leads to burnout. The assumption is based on hypothesis 1 and 2. Hypothesis 3 assumes that burnout is caused by organisational strains and organisational stress. A revised model will be developed in accordance to outcomes of the research.

2.3. STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE

According to Healy (2005: 152), the strengths perspective bases its notion on the capacities and potentials of service users. It concentrates on enabling individuals and communities to articulate, and work towards, their hopes for the future, rather than seeking to remedy the problems of the past or even the present. In addition, Saleebey (cited by Healy, 2005: 152) postulates that the strengths perspective formula is simple: "mobilize clients' strengths (talent, knowledge, capacities) in the service of achieving their goals and visions, and the clients will have a better quality of life on their terms". The strengths perspective requires practitioners to adopt an optimistic attitude towards the individuals and communities with whom they work.

The essence of the strengths perspectives is that it lobbies for focus to be centralized around the clients' ability to address their own situations. In support of this notion, Zastrow (2011: 52) states that it is essential for social workers to include clients' strengths in the assessment, planning and intervention process. In working with clients, social workers should focus on the strengths and resources of clients to help them resolve their difficulties. To utilize clients' strengths effectively, social workers must first identify those strengths.

In addition, Kirst-Ashman and Hull Jr. (2009: 15) refer to Sheafor and Horejsi and explains that the orientation of strengths perspective is its focus on the client's resources, capacities, knowledge, abilities, motivations, experience, intelligence, and other positive qualities that can be put to use to solve problems and pursue positive changes.

The strengths perspective is closely related to the concept of empowerment. Empowerment has been defined by Barker (cited by Zastrow, 2011:52) as "the process of helping individuals, families, groups and communities to increase their personal, interpersonal, socio-economic, and political strength to develop influence towards improving their circumstances". The strengths perspective is

useful across the life cycle and throughout the assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation stages of the helping process.

The researcher employed the strengths perspective in order to assess and identify the social workers' ability to address the burnout phenomenon. It is through the appropriate application of the strengths perspective that the social workers' potential will be identified and enhanced to prevent and alleviate the burnout phenomenon which has a detrimental effect on worker's effective functioning and professional development.

A strengths perspective is a strategy for seeing; a way to learn, to recognize and to use what is already available to workers (i.e. social support, adequate resource and manageable case load, inter alia), to address their problems. According to Healy (2005: 153) the professional person thus become a translator who helps people see that they already possess much of what they need to proceed on their chosen path. The strengths perspective emphasizes people's abilities, values, interests, beliefs, resources, accomplishments, and aspirations (Zastrow, 2011: 52).

2.4. CONCLUSION

From the descriptive accounts detailed in this chapter, literature has identified that social workers are at risk of burnout by virtue of who they are, the work they do, and the environments in which they work. Once burnout has developed, it is extremely difficult to reverse, and the costs of burnout are a burden for the client, the practitioner, and the agency.

A comprehensive review of burnout literature has suggested that prevention is a more successful strategy. Agencies have a responsibility to create a work environment that does not foster burnout. However, the individual practitioner is able to reduce the risk of burnout by becoming aware of the various stressors and implementing strategies for their minimization (Compton et al., 2005: 496). It is through the effective implementation of preventative strategies that burnout among social workers can be prevented.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Research methodology refers to a systematic way of solving a problem. According to De Vos et al. (2011: 109), the research methodology refers to a science of studying how the research has to be carried out. It entails the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomenon and methodology. It is further defined as the study of methods by which knowledge is gained.

In this chapter the researcher describes how qualitative research approach was employed to gain a more grounded understanding of the participants' perception of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. The following research methodologies were applied:

3.1.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

The study adopted a qualitative research method in order to explore and describe the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. According to Maree (2011: 51), qualitative research as a research methodology is concerned with understanding the process, the social and cultural contexts which underlies various behavioral patterns, and is mostly concerned with exploring the 'why' questions of research. Qualitative research typically studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment and focusing on their meanings and interpretations (Holloway and Wheeler; cited by Maree, 2011: 51).

In this study, the researcher applied qualitative approach in order to understand the phenomenon of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, as well as being able to codify social workers' perceptions regarding burnout. This method of research was employed in order to

describe and analyse factors contributing to burnout among social workers, and the strategies that can be applied to prevent its further manifestation. Qualitative data was collected by means of in-depth interviews schedule (see Annexure 6 on page 96-102).

3.1.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to a plan or a strategy which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of respondents, the data gathering techniques to be used and the data analysis to be done (Maree, 2011: 70). According to the researcher's understanding of the research design, it is a plan that entails how the research project is being conducted. Based on the aims of this study, the researcher used explorative and descriptive research designs, which are conceptualized as follows:

- **Explorative research design**

According to Blaikie (cited by De Vos et al., 2011: 95) explorative research is conducted to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual. In addition, Babbie and Mouton (2001: 79) postulates that explorative research design is employed when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of study itself is relatively new. In support of the use of this research design, De Vos et al. (2011: 96) explain that exploratory research has a basic research goal, and a researcher frequently uses qualitative data.

In view of the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province, the researcher employed the explorative research design in order to gain an in-depth comprehension of the social workers perception of the burnout phenomenon in among social workers in Mafikeng, as well as gaining a clearer understanding of its causes, effects and strategies that can be implemented to prevent its further manifestation.

- **Descriptive research design**

De Vos et al. (2011: 96) indicate that exploratory and descriptive research has some similarities, but also differ in many respects. Descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship, and focuses on the 'how' and 'why' questions (Kreuger and Neuman, cited by De Vos et al., 2011: 96). In this research design the researcher, therefore, begins, with a well-defined subject and conducts research to describe it accurately, whereas in exploratory studies, the researcher aims to become conversant with basic facts and to create a general picture (De Vos et al., 2011: 96).

The researcher employed the descriptive research design, in the manner that, after exploring the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng, the data was analyzed and then the researcher employed the descriptive research design to describe the participants' perceptions regarding the burnout phenomenon, its causes, effects and prevention strategies among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province.

3.1.3. TYPE OF RESEARCH

The study employed applied social research. This choice was based on the notion that the findings of the study will be used to enable social workers and various social work agencies to develop strategies that can be employed to address the phenomenon of burnout. In support of this statement, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2009: 45) indicates that applied research is employed when the researcher's primary motivation is to utilize the findings of research to address a particular phenomenon facing the community. This is achieved by applying basic research findings to assist the community overcome the problem or design intervention which will help to solve the problem, which in this study is burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province.

3.2. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.2.1. Population

Population refers to the target population or the set of elements that the research focuses upon and to which the results obtained by testing the sample should be generalized (Bless et al., 2009: 99).

Mafikeng is the capital city of North West Province of South Africa (See Annexure 1, on page 91), with a population estimation of 250 000 (Mbenga and Manson, 2011: 1). According to the report given by Earle-Mallesson (cited by Erasmus and Breier, 2009: 56), the total number of SACCP registered social workers in the North West Province is 517 social workers which constitute a ratio of 13.4 percent per 100 000 of the population.

The following table is a vivid exposition of the number of SACSSP (South African Council for Social Service Professions) registered social workers, and social workers involved in direct formal welfare activities, per 100 000 of the population, North West Province, 2004 (Adapted from Earle, 2008: 21).

Table 1 – Total number of SACCP registered social workers and social workers involved in formal welfare practice in North West Province.

Estimated population of North West Province	Total SACSSP registered social workers in North West Province			Total social workers employed in formal social work agencies			
	Social workers	Number of social workers per 100 000 of the population	Provincial distribution of social workers	Social workers	Number of social workers per 100 000 of the population	Provincial distribution of social workers	Number of registered social workers employed in formal social work agencies
3870037	517	13.4	4.8	298	7.7	5.9	57.6

Table 2 – Number of social workers employed by the formal social work agencies in Mafikeng, North West Province:

Province	Social Development / Welfare	Correctional services	FAMSA	Total
North West	38	13	5	46

Table 1 is a vivid illustration of the total number of the SACSSP registered social workers and social workers involved in formal welfare practice per 100 000 of the population in North West Province; and table 2 outlined the total number of social workers employed by the government in Mafikeng, North West Province. The researcher selected the three prime social work service providers in Mafikeng, being the Department of Social Development as the primary custodian of social workers in Mafikeng; the Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA. The researcher purposefully selected 35 participants from the 46 social workers employed in formal social work agencies.

Earle (2008: 21) asserts that North West is one of the provinces in South Africa with large rural population, where poverty is generally concentrated; and it reveals a considerably weaker social worker to population ratios. This exerts pressure on the social workers practicing in the North West Province, which subsequently lead to organisational stress and burnout. This working environment is mostly characterized by role ambiguity, high case loads and lack of resources which affect the social worker's ability in addressing the problems faced by the clients.

For the purpose of this study, the target population composed of 35 practicing social workers who were purposefully selected from the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA in Mafikeng, North West Province.

3.2.2. Sampling

Sampling refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for study (Maree, 2011: 79). The proposed study employed the qualitative research method, and in selecting the sample of participants the researcher applied non-probability (purposive) sampling method. According to Bless et al. (2009: 100) non-probability sampling refers to the case where the probability of including each element of the population in a sample is unknown. This form of sampling is essentially strategic and necessitates an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling.

Thirty five social workers from the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services, and FAMSA in Mafikeng, North West Province, were purposefully selected to participate in the study. In selecting the participants, the researcher applied the accidental-availability sampling technique to select thirty five social workers who were available during the time of the study and consented to participate in the study. According to Bless et al. (2009: 105) this method consist of "taking all the cases on hand until the sample reaches the desired size".

Maree (2011: 259) postulates that in qualitative study, the sample size is small and is purposefully selected from those individuals who have the most experience in the studied phenomenon. With reference to qualitative sampling, Nicholls (2009: 356) refers to Geertz, Holloway and Wheeler, and postulate that qualitative studies are based on quality rather than quantity, with the researchers searching for a sample of participants and with a sample being a subset of persons or elements drawn from the population who might offer rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study.

The study applied stratification, which means that the individuals represented in the sample met the specific characteristics outlined below, so that the sample reflects a true proportion of individuals required for the research (Fowler, cited by Maree, 2011: 295).

In obtaining a sample with suitable characteristics, the following eligible criterion was established:

- **Participants:** Thirty-five practicing social workers in North West Province, Mafikeng area, working at the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services, and Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA).
- **Gender and age:** Participants of the study included both males and females with the age range of 23 to 60 years.
- **Geography:** Participants comprised of 35 fulltime social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province.
- **Experience:** Registered full-time social workers with at least one year of experience and above.

The following table is a vivid exposition of the participants' profile as sampled in the study:

Table 3 – Participants' profile

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
1. Gender	Males = 12 Females = 23
2. Race	Black = 35
3. Age	22 to 35 = 19 36 to 49 = 16 50 to 65 = 0
4. Designation	Junior social worker = 29 Senior social worker = 5 Supervisor social worker = 1 Principal / Head social worker = 0
5. Years of service	0 to 5 = 24 6 to 9 = 8 10 & above = 3
6. Agency	Government social workers = 30 Non-Governmental social workers = 5

3.2.3. Recruitment and preparation of the participants

In recruiting the participants, the researcher started by writing a letter to the Head of the Department of Social Development in Mafikeng, North West Province to ask for permission to conduct the study with social workers in Mafikeng (see Annexure 3 on page 93). After the permission was granted by Head of the Department of Social Development, the researcher proceeded by writing letters to seek permission from the management of the Department of Social

Development, the Department of Correctional Service and FAMSA in Mafikeng, outlining the aims of the study (see Annexure 3 on page 93) with an attached letter of approval showing that permission to conduct the study with social workers had been granted by the Head of the Department of Social Development.

Permission to conduct the study was then granted by the management at the Department of Social Development, the Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA, who in this regard acted as gatekeepers. According to Engel and Schutt (2009: 320) a gate keeper is a person who grants researchers permission to the setting; in this research the management of the above mentioned departments assisted in identifying and establishing contacts with the social workers who met the inclusion criteria.

Having met with the potential participants face to face, the researcher was introduced to the potential participants by the respective managers. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and the selection criterion, which most of them met, and what their participation in the study entailed. The participation letters were handed to the potential research participants outlining the aims of the study (see Annexure 5 on page 95). The researcher further informed the potential participants that their participation in the study is voluntarily and that they had the right to refuse taking part in the study, and that they may discontinue their participation at any point of the study without being judged nor stigmatized.

Furthermore, the researcher explained to the research participants that he will accept questions of clarity throughout the study, as well as probing for more information and check accuracy of the recorded data. The researcher informed the participants that the data will be transcribed manually in writing, which allowed for clarification at any stage of data collection. Having verbally explained all the aspects of the study, the researcher proceeded by giving each participants a

consent form which outlined the research ethics (see Annexure 4 on page 94), and advised those interested to partake in the study to sign voluntarily. A follow up appointment was set, and the consented participant handed in their consent form, and the researcher proceeded to collect data through an in-depth interview schedule (see Annexure 6 on page 96-102).

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

The following data collection method was employed:

3.3.1. In-depth interview schedule

In-depth interview schedule was used for data collection during interviews with social workers. The aim of using in-depth interview schedule was to see the world through the eyes of the participants, and also to obtain rich descriptive data helpful to understand the participants' construction of knowledge and social reality (Maree, 2011: 87). This method enabled the researcher to gain more in-sight and elicit more information from the participant in regard to the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng.

Holstein and Gubrium (cited by Maree, 2011: 302) describe interviewing as a unique form of conversation, which provides the researcher with empirical data about the studied phenomenon by engaging the participant's perception on the phenomenon under study. Its benefit is that it enables the researcher to gain participants' cooperation by establishing a relationship with them, which therefore facilitates the production of high response rate (Leedy and Ormrod in Maree, 2011: 302). De Vos (2011: 186) further highlights that the basic objective of an in-depth interview is to obtain facts and opinions about phenomenon from people who are informed on the particular issue.

In exploring and describing the phenomenon of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province, the researcher asked questions related to the topic under investigation in a flexible order using English, which is the language most participants were comfortable with. The in-depth interview schedule comprised of two sections, that is section A, focusing on the

participant's own experience of burnout, and section B focusing on the participant's perception of burnout on social workers in Mafikeng area. Most of the questions in the interview schedule were open-ended questions which allowed the participants to elaborate and provide enriched information (see Annexure 6 on page 96-102). During the interview, the researcher employed several interviewing techniques such as probing, attentive listening, paraphrasing and clarification.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process in which a researcher constructs meaning from the participants' response. The end result of conducting a qualitative study is to produce findings, which involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (De Vos et al., 2011: 397).

In the study the researcher implemented qualitative data analysis. In achieving the process of data analysis, the researcher organized the participants' responses according to the logical flow of questions which were then transcribed to form a complete picture. After the data was transcribed, it was then coded, analyzed, interpreted and verified. The process of transcribing the interviews enabled the researcher to gain more understanding of the subject by repeatedly reading the transcribed interviews. The coding of the collected data was done after all data was fully transcribed. After the codification of the transcribed data was completed, the researcher then analyzed, categorized and organized data into themes which were directed by research questions structured during interviews. In the second stage, the researcher interpreted data by identifying any re-occurring themes throughout the data, and by highlighting the differences and similarities in the data. The final stage involved data verification which was achieved through the repeated check on the transcripts and codes, which allowed for the logical presentation of data.

3.5. DATA VERIFICATION

In this study, trustworthiness was addressed through Lincoln and Guba's model (cited in De Vos et al., 2011: 419-421, and in Shenton, 2004: 64-73) as a way of validating data. The following four aspects were addressed according to the model:

- **Credibility**

According to Shenton (2004: 64) credibility refers to truth and value. It is concerned with how congruent are the findings with reality. De Vos et al. (2011: 419) state that its goal is to demonstrate that the enquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject has been accurately identified and described.

The researcher selected a sample of participants from the population which has knowledge of the phenomenon under the study. The researcher ensured that the research findings were a true reflection of the participants' perceptions regarding burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province through the implementation of the following techniques:

- **Interviewing techniques and skills:** This involved the probing and listening skill which enabled the researcher to do a more in-depth exploration on burnout among social workers in Mafikeng (Shenton, 2004: 64).
- **Researcher's background qualification and experience:** The researcher is a qualified social worker working at the Department of Social Development. Being a social worker helped in creating a good relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants, who in this study were social workers from the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA in Mafikeng.
- **Triangulation:** Shenton (2004: 66) states that triangulation involves the use of a wide range of research participants and occurs when an individual's perceptions and experiences can be

verified against others. In this study triangulation of data was employed by interviewing different social workers who differed in age and experience, and both males and females from different welfare organisations; being the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA in Mafikeng.

- **Transferability**

According to De Vos et al. (2011: 420), transferability occurs when the researcher asks whether the findings of the study can be transferred from a specific situation or case to another. In addition, Shenton (2004: 69) highlights that transferability refers to the ability to demonstrate that the results of the study can be generalized to a wider population, which can be achieved by providing a sufficiently thick description of the phenomenon under study and the methodology employed to carry out the study. The researcher ensured transferability by providing a dense description of the research methodology employed in the study (detailed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4).

- **Dependability**

Shenton (2004: 71-72) postulates that dependability refers to whether the findings would be consistent if the study was repeated with the same participants, with the same research methodology and in a similar setting. In achieving dependability on the findings of the study, the researcher detailed a dense description of the research method employed and the process of how data was analyzed.

- **Conformity**

De Vos et al. (2011:421) make reference to Lincoln and Guba, and stress the need to “ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another. By doing so, they remove evaluation from some inherent characteristics of the researcher and place it squarely on the data themselves. The question is whether the researcher provides

evidence that corroborates the findings and interpretations by means of auditing.” Triangulation of data stated above was employed by the researcher to achieve conformability.

3.6. RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The study applied the following research procedure:

3.6.1. Ethical clearance

Ethical approval to conduct the study was requested from the Ethical Committee of North-West University - Mafikeng Campus, (see Annexure 2 on page 92).

3.6.2. Research permission

The permission to conduct the study with practicing social workers was requested from the head of the Department of Social Development, Correctional Services and FAMSA in Mafikeng, North West Province (see Annexure 3 on page 93).

3.6.3. Participant's consent

Consent forms, accompanied by research letters, were presented to research participants wherein all ethical principles and procedures were clearly stipulated (see Annexure 4 on page 94 and Annexure 5 on page 95).

3.7. FIELD WORK

Field work commenced in March 2014, at the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services and FAMSA in Mafikeng, North West Province (see Annexure 1 on page 91).

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical approval was acquired from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University (Mafikeng Campus).

Maree (2011: 300) makes reference to Strydom and explains that anyone involved in research needs to be aware of the general agreements about what is proper and improper in scientific research. It is essential that throughout the research process, the researcher follows and abides by the set ethical guidelines.

When working with the research participants, the researcher employed the following ethical principles:

- **Informed consent and voluntary participation**

In ensuring the informed consent and voluntary participation as per the research ethics, the researcher presented the participants with a research letter (see Annexure 5 on page 95) outlining the objectives, processes and procedures of the research, accompanied by a consent form (see Annexure 4 on page 94).

The researcher informed the participants to read the attached research letter, which outlined the aims and objectives of the study, and to ask questions to gain clarity, as well as signing the consent form which was deemed paramount for their participation in the study. Participants were further informed that participation is voluntarily, and that they may withdraw at any time during the research process if they wish to do so, without being intimidated or threatened by the researcher.

- **Protection from harm**

The researcher ensured that participants are not exposed to any undue physical or psychological harm. During the study the researcher thrived to be honest, respectful and sympathetic towards all participants, as asserted by Leedy and Ormrod (cited by Maree, 2011: 300).

- **Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity**

Burns (cited by Maree, 2011: 301) postulates that both the researcher and the participants must have a clear understanding regarding the confidentiality of the results and findings of the study.

All participants' information and responses shared during the study were kept private and the results were presented in an anonymous manner in order to protect the identities of the participants (see Annexure 4 on page 94). Participants' consent form was accompanied by the research letter which outlined the aims and objectives of the study (see Annexure 5 on page 95).

3.9. CONCLUSION

From the descriptive accounts, it can be deduced that research methodology enables the researcher to implement appropriate strategies of collecting data, selecting the desired sample as well the type of research methods to be applied. It was through the appropriate application of the research methodologies that the researcher was able to conduct the study in the most efficient and effective manner. The research methodology focused on the research process and the type of research tools and procedures to be used. This included the type of research, the research methods, and the research designs.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore and describe burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. This chapter draws upon the main themes and present the findings which arose out of the interview process and subsequent data analysis.

4.2. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents the findings which arose out of the interview process and sub-sequent data analysis categorized under the main themes. Data collected from the in-depth interview is presented under the following four themes:

- The meaning of burnout as conceptualized by social workers.
- The causes of burnout.
- The effects of burnout.
- Strategies for preventing and alleviating the burnout phenomenon.

4.2.1. The meaning of burnout as conceptualized by social workers

Burnout has been conceptualized by the participants as the process of mental and physical dysfunctioning amongst social workers. It is defined as the process of disintegration on professional development. It is an inability to perform one's duties effectively and efficiently, and this has detrimental effects on the accomplishment of professional and organisational goals.

In conceptualizing burnout, one of the participants stated that: *"...burnout is understood as the process of losing interest in the profession as a result of uncondusive working environment and social-ill factors that workers are exposed to."*

In addition the other participant stated that burnout is a *"...physical and mental fatigue that affect the social workers in performing their roles. The participant further asserted that: "When social workers are burnout, they become passive in their work and are unable to work with client in helping them solve their problems."*

Prince and Murphy (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano Rivas, 2011: 299) stated that burnout is a process in which the attitudes and behaviour of social workers change negatively in response to job stress

In support of this afore mentioned argument, one participant stated that *"...burnout is a psychological feeling that affects the overall performance of social workers in performing their operational tasks. It is a condition in which workers feel overwhelmed, tired, helplessness and unable to carry out the assigned duties effectively..."*

In concurring with the above definition of burnout as conceptualized by the research participants, Cherniss (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano Rivas, 2011: 229) postulates that burnout is a process in which the attitude and behaviour of professionals change negatively in response to job stress.

Burnout was further conceptualized as the process of psychological disorientation aggravated by lack of resources, social support, team work, and high workload, inter alia. It is defined as an inability to carry the organisational mandate caused by unmanageable caseloads and ineffective supervision accorded to social workers.

In addition one of the participants noted that: *"...burnout is an organisational stress caused by high workload without the provision of relevant resources needed to address cases effectively."*

Burnout was further conceptualized by the research participant as *"...the process in which social workers become disoriented from their profession due to lack of training on new policies, effective supervision, team work and adequate manpower in managing high caseloads."*

From the descriptive account detailed by the research participants, burnout is regarded as mental and physical response to organisational stress aggravated by uncondusive working environments, lack of social support, ineffective supervision, as well as lack of professional training and development. It is a situation in which social workers are not able to cope with work demands and increasing caseloads, which subsequently have a detrimental effect on the quality of services rendered, and the accomplishment of individual and professional goals.

4.2.2. The causes of burnout as conceptualized by social workers

The research participants are of the opinion that burnout is mainly caused by the social workers' inability to manage work related stress effectively, which subsequently leads to social workers being vulnerable to burnout. The research participants highlighted that when social workers are stressed, they become unable to perform optimally, and this has an adverse effect on their psychological, physical and professional well-being.

From the descriptive accounts presented by participants, burnout is an antecedent of work related stress, work overload, role confusion, lack of resources, lack of proper supervision, inadequate resources to carry out the organisational mandate, low incentives, and lack of continuous training and development.

Based on the causes of burnout as conceptualized in the study, one participant stated that: *".....burnout is caused by the inability to manage high*

case load as a results of shortage of staff, as well as unqualified supervisors who are appointed without proper screening..."

Another participant stated that: *"...the department is not concerned about social workers. There are no promotions in this field, and we stay at one level forever."* The participant further stated that: *"...we work in offices without telephones and computers, which is a different story as compared to other professionals."*

In support of this argument presented by the research participant, NASW (cited by Kim and Stoner, 2008: 6) postulates that job demands, increasing paperwork, unmanageable caseloads, and problems with difficult clients, as well as staff shortages and reduced availability of adequate supervision are fundamental antecedent of burnout among social workers.

Another participant argued that *"...burnout occurs in a situation whereby social workers are expected to perform more than they can handle within a short period of time and this creates tension on social workers."*

In concurring with the above statement, Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu (2011: 1066) highlights that various types of job related stressors, such as work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, limited job autonomy and clients demands contribute to burnout.

One participant further stated that: *"...when I entered the profession I had the desire to help others and make a difference in people's lives, but my ambition was shattered by the kind of conditions we are expected to perform from."*

In addition, the other participant stated that: *"...there is high workload and we are not being given appropriate resources to do our work, and at times we even use our own transport and airtime to call clients..."*

The other participant argued that *"...social workers in Mafikeng operate under difficult conditions with no transport to reach out for clients and facilitate cases, they don't have computers to type professional reports, and worst of all they operate in an overcrowded offices which break confidentiality and the client-*

worker relationship, and a social worker functioning under such condition which is reality in Mafikeng, you lose interest on your job and get burnout.

In support of the above statement as conceptualized by the research participant, Maslach (cited by Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu, 2011: 1066) states that social workers experiences stress and, without adequate resources for coping, may face strain, exhaustion, attitudinal, and behavioral changes indicative of burnout.

4.2.3. The effects of burnout

Research participants have indicated that burnout has a detrimental effect on the overall functioning of social workers, the organisation and the client system at large, and these effects have been conceptualized as follows:

4.2.3.1. The effects of burnout on social workers

According to the descriptive accounts presented by the research participants, it has been justified that burnout has negative impact on the professional and personal functioning of social workers. Workers who experience burnout are unable to perform effectively and efficiently in carrying out their mandates. They are unable to manage their cases effectively and this has detrimental effects on the quality of services rendered.

One participant stated that *"...when social workers are experiencing burnout they are unable to work according to the set standards as outlined in their performance plan."*

It was further highlighted that social workers who experienced burnout lose interest in their job. They always take sick leave and annual leave in order to stay away from their job. They are unable to develop as professionals due to the high level of stress experienced at their work-place thus leading to stagnation on professional development and growth, leading to higher level of burnout.

In support of this statement, the other participant indicated that social workers who experience burnout *"... are always tired at work, they have no ambitions and they lose their temper when working with clients and fellow colleagues."*

In concurring with the above statement highlighted by the research participant, Maslach (cited by Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu, 2011: 1066) argues that social workers who are burnt-out may face strain, exhaustion, as well as attitudinal and behavioral changes. They manifest a great sense of emotional depletion, de-professionalization, and diminution of personal competence.

One participant stated that: *"...when I entered the profession I had the desire to help others and make a difference in people's lives, but my ambition was shattered by the kind of conditions we are expected to perform from."*

Another participant stated that: *"...burnout has affected my professional performance. I have lost touch with the objectives of my work, but at the same time I feel sorry for my clients the most because they depend on my expertise in addressing their situations, and as a professional I am unable to help them without necessary tools."*

In support of the above statements presented by the research participants, Cherniss (cited by Compton et al., 2005: 495) asserts that new practitioners, driven by idealized notions of professional performance, may experience a crisis of competence. Building on White's theory that a sense of competence may be developed by acting in the environment and meeting its challenges; however, Harrison (also cited by Compton et al., 2005: 495) argues that workers are able to develop positive effective responses to their jobs only if there is some certainty that what they do is valuable and makes a difference in their lives and those of their clients.

4.2.3.2. The effects of burnout on the client system

Positive change in client system is the sole purpose for the existence and operation of social work agencies, but when the social workers who are supposed to render services to clients are experiencing burnout, such purpose become compromised. Burnout has a detrimental effect on the quality of

service rendered to the client. It affects the working relationship between the clients and social workers.

In support of the above analysis, one of the participants stated that: *"...burnout has an impact on the overall behavior of social workers, and this lead to workers giving clients attitude and judging them for the situation they find themselves in."*

In agreement the other participant highlighted that *"...burnout affect the client-worker relationship. When social workers are burnout they are unable to perform effectively, and in most cases this is due to lack of resources which lead to them being stressed and clients being deserted."*

In support of the above statements as conceptualized by the research participants, Hamama (2012: 114) asserts that burnout can lead to deterioration in the quality of care and service the worker provides. It affects the social worker's ability in helping the smooth and effective running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment, which subsequently affects the solutions offered to clients' problems, as well as impairing treatment outcomes.

One participant stated that *"...social workers who are burnt-out tend to release their stress and frustrations on clients. They don't treat their clients with respect, acceptance and utmost value."*

In addition the other participant noted that: *"...burnout has affected my professional performance. I have lost touch with the objectives of my work, but at the same time I feel sorry for my clients the most because they depend on my expertise in addressing their situations, and as a professional I am unable to help them without necessary tools."*

In agreement, Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011: 230) refers to Maslach and explain burnout as a response to chronic job stress that manifests as a three-dimensional construct characterized by emotional exhaustion or the loss of emotional resources; depersonalization or the development of negative attitudes, insensitivity and cynicism toward those receiving the service provided.

One participant stated that: *"...the effects of burnout can be severe on social workers and the clients. When workers are stressed as a results of unbearable conditions at work, the person who suffers the most is the client, as they are the one who depends on the social worker for assistance in facilitating their cases such as foster care placements and reviews which if not attended on time they lapse."*

Cherinss, et al. (cited by Cohen and Gagin, 2005: 84) postulate that burnout is a dynamic process that exerts gradually increasing negative effect on professional's morale and well-being, on their self-concept, on the quality of care provided for clients, and even on clients' emotional and functional well-being.

4.2.3.3. The effects of burnout on the organisation

According to the descriptive accounts presented by the research participants, burnout leads to deterioration on the quality of care and service the organisation renders to its target system, and this affects the organisation in accomplishing its aims and objectives.

One of the participants stated that: *"...to mention one, there is high rate of foster care backlog which reflects badly on the organisation, and this leads to much focus being placed on foster-care and other cases are being overlooked."*

The other participant asserted that *"...when social workers are experienced burnout, they lose they lose the motivation to excel in carrying their mandate and this affect the organisation in achieving its operational and annual performance goals."*

It was further stated that burnout in organisations leads to high caseload and backlogs caused by the high level of absenteeism and turnover among social workers experiencing burnout. When social workers are experiencing burnout, organisations cannot function effectively towards the accomplishment of their goals. In support of this statement as conceptualized by the research

participants, Hamama (2012: 114) asserts that burnout can lead to the deterioration in the quality of care and services that the worker provides, which subsequently affect the worker's ability in helping the smooth and effective running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment.

Another participant noted that when: *"...social workers are stressed at work, this affect their personal life as well. They become moody and depressed at home, and some even lose the desire to go to work on daily basis, they end doing it just to support their families..."*

In summing up the effects of burnout on social workers as conceptualized by the research participants, Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005: 491) postulates that burnout is costly to practitioners, organisations, and clients. For the individual practitioner, burnout can include physical and emotional exhaustion, depression and general malaise, feelings of hopelessness, and physical problems such as drug and alcohol abuse. For the organisation, burnout results in efficient workers, low morale, absenteeism, and high turnover, and for the clients this means impersonal, dehumanized and uncaring services.

4.2.4. STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING AND ALLEVIATING THE BURNOUT PHENOMENON

From the descriptive accounts presented by the research participants, strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, includes team work, training and development, effective supervision, social support, counseling, adequate resources, promotions and increased incentives.

These strategies are conceptualized as follows:

- Team work

According to the research participants team work will act as source of support whereby social workers will be able to ventilate their challenges, and come up with constructive solutions as a collective,

thus addressing the burnout phenomenon and other work related stress.

In support of this statement one participant argued that *“...social workers should work as a team in helping each other to address difficult cases that causes backlog as well as sharing the available resources.”*

In concurring with the above statement, another participant stated that: *“team work in any organisation enforces an atmosphere of trust and consultation. Social workers should work as a team in addressing various problems they experience in the department as well as proposing for collective solutions to those problems.”*

Another participant asserted that *“...social work agencies and social workers should create a consultative environment in which workers are free to table their challenges and seek advice from their seniors and fellow colleagues in order to address work challenges which hampers their performance”*

In support of the above arguments presented by the research participants, Pines, Kafry and Etzion (cited by Hamama, 2012: 116) highlights that there is a reduced intensity of burnout among social workers who enjoys social support from work colleagues. It is further stated that in an atmosphere of supportive working relationships, social workers under stress can turn to their work colleagues for advice and encouragement, thus lessening tension and reducing the development of burnout.

Team work helps workers to share ideas, support each other, and work as a unit in addressing their day to day challenges, as well as helping the organisation accomplish its goals and objectives.

- Training and development

According to the participants this strategy will help to enhance the social worker's passion and motivation to perform their work efficiently and effectively. It is through training and development that workers get to learn, develop and implement solutions aimed at addressing their challenges and work related stress.

One participant stated that *"social workers should continually attend social work training and workshops to equip themselves with knowledge and the skills which will sharpen and enhance their professionalism and help to lessen work stress."*

In agreement, Compton et al. (2005: 495) assert that practitioners have an on-going responsibility to expand their knowledge base by keeping up with professional literature, participating in continued education programs and in-service trainings, as well as learning from their clients, peers, fellow colleagues and supervisors.

One participant noted that: *"...when social workers are appointed to attend workshops on regular basis, this will enhance their capacity in performing their task, and through that they will be able to learn different ways to manage stress resulting from work and separating that from their personal life."*

The other participant stated that *"...to reduce burnout, the social work departments must first review social workers' salaries, provide them with necessary resources and ensure that training is being provided on a quarterly basis..."*

Training and development will help social workers to keep abreast of development. It will capacitate workers on new developments within the profession, thus improving their skills, techniques and knowledge to enable them to function effectively.

- Effective supervision

This strategy will help social workers to perform their job accurately and reach the organisation's set target on time. Supervision act as a support tool within the organisation to guide workers throughout their professional realm.

One participant asserted that *"...social work agencies and social workers should create a consultative environment in which workers are free to table their challenges and seek advice from their seniors and fellow colleagues in order to address work challenges which hampers their performance"*

The other participant is of the notion that: *"supervisors should act as pillar of support to social workers. They should ensure that social workers are given necessary resources to attend their cases and also helping in creating strategies that will them to manage their workloads."*

Effective supervision enables workers to raise concerns pertaining to their job, develop constructive ways of addressing such concerns, thus preventing the prevalence of organisational stress leading to burnout.

In support of the above statement, Weinberg, Sutherland and Cooper (2010: 159) postulate that effective supervision involves building a supportive and consultative environment and culture in the organisation, and ensuring that the style of management is compatible with the goals and aims of the organisation, which are important in the reduction of stress at work. It also means developing a culture that encourages staff to be more supportive of each other.

- Social support

According to the research participants, social workers should have a structure in which they are able to support each other as colleagues, discuss difficult cases, as well as developing effective ways of managing caseloads. Social support entails effective supervision, supportive working environment and effective team work.

One participant stated that *“social work agencies and social workers should create a consultative environment in which workers are free to table their challenges and seek advice from their seniors and fellow colleagues in order to address work challenges which hampers their performance”*

In agreement, Pines et al. (cited by Hamama, 2012: 116) argue that in an atmosphere of supportive work relationships, workers under stress can turn to their work colleagues for advice and encouragement, thus lessening tension and reducing the manifestation of burnout.

In addition the other participant asserted that *“...social workers should work as a team in helping each other to address difficult cases that causes backlog as well as sharing the available resources.”*

In support of the above argument, Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas (2011:231) state that social support protect against stress and burnout in the workplace. In addition Gil-Monte and Peiro (cited by Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas, 2011: 231) states that in the workplace context, interpersonal relationships can become a source of stress, but when there is good interpersonal communication and perceived social support the negative effect of stress are buffered.

- Counseling

Counseling is a therapeutic process which could help worker to address challenges leading to burnout. It is reported by the virtue of being a social worker one is faced with overwhelming problems experienced by the clients and such workers become vulnerable to stress. It is deemed necessary and beneficial for social workers to be involved in the counseling sessions that would help them to ventilate their work related and social challenges that may have a detrimental effect in their functionality. It is through counseling that workers are able to point out their concerns, brainstorm and implement constructive ways of addressing such challenges.

One participant stated that “social workers should voice out issues causing tension in their work environment and seek help were necessary. This can involve talking to their fellow colleagues and supervisors, than being bottled-up in the unpleasant world of strenuous working environment...”

In support of this statement, Weinberg et al. (2010: 232) assert that counseling services typically help individual employees to deal with a particular personal or work related problem. Counseling will help social workers to explore their difficulties or the distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction work, life, or loss of direction and purpose.

Another participant is of the view that: “social workers should also have their own EAP’s, someone who will listen to their challenges involving work, and advise them on the appropriate strategies to be followed in addressing burnout and other work related challenges.”

- Adequate resources

According to the research participants, management and supervisors should ensure that social workers are provided with the

necessary resources to help effect their work. Such resources includes, among others, transport, telephones, computers, printers and office stationary necessary to help workers perform efficiently and effectively.

One participant argued stated that *"resource should not be an option but a must for every social worker to have*. In addition, the other participant further inferred that *"...without resources, workers lose interest on their job, the quality of services rendered to clients deteriorates and backlogs arise"*, and this are regarded as the fundamental antecedents of burnout.

Another participant stated that: *"...we work under terrifying situation. We are expected to do our job effectively and submit our means of verification monthly as well as submitting quarterly review, but the department is doing nothing. I share this office with two other social workers, with only one computer that freeze all the time. We are given contracts cellphones with airtime that does not last for a month, and yet we are expected to do follow ups on our clients and give progress reports."*

In addition, the other participant indicated that: *"lack of resources is a serious problem. As social workers we don't have transport to attend our clients, we share offices and yet the department expect us to submit our reports at the end of the month."*

One participant is of the view that: *"if social workers can be given resources, they will be able to perform their duties which will reduce high work load and it will also help to address the burnout problem."*

in concurring with the afore mentioned statements as presented by the research participants, Maslach (cited by Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu, 2011: 1066) postulates that social workers experience stress and, without adequate resources for coping, may face strain,

exhaustion, and attitudinal as well as behavioural changes indicative of burnout.

- Promotions and increased incentives

When workers are promoted they become happy, and when workers are happy, they perform their duties with merit. Promotions should be accorded to workers based on merit, not just on basis of how long one has been in the organisation. Promotions should be transparent with increased incentives, and every social worker should be accorded an equal opportunity to contest for such promotion.

One participant stated that “social work agencies should first review the social worker’s salaries, provide them with necessary resources and ensure that trainings and workshops are provided on a quarterly basis...”

In addition the other participant asserted that “...agencies should ensure that social workers are fairly paid. Most social workers experience stress because they are underpaid. They stay at level 7 for many years without promotions and better salaries. We are expected to perform more than we are paid and the government is doing nothing to review our salary”

4.3. CONCLUSION

From the descriptive accounts presented by the research participants, burnout is conceptualized as work stress caused by high workload, ineffective supervision, lack of training and professional development of social workers as well as lack of social support and low incentives. Burnout has a detrimental effect on the effective and efficient functioning of social workers and the social work organisations which subsequently has a detrimental effect on the quality of care and services rendered to clients.

To address the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, social work organisations, managers and supervisors should create a supportive working environment for social workers. This is an environment in which all social workers are enabled to function effectively and efficiently within the organisation which will be facilitated by the availability of necessary resources, team work, social support and better incentives, inter alia.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1. INTRODUCTION

It is deemed necessary to conclude this discussion by providing a summary of the entire study, followed by the limitations, conclusion and recommendations.

This study aimed to explore and describe burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. The literature consulted and the descriptive accounts presented by the research participants clearly points out that burnout has a detrimental effect on the professional development and general well-being of social workers. Burnout is a process in which the attitudes and the behaviour of social workers change negatively in response to job stress. It is as a process of adaptation to situations of job stress characterized by feelings of failure or professional disorientation.

Variables within the social workers' organisations such as: lack of resources, role confusion, work overload and lack training and development have been regarded as the fundamental antecedents of burnout. Burnout is commonly recognized as exhaustion and reduced interest in work tasks or activities. The social worker experiences stress, and without adequate resources for coping, may face strain, exhaustion, and attitudinal as well as behavioural changes indicative of burnout.

While the literature referred to the above points as the causes of burnout, social support, effective supervision, adequate resources, increased incentives as well as constant training and professional development have been stated as strategies that can be used to address burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province.

In the study, Chapter One outlined orientation of the study highlighting the problem statement, research questions as well as the aims and objectives of the study. In Chapter Two the researcher gave a vivid outline of literature in regard to burnout among social workers as well as outlining the theories employed in order to explore and describe the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng.

In Chapter Three, the researcher gave a detailed explanation of the research methodology employed in the study; the sampling techniques used as well the process of data analysis employed. Chapter Four gave a vivid presentation on the findings of the study, and in Chapter Five the researcher summed up the study by highlighting a summary of the study, its limitations, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

5.2. THE FOLLOWING ARE MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH PERTAINING OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

5.2.1. Meaning of burnout among social workers

In the study the first objective was to determine the meaning of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. This objective was achieved by means of literature review and empirical findings. Burnout was conceptualized by the research participants as a psychological feeling that affects the overall performance of social workers in performing their operational tasks. It is a condition in which workers feel overwhelmed, tired, helplessness and unable to carry out the assigned duties effectively. Burnout was further conceptualized as a physical, emotional and psychological response to work related stress.

Physical responses include low energy, chronic fatigue, and weakness. Emotional responses include depression, helplessness, and hopelessness. Psychological responses include detached concern for patients, intellectualization of stressful situations, and withdrawal from clients and co-workers.

5.2.2. Factors contributing to burnout among social workers

Literature review was conducted in order to achieve the specific set objective. Literature review highlighted that burnout is primarily caused by the social workers' inability to manage work related stress effectively.

According to the descriptive accounts presented by the research participants, burnout among social workers in Mafikeng is caused by lack of resources, role confusion and high caseloads whereby social workers are expected to work with more clients than anticipated, and as a result, this lead to high level of turnover, inability to develop as professionals and the deterioration on the quality of services rendered to clients. Burnout exerts gradually increasing negative effect on professional's morale and well-being, on their self-concept, on the quality of care provided for clients, and even on client's emotional and functional well-being.

5.2.3. The effects of burnout among social workers

Another fundamental objective of this study was to examine the effects of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. According to the research participants, burnout is believed to have detrimental effects on the overall functioning of social workers. It can lead to deterioration on the quality of care and service that social workers render to their clients. It affects the social worker's ability in helping the smooth and effective running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment. It can subsequently affect the solutions offered to clients' problems, as well as impairing treatment outcomes.

Empirically it was found that the consequences of these burnout components are potentially serious for social workers, clients, and agencies. Social workers who are experiencing burnout in agencies lose the desire to perform effectively in carrying their mandate, thus affecting the organisation in accomplishing its goals and objectives.

5.2.4. Strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout

The last objective was to determine the strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout among social workers in Mafikeng. Literature pointed that techniques recommended for stress management and stress reduction include relaxation techniques, physical exercise, proper nutrition and rest, and the reduction of coffee, cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol consumption. Important as the burnout techniques are for health promotion and well-being, these stress management and stress reduction methods address the symptoms of burnout, rather than the causes. Strategies for addressing burnout must focus on stressors at the individual level, including the client-worker relationship, and the organisational and societal level.

From the empirical findings, other strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout among social workers in Mafikeng include, inter alia, the following:

- Team work among social workers.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's) for social workers.
- Social support services within the social work agencies.
- Effective supervision.
- Adequate resources.
- Training and development.
- As well as promotions and better incentives.

5.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The basic theoretical framework applied in this study included systems theory, the strengths perspective and person-in-environment fit model.

5.3.1. Systems theory

Systems theory addresses the impact that organisations, policies, communities, and groups have on individuals who are the subsystems in those systems. Emphasis is on reciprocity between a system and its sub-systems with identifiable boundaries that form a complex or unitary whole. The high intensity of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng affects the worker's ability in helping the smooth and effective running of the organisation towards goal accomplishment. The findings further indicated that burnout affect the solutions offered to clients' problems, as well as impairing treatment outcomes

The researcher applied systems theory in order to explore and effectively describe those environmental, organisational as well as social factors that contribute to social workers' burnout in Mafikeng, as well as the preventative and alleviation strategies that can be implemented to empower social workers and social work agencies to address the burnout phenomenon constructively.

Literature pointed that social workers in their day-to-day practice are involved with various systems within their work environment, in their families and the community at large. This interaction with various systems may impact social workers in functioning effectively within their set roles, task and social life, and thus leading to burnout. The systems theory helped the researcher to identify those environmental and organisational factors that may have a detrimental effect on the functioning of social workers in relation to family, friends, colleagues and clients, and how such systems can be manipulated to enhance and address burnout among social workers in Mafikeng.

5.3.2. Strengths perspective

According to literature, the strengths perspective bases its notion on the capacities and potentials of people. It concentrates on enabling individuals and communities to articulate, and work towards their hopes for the future, rather than seeking to remedy the problems of the past or even the present.

In the study the strengths perspective was employed to identify, explore and describe those abilities that social workers can tap into to address and prevent the burnout phenomenon. It is through the appropriate application of systems perspective that the social workers' potential will be identified and enhanced to prevent and alleviate the burnout phenomenon which has a detrimental effect on workers' effective functioning and professional development.

Literature pointed that the strengths perspective is a strategy for seeing; a way to learn, to recognize and use what is already available to workers (i.e. social support, adequate resource, team work and effective supervision), to be able to address the burnout phenomenon, through the utilization of individual abilities and organisational resources. In this study the researcher applied the strengths perspective in order to be able to identify those individual and organisational resources that social workers in Mafikeng can tap-into, in order to address the prevalence of burnout in their professional endeavor.

5.3.3. Person-in-environment fit model

The person-in-environment fit model hypothesizes that the fit between a person and the environment determines the amount of stress that the person perceives.

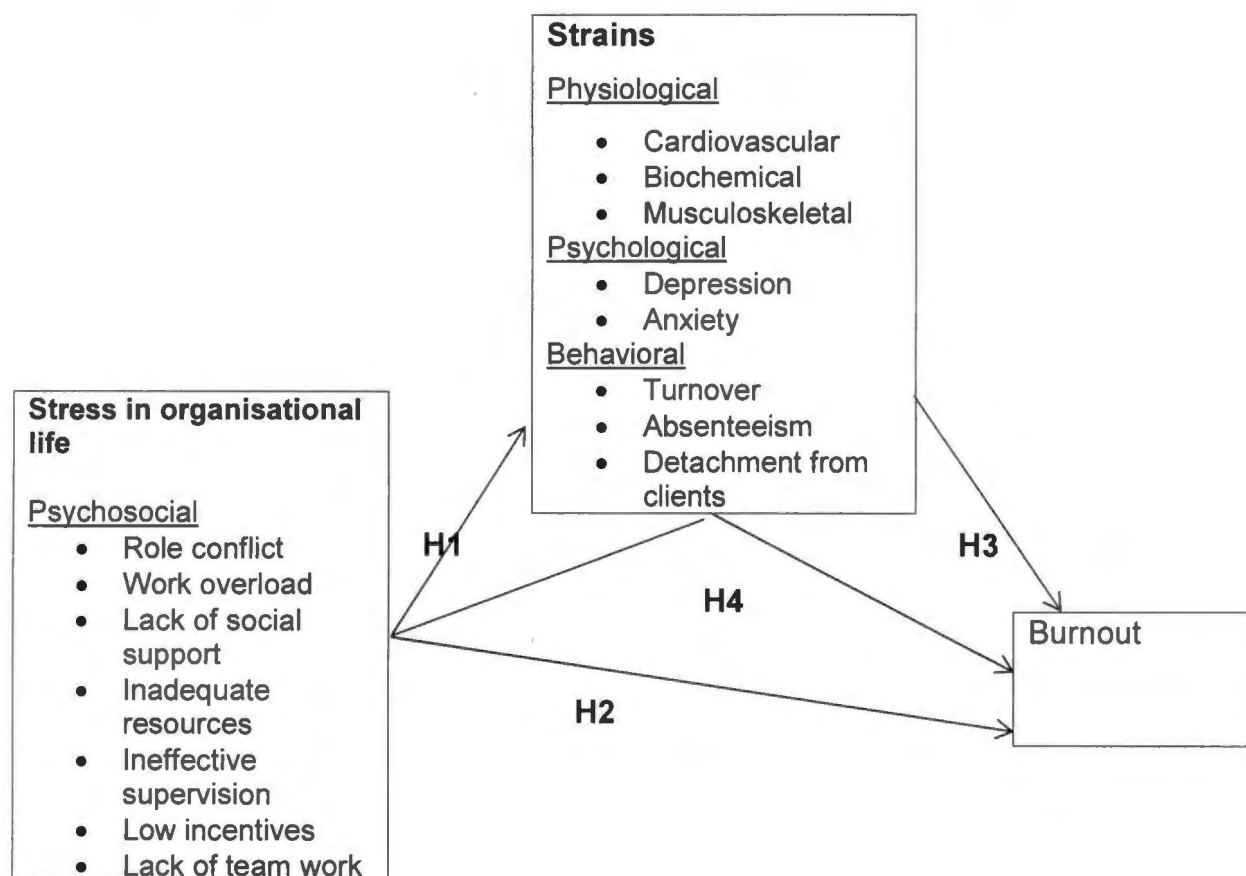
This theoretical model was employed to enable the researcher to understand the fit between social workers and their environments, as well as the interaction between the two. The person-in-environment fit model helped the researcher to stipulate factors that contributes to the manifestation of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, which at most, is caused by the negative interaction between social workers and environmental systems such as friends, families, work demands and the community at large.

The person-in-environment fit model enabled the researcher to explore and describe mechanisms in which social workers can tap-into in order to manipulate the environment to be responsive to their needs, as well as identifying those strategies which social workers can be to address mismatch between them and their environment, which in turn leads to burnout.

5.3.4. Revised conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout

The following revised conceptual model has been developed in accordance to the outcomes of the study, as adopted in Landy and Conte (2007: 420):

Figure 2 – Revised conceptual model for organisational stress / burnout.



The above model is a revised structural illustration of the relationship as hypothesized in this research. Organisational stress leads to organizational strain, which ultimately leads to burnout. The assumption is based on hypothesis 1 and 2. Hypothesis 4 assumes that burnout is caused by organisational strains and organisational stress.

5.4. ACHIEVEMENT OF RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng. The study took into cognizance its causes, effects, and the strategies that can be implemented to manage and prevent further occurrence of burnout among social workers. This aim was achieved through the following implications:

5.4.1. In terms of policy

In terms of policy, the findings of the study will help social work agencies to review and modify their policies in order to enhance the working conditions of social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. The policy must look into those factors that contribute to burnout among social workers as well as developing strategies to alleviate and prevent its further occurrence.

5.4.2. In terms of theory and practice

In terms of theory and practice, the recommendations are discussed under the following levels of interventions:

- Primary intervention

It is recommended that social workers, social work supervisors and the social work managers should work together in preventing the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province. This can be achieved by capacitating social workers through training and development, as well as creating favourable working conditions responsive to social workers' needs which will promote efficient and effective functionality.

- Secondary intervention

In the secondary level, it is recommended that social workers, social work supervisors, and social work managers should identify social workers who are burnt-out, and recommend them for social support groups, counselling services and workshops necessary to enhance their functionality in the work place, thus reducing the prevalence of burnout.

- Tertiary intervention.

In this level of intervention, social workers, social work supervisors and social work managers should utilize support structures within their organisations to address the prevalence of burnout among social workers. Service to be used includes social support, counselling service, as well as training and development to capacitate workers with necessary skills and strategies to be able to address and prevent further manifestation of burnout among social workers.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited in terms of the following factors:

- Reluctance of social workers to participate in the study.
- The study was limited in terms of time as it had to be completed within the academic year.
- Permission to conduct the study with social workers from the Department of Health was not successful as a result of the chain of management that had to read the requisition letter, and grant the necessary permission to effect the study. The researcher tried by all means to obtain permission but without success as a result of the bureaucratic constraints embedded by the Department of Health.

7. CONCLUSION

The study contributed in exploring and describing the meaning of burnout among social workers in Mafikeng, North West Province; which included the causes, effects and strategies that can be implemented to address and prevent its further occurrence.

From the descriptive accounts detailed in this study, burnout is being regarded as one of the crucial problems being faced by most social workers globally. It has an adverse effect on the functionality of workers in performing organisational duties in the most efficient and effective manner. Literature has identified that social workers are at risk of experiencing burnout by virtue of who they are, the work they do, and the environments in which they work.

The research findings point that agencies and social workers have a responsibility of creating a working environment that does not foster burnout. Once burnout has developed, it is extremely difficult to reverse, and the cost of burnout is a burden for the client, the practitioner, and the agency. It is through the effective implementation of alleviative and preventative strategies that burnout can be managed and its further occurrence prevented.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that the following areas be further researched:

- The extent of training and orientation given to social workers to enhance their functionality.
- The strategies used by social work agencies to alleviate and prevent the burnout phenomenon.
- Comparison on the effective strategies used by other social work agencies to address burnout phenomenon in South Africa.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, R., Dominelli, L. & Payne, M. (2009): *Social work; themes, issues and critical debates*. 3rd Edition. United Kingdom. Palgrave Macmillan Publishers.

Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. (2001): *The practice of social research*. Belmont. Wadsworth Publishers.

Bless C., Smith C. & Kagee A. (2009): *Fundamentals of Social Research Methods; An African Perspective*. 4th Edition. Cape Town. Juta Publishers.

Certo, S.C. (2003). *Supervision, concepts and skill-building*. New York. McGraw-Hill Publishers.

Cohen, M. & Gagin R. (2005): Can skill-development training alleviate burnout in hospital social workers; *Social work in health care*. Vol. 40 (4): p83-97. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J010v40n04-05>

Compton, B.R., Galaway, B. & Cournoyer, B.R. (2005): *Social work processes*. 7th Edition. Belmont. Brooks/Cole Publishers.

De Vos A.S, Strydom H. & Delport C.S.L. (2011). *Research at Grass Roots: for social sciences and human service professions*. 4th Edition. Pretoria. Van Schaik Publishers.

Earle, N. (2008): *Social work as a scarce and critical profession*. Pretoria. HSCR Press.

Engel, R.J. & Schutt, R.K. (2009): *The practice of Research in Social Work*. 2nd Edition. London. Sage Publishers.

Erasmus, J. & Breier, M. (2009): *Skills shortage in South Africa; case studies of key professions*. Cape Town. HSRC Press.

Farley O.W, Smith L.L. & Boyle (2009): *Introduction to Social Work*. 11th Edition. New York. Pearson Education, Inc.

González-Morales, M.G., Peiro, J.M., Rodríguez, I. & Bliese, P.D. (2012). Perceived collective burnout: a multilevel explanation of burnout, Anxiety, Stress

& Coping. *An International Journal*. Vol. 25 (1): p43-61. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21229404>

Gray-Stanley, J.A. & Muramatsu, N. (2011): Work stress, burnout and social and personal resources among direct care workers; *Journal of research in developmental disabilities*. Vol. 32: p1065-1074. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21316918>

Hamaideh, S.H. (2011). Burnout, social support, and job satisfaction among Jordanian mental health nurses. *Mental Health Journal*. Vol. 32: p234-242. Available at: <http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.3109/01612840.2010.546494>

Hamama, L. (2012): Burnout in social workers treating children as related to demographic characteristics, work environment, and social support. *Social work research* Vol. 36 (2): p113-125. Available at: <http://m.swr.oxfordjournals.org/content/36/2/113.short>

Hatinen, M., Kinnunen, U., Makikangas, A., Kalimo, R., Tolvanen, A., & Pekkonen, M. (2009): Burnout during a long-term rehabilitation; comparing low burnout, high burnout – benefited, and high burnout – not benefited trajectories. *Journal of anxiety, stress & coping*; Vol. 22 (3): p341-360. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10615800802567023>

Healy, K. (2005): *Social work theories in context; creating frameworks for practice*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan Publishers.

Hombrados-Mendieta, I. & Cosano-Rivas, F. (2011): Burnout, workplace support, job satisfaction and life satisfaction among social workers in Spain; a structural equation model. *International social work*. Vol. 56 (2): p228-246. Available at: <http://m.isw.sagepub.com/content/56/2/228.full>

Humphrey, K.R. (2013). Using a Student-Led support group to reduce stress and burnout among BSW students. *Social Work with Groups*. Vol. 36 (1): p73-84. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01609513.2012.712905>

Kim, H. & Stoner, M. (2008): Burnout and turnover intention among social workers; effects of role stress, job autonomy and social support. *Journal of*

administration in social work. Vol. 32:3: p5-25. Available at:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03643100801922351>

Kirst-Ashman, K.K. (2007): *Introduction to social work and social welfare; critical thinking perspectives*. 2nd Edition. New York. Thompson Brooks / Cole Publishers.

Kirst-Ashman, K. & Hull Jr., G. (2009): *Generalist practice with organisations and communities*. 4th Edition. New York. Thompson Brooks / Cole Publishers.

Landy, F.J. & Conte, J.M. (2007a): *Work in the 21st century; an introduction to industrial and organisational psychology*. 2nd Edition. New York. Blackwell Publishers.

Landy, F.J. & Conte, J.M. (2010). *Work in the 21st century: an introduction to industrial and organisational psychology*. 3rd Edition. New York. Blackwell Publishers.

Lloyd, C., King, R. & Chenoweth, L. (2002). Social work, stress and burnout; a review. *Journal of mental health*. Vol 11 (3): p255-265. Available at:
<http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09638230020023642>

Maree K. (2011): *First Steps in Research*. Pretoria. Van Schaik Publishers.

Mbenga, B. & Manson, A. (2011): *North-West history – Tawana Molema Historical encyclopaedia of South Africa's North-West Province*. Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism. North West Province. Available at:
[Http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/mahikeng](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/mahikeng)

Nicholls, D. (2009): Qualitative research: part three – Methods. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*. Vol 16 (12): p638-647. Available at:
<http://www.researchgate.net/publication/234055158-Qualitative-Research-Part-Three-Methods>

Payne, M. (2005): *Modern social work theory*. 3rd Edition. New York. Palgrave Macmillan Publishers.

Potgieter, M.C. (2008): *The social work process; development to empower people*. Pretoria. Prentice Hall.

Shenton, A.K. (2004): Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*. Vol 22 (2): p63-75. Available at: <http://www.crec.co.uk/docs/Trustworthypapers.pdf>

Sulsky, L. & Smith, C. (2005). *Work stress*. Belmont. Thomson Wadsworth Publishers.

Weinberg, A., Sutherland, V.J. & Cooper, C. (2010). *Organisational stress management: a strategic approach*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan Publishers.

Zastrow, C. (2011): *Introduction to social work and social welfare; empowering people*. 10th Edition. New York. Brooks / Cole Publishers.

ANNEXURES

10.1. ANNEXURE 1

NORTH-WEST PROVINCE MAP



10.2. ANNEXURE 2

North West University (Mafikeng Campus)
Department of Social Work
Faculty of Social Sciences
Private Bag X 2046
Mmabatho
2735
Tel: 084 3542 777
20 May 2013

The Director
Department of Social Work
North-West Province
Unit 2
Mmabatho
2735

Greetings

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE

I am a registered Masters' of Social Work student at the North West University (Mafikeng Campus). In fulfillment of my dissertation, I am engaged in a research study on the 'Prevalence of burnout among social worker in the Mafikeng area'.

The aim of the research is to investigate the prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area, its causes, effects, and strategies that can be implemented to manage it and prevent its further occurrence.

It is against this background, that I will be grateful to be granted ethical clearance to conduct an in-depth and focus group interviews with social workers about their views concerning the 'prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area'. All the research ethics, those of anonymity, confidentiality and respect will be adhered to.

For further enquiries you are free to contact my supervisor.

Sincerely

The Researcher
Makwela M.M.

Supervisor
Dr. De Chavonnes Vrugt

10.3. ANNEXURE 3

North West University (Mafikeng Campus)
Department of Social Work
Faculty of Social Sciences
Private Bag X 2046
Mmabatho
2735
Tel: 084 3542 777
20 May 2013

The Social Work Manager
North-West Province
Unit 2
Mmabatho
2735

Greetings

APPLICATION FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH

I am a registered Masters' of Social Work student at the North West University (Mafikeng Campus). In fulfillment of my dissertation, I am engaged in a research study on the 'Prevalence of burnout among social worker in the Mafikeng area'.

The aim of the research is to investigate the prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area, its causes, effects, and strategies that can be implemented to manage it and prevent its further occurrence.

It is against this background, that I will be grateful to be granted permission to conduct an in-depth and focus group interviews with social workers in your institution about their views concerning the prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area. The duration of the interview will be of 60 minutes, and will be conducted with minimal disruptions. All the research ethics, those of anonymity, confidentiality and respect will be adhered to.

For further enquiries you are free to contact my supervisor.

Sincerely

The Researcher
Makwela M.M.

Supervisor
Dr. De Chavonnes Vrugt

10.4. ANNEXURE 4

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY

I, the undersigned, hereby consent to: voluntarily, participate in the in-depth interview conducted by Mr. Makwela, for research purpose. The researcher will apply the following ethical principles throughout the research:

- **Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity.**

This principle entails that the information, and responses shared during the study will be kept private and the results will be provided in an anonymous manner in order to protect the identities of the participants.

- **Protection from harm**

This principle entails that the researcher will ensure that participants are not exposed to any undue physical or psychological harm. The researcher will strive to be honest, respectful and sympathetic towards all participants, and if by any chance the participants require a debriefing after an interview, the researcher will provide this or make necessary referral to a professional who can provide such a service.

- **Voluntary participation**

This principle entails that participants are free to choose to partake in the research process, and that they are also free to terminate their engagement in the interview whenever they start feeling uncomfortable.

Signatures

Participant Date

Researcher Date

10.5. ANNEXURE 5

Department of Social Work
Faculty of Social Sciences
Private Bag X 2046
Mmabatho
2735
Tel: 084 3542 777
26 May 2014

Social Worker
North-West Province
Unit 2
Mmabatho
2735

Greetings

PARTICIPATION LETTER

I am a registered Masters' of Social Work student at the North West University (Mafikeng Campus). In fulfillment of my dissertation, I am engaged in a research study on the 'Prevalence of burnout among social worker in the Mafikeng area'.

The aim of the research is to investigate the prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area, its causes, effects, and strategies that can be implemented to manage it and prevent its further occurrence.

It is against this background, that I will be grateful to have your input pertaining to the research questions prepared for in-depth interviews, in relation to the prevalence of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area.

For further enquiries you are free to contact my supervisor.

Sincerely

The Researcher
Makwela M.M

Supervisor
Dr. De Chavonnes Vrugt

10.6. ANNEXURE 6

IN-DEPHT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

YEAR 2014

TOPIC:

BURNOUT AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS IN MAFIKENG, NORTH WEST PROVINCE.

1. IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS

		Please tick
1.1. Gender	Male	☐
	Female	☐
1.2. Race	Black	☐
	White	☐
	Indian	☐
	Coloured	☐
1.3. Age	22 – 35	☐
	39 – 49	☐
	50 – 65	☐
1.4. Designation	Junior social worker	☐
	Supervisor - social worker	☐
	Principal / Head social worker	☐
1.5. Years of service	0 – 5	☐
	6 – 9	☐
	10 & above	☐
1.6. Agency	Governmental	☐
	Non-governmental	☐

Please turn to the next page

2. OPINION QUESTIONS

SECTION - A
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SELF

2.1. What do you understand about burnout?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.2. Have you ever experienced burnout?

Yes	☐
No	☐

2.2.1. If yes, what caused you to experience / feel burnout?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Please turn to the next page

2.2.2. If you answered yes on 2.2., what effects did burnout have on your professional and personal development?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.2.3. If you answered yes on 2.2; what did you do to overcome / address the burnout phenomenon?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION – B

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- 2.3.** In your opinion what do you think are the general causes of burnout among social workers in the Mafikeng area?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2.4.** Does burnout have an adverse effect on the personal and professional functioning of social workers in Mafikeng area?

YES

NO

Support your position:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.5. Does burnout among social workers have an adverse effect on the quality of services rendered to the client system?

YES

NO

Support your position:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.6. What are the prevailing symptoms or indicators of burnout among social workers?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Please turn to the next page

2.7. In your opinion, do you think that burnout has an adverse effect on the professional development and growth of social workers in Mafikeng?

Yes

No

2.8. In your opinion, do you think that burnout has an adverse effect on the effective functioning of the organisation towards service delivery and goal accomplishment?

Yes

No

Explain your position.....

1

Please turn to the next page

2.9. What measures do you propose / suggest should be implemented by social workers in the Mafikeng area to prevent and alleviate the burnout phenomenon?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.10. What measures do you propose / suggests should be implemented by social work agencies to prevent and alleviate the burnout phenomenon among social workers in Mafikeng?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking part in this study. Your input is utmostly valued.