UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

EXPLORING THE HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND SUPPORT OF

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS AT A SELECTED UNIVERSITY

Student: **Adwina Brown**

Student number: **3460210**

A full thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master's in social work in the Department of Social Work

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

University of the Western Cape

Supervisor: Prof Glynnis Dykes

Date: 31 January 2023 2

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of social work students at a selected university in three areas: health, well-being and support. The research approach used was qualitative and the research design was phenomenological, since it required the researcher to focus on participants' lived experiences in three thematic areas. Three specific questions were asked of the participants of the study. These were: (i) Describe a particular situation in which you experienced an emotional event(s) while on campus that affected your studies thereafter; (ii) How did this event and experience affect your health and well-being (physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social or in terms of occupational health)? (iii) What are the kinds of support you needed and used at the university?

The sample for the research study was seven social work students at the selected university, who were interviewed until data saturation was achieved. The phenomenological approach makes use of a specific way of collecting data, involving bracketing, intuition, analysis and description. The data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained from the faculty's Higher Degrees Research Committee and the university's Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, while the university's Registrar and Head of the Department of Social Work granted permission to access students for the study. The main findings were: social work students had to undertake a great deal of emotional preparation in order to enter the domain of clients who battle their own emotional pressures; they experienced particular challenges in managing their academic lives and personal life struggles; most experienced financial struggles that affected their academic performance; they valued emotional support; and they implemented a range of self-care strategies. Based on these findings, the researcher has made recommendations for the selected university, the social work department at the selected university, the social work students and policy developers.

KEY WORDS

Student health; Student stress; Social work students; Student Support; Student well-being

ABBREVIATIONS

BSW   -   Bachelor of Social Work

CSSS   -   Centre for Student Support Services

DoSW   -   Department of Social Work

ECP   -   Extended Curriculum Programme

EST   -   Ecological Systems Theory

HEIs   -   Higher Education Institutions

POPIA   -   Protection of Personal Information Act

PVEST   -   Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory

RPL   -   Recognition of Prior Learning

SA   -   South Africa

SWS   -   Social Work Student

WHO   -   World Health Organisation

UK   -   United Kingdom

USA   -   United States of America

UWC   -   University of the Western Cape

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the study, entitled, *Exploring the health, well-being and support of social work students at a selected university*, as presented by me, is my original work, which has not been submitted in any form for examination at any other university, or study institution. In addition, all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Student Name: Adwina Brown

Date:

Signature: …………………………….

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to say thank you to God for granting me the courage, strength, patience and wisdom (beyond my age) to complete this thesis.

This would not have been possible without the support, guidance and encouragement of my supervisor, Professor Glynnis Dykes. Professor Dykes, you have been so patient and understanding with me over the past few years – both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. I wish you all the best that life can offer; you deserve nothing less.

Thank you, too, to my family and friends for your support and words of encouragement when I needed them most. To my postgraduate colleagues; I am rooting for you, just as you have rooted for me.

Most of all, I want to say thank you to my husband, Jean Voigt. You have kept me grounded and always encouraged me to continue. When I felt like giving up, you were the one that kept motivating me to push on. I thank you for this.

I would like to end by acknowledging the participants who made this research study possible. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me and allowing me to listen your stories. I am so grateful and honoured.

Thank you to Jane Mqamelo for editing my thesis.

I am dedicating my thesis to all social work practitioners and social work students.
Brene Brown says it so beautifully:

I believe that what we regret most are our failures of courage, whether it's the courage to be kinder, to show up, to say how we feel, to set boundaries, to be good to ourselves. For that reason, regret can be the birthplace of empathy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

xii

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

1.1 Introduction

According to El Ansari and Stock (2010), the health and well-being of the individual involve all dimensions that make the individual function optimally in a holistic way. These dimensions are the physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health. When one of these dimensions is neglected, the individual's overall health and well-being is affected. The same applies to students in the context of learning and academic pressure. Miller (2013) and Simpson (2015) state that when a student engages with a profession in terms of education and practice, they begin to learn to adapt to the requirements of the profession both personally and professionally. This applies particularly to social work students, who have to make personal adjustments to adapt to the demands of their future careers. Simpson (2015) states that in addition to social work students being taught about the profession, they are advised to self-reflect and to develop self-awareness of their personal and professional growth and development. El Ansari and Stock (2010) are of the view that holistic health and well-being programmes at universities, where they are introduced, are likely to positively affect students' academic outcomes. This observation was underscored by a study by El Ansari, Labeeb, Mosely, Kotb and El Houfy (2013) in an Egyptian university, who found that female students were particularly vulnerable to emotional and academic stresses. Many of the female participants in their study reported feelings of being burdened by personal aspects of their lives, suffered from health problems and worried far more about their physical appearance than males did.

Two experiences ignited this researcher's interest in the health, well-being and support of social work students. As an undergraduate student, the researcher worked as a student assistant at the selected

1

university and found that many social work students were dealing with difficulties in their personal life and challenges in their studies, and as a result their health and sense of well-being were affected. The researcher experienced this as concerning and felt that the levels of stress were alarming. The researcher developed an interest in the topic and wished to understand the ways in which the personal circumstances of specifically social work students affected their health and well-being and to what extent they accessed the appropriate resources to assist them.

The second experience was that the researcher found herself experiencing burnout in her first year in the field as a professional social worker. She also experienced prejudice and ethical dilemmas that may have arisen as a result of a lack of self-reflection and her own biases.

These two experiences highlighted to the researcher the importance of self-reflection, knowledge of oneself and the ability to recognise one's own feelings when it comes to social work issues. It is essential that social work students learn to understand themselves and how their reactions and responses affect professional relationships in social work. In addition, there is a need for knowledge about students' health, well-being and support needs, not only among students themselves, but in academic institutions and among employers of practising social workers. This understanding is vital in order to ensure that both social work students and practising social workers benefit from a positive support system and are able to carry out their many duties without experiencing burnout.

In this study, the focus was on social work students and their levels of health and well-being through their own narratives and their description of the kinds of support they felt they needed. The research was conducted at a selected university to explore and describe social work students' views on academic stress and pressures, which can be exacerbated by personal and family challenges (Dykes & Green, 2015), and high academic and emotional demands (Wilks & Spivey, 2010).

1.2 Background and Problem Statement

A survey was conducted by Bantjes, Kagee, McGowan and Steel (2016) on students at a selected university in South Africa which showed that many students experienced severe symptoms of depression and anxiety. However, little to no research has been conducted on the health and well-being of particularly social work students locally (in South Africa). Internationally – mostly in Europe – several research studies have been conducted regarding the health and well-being of social work students. Grant and Kinman (2012) pointed out the importance of enhancing the well-being of social work students. These authors found that social work students are taught about the importance of resilience; however, applying these teachings on resilience is challenging to both students and lecturers. Grant (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study in Europe with 359 social work students. Many of these students reported that they suffered from empathetic distress owing to their personal challenges. Many required academic support and the teaching of mindfulness techniques in order to become better social work professionals. Crowder and Sears (2017) also conducted a mixed-methods study using a mindfulness intervention with 14 social workers in Canada to determine their levels of stress in the field. These authors found that after mindfulness training, the stress levels of the 14 participants decreased in relation to the stress levels of the other participants who were placed on a waiting list. Crowder and Sears (2017) also found that many social workers experience a flood of emotions owing to their workloads and the reality of the cases that they dealt with. Longtime, Crowder and Sears (2017) state that supportive structures and proper interventions should be put in place for social workers so that they are able to take better care of themselves. Studies conducted on self-care show that students are not taking care of themselves as well as they should as according to Longtime, Crowder and Sears (2017).

It was also found that most students were aware of the theoretical aspects of taking care of themselves, but the implementation of the theory was poor (James, Handu, Khaja, Otoom & Sequeira, 2006). Their unhealthy lifestyles affected their academic performances, which often led to early dropout

3

or failing courses (Stewart-Brown, Evans, Patterson, Petersen, Doll, Balding & Regis, 2000; El Ansari & Stock, 2010).

Researchers Chitanand, Rathilal and Rambharos (2018) found that the mental health and well-being of university students is important to investigate and that discussions about their mental health and well-being should be included in various curricula.

Much of the research referred to above does not specifically focus on social work students but on students generally. In addition, the studies have tended to examine specific aspects only, such as the resilience of students or the policies that are put in place for them. The concern, therefore, is that there is insufficient focus on the health and well-being of social work students in South Africa, despite a student profile that suggests that these students are particularly vulnerable. The health and well-being of social work students is increasingly viewed as vital for the successful completion of their studies and for becoming professional social workers. Successful outcomes hinge on students being supported to deal with their own real-life challenges. Therefore, this research focused on the perceptions and experiences of social work students at a selected university regarding their own health and well-being, in order to gain knowledge and understanding of this topic and to make recommendations for implementation.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of the study was to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of social work students at a selected university regarding their health and well-being as students, the impact of their mental health on their studies and lives, and the support they needed and received.

1.4 Research Question

The research question relevant for the study was the following: *What are the perceptions and experiences of social work students at a selected university regarding their health and well-being and the support they need and receive?*

1.5 Study Objectives

The following objectives emerged from the aim of the study:

- Explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students at the selected university regarding their health and well-being, in terms of the physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health aspects.

- Explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students regarding the support they need and used at the selected university.

1.6 Overview of Study Methodology

1.6.1 Research Approach: Qualitative

Qualitative research is related to both constructivist and pragmatic philosophies. It focuses on the experiences, narratives and perceptions of the individual (Kuper, Lingard & Levinson, 2008). The researcher chose the qualitative approach as it allowed her to hold in-depth discussions and conversations with the participants about their personal experiences. Using this research approach, the researcher was able to obtain rich, thick data from which to make informed and insightful recommendations for the selected university, social work practice and social work education.

1.6.2 Research Design

A research design is the strategy that researchers use to ensure that their study is clear, reasonable and addresses the research problem (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used a phenomenological research design. A phenomenological design seeks to uncover the essentials and meanings of the experiences of the participants, revealing authentic data based on participants' narratives (Giorgi, 2012). The researcher selected the interpretive phenomenological design. Giorgi (2012) states that there are two different types of phenomenological studies: descriptive and interpretive. According to Giorgi (2012) and Qutoshi (2018), in descriptive phenomenological studies, researchers put their assumptions aside so that they do

5

not affect the findings, the participants and the overall study. With an interpretive design, researchers do the opposite (Giorgi, 2012); they do not put their assumptions aside, as they believe their assumptions play an important role in the overall research study, enabling them to contextualise the experiences of the participants that were previously poorly misunderstood. The researcher selected this design type because she felt that her own experiences as a social work student were relevant to the study. Phenomenology created the ideal framework within which to investigate, yielding a broad understanding of the students' experiences and perceptions and how these affected their mental health and well-being.

1.6.3 Population and Sampling of the Participants

Lune and Berg (2017) refer to population in research as a collective or total number of objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. The population for this study was social work students from all five-year levels at the Department of Social Work at a specific university. It was necessary to extract a sample of the population for the study, in order to examine the experiences of a small group in some detail. The researcher used purposive sampling for initial recruitment of three participants, with an inclusion criterion. She then used snowball sampling by asking these three participants if they were aware of classmates or friends at other study levels who would be interested in participating in the study. The researcher eventually settled on seven participants from the ECP level to the fourth-year level.

1.6.4 Data Collection Methods

In phenomenology, researchers have an array of methods from which to choose; for example, interviews, conversations, participant observation, active research, focus meetings and analysis of diaries and other personal texts (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). The researcher used unstructured telephonic interviews with the participants because of the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown rules imposed.

In phenomenological research, two broad questions are commonly posed to participants. In this study, the researcher used the following three questions:

1. Describe a situation in which you experienced an emotional event(s) that occurred on campus that affected your studies thereafter.

2. What are the ways in which this event and your experience of it affected your health and well-being (in physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social or occupational health aspects)?

3. What are the kinds of support you needed and used at the selected university?

1.6.5 Data Analysis

The data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. Qualitative thematic analysis is used for dissecting the data into areas of commonality and difference, which translate into themes and sub-themes, with the researcher using codes to identify, break up and reduce the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used the eight steps for analysing data recommended by Tesch (1990) and Creswell (2013, pp. 142-149) to process the data, from reading the transcripts to presenting the findings. These were as follows:

(1) Reading the transcript carefully and making notes as the researcher reads.

(2) Placing the documents in order of relevance to the research study, prioritising those that the researcher feels contain the most valuable information.

(3) Making a list of all the themes that the researcher identifies when reading through the transcripts, then grouping data from all the transcripts into themes.

(4) Abbreviating all the themes, creating a code name for each and writing the code next to sections of text where the theme appears.

(5) Creating descriptive words for the themes and categorising them, looking for interrelationships between the themes.

(6) Abbreviating each theme and the code that relates to it, then arranging these in alphabetical order.

(7) Putting all the data together and performing a preliminary analysis.

(8) Recoding the data if necessary.

These steps were used to group units of data together into themes and sub-themes, which enabled easier interpretation of the data.

1.6.6 Trustworthiness of the Data

Chan, Fung and Chien (2013) state that the trustworthiness of qualitative research is grounded in credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. For phenomenological studies, reflexivity and bracketing are just as important. An awareness of these principles helps the researcher to conduct better and sounder research, and to prove links between the findings and the raw data through the provision of precise details of the methodology used. According to Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen and Kyngäs (2014), ensuring that each of the aforementioned aspects of research are observed and upheld ensures the trustworthiness of the research. Each aspect or principle requires specific steps and processes. Elo et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of these steps to ensure that data is correctly analysed and that the study portrays a true reflection of the data.

1.7 Definition of Key Concepts

1.7.1 Student Health

Ventegodt, Kandel, Ervin and Merrick (2016) state that health may be defined as the multidimensional aspects of wellness in individuals. These aspects are the spiritual, psychological, physical, social, intellectual and economic, all of which combine to determine the well-being of the individual. Ventegodt et al. (2016) further state that an individual becomes "whole" only through interconnections in body, spirit and mind. According to Sainju (2018), health is determined by the

8

complete state of the individual's body, spirit and mind – their physical health, psychological health and spiritual health.

17.2 Student Stress

Fink (2010) describes stress as having diverse meanings for different people under different conditions. Stress was first studied by "the father of stress", Hans Selye (1907 – 1982), a Hungarian-Canadian scientist. Selye started his research on stress in 1962, and his work has been citied in numerous books, articles and journals over the years. He defined stress as the response of the human body to a particular demanding aspect in the person's life. Biggs, Brough and Drummond (2017) contend that the experience of excessive stress is the result of an inappropriate physical response to pressure, in whatever form.

1.7.3 Social Work Student Profile

Dykes (2011) states that it is important for students to reflect on their personal experiences and realities before they enter the helping professions. This self-reflection will allow students to identify their shortcomings and biases. Merriam and Caffarella (2007) contend that in order to efficiently educate and lecture students, it is important for lecturers to understand the students' backgrounds and personal life experiences. This will assist lecturers to establish the best learning methods required for the students. (See also Dykes & Green, 2015.)

1.7.4 Student Support

Prebble, Hargraves, Leach, Naidoo, Suddaby and Zepke (2004) explain that academic support refers to the support services that are provided to the students of a tertiary institution. These services include educational support, the teaching of writing techniques, psychosocial support, tutoring, support groups for specific causes or elite groups, and financial support. These services vary from one institution to another. Bettinger, Boatman and Long (2013) state that the need for academic support has increased globally. Bettinger et al. (2013) asked approximately half of the first-year students in a college in the USA

9

about their experiences of various forms of academic support, such as counselling, tutoring, financial aid and even childcare. The aim was to monitor the efficiency of academic support and reduce dropout rates among students. Their findings were that limited resources – including financial support for students was important for institutions in the importance students' performance academically. Prebble et al. (2004) suggest that higher education institutions (HEIs) have the ability to influence a more comprehensive and well-functioning student support service.

1.7.5 Student Well-being

Psychological well-being is one of the main aspects of student well-being. According to Murphy, Markey, O'Donnell, Moloney and Doody (2021), students encounter a vast variety of stressors on a daily basis which have a negative effect on their emotional and psychological well-being. Banerjee (2020) states that it is important to recognise how external factors affect the functioning of students' daily activities. Banerjee (2020) adds that disruptions in academic performance often stem from elevated levels of anxiety, depression, trauma, loss and substance abuse. Murphy et al. (2021) contend that students have to take care of themselves not only physically and emotionally, but psychologically, too.

1.8 Overview of the Dissertation: Chapter Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters.

1.8.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and Context of the Study

In Chapter 1, the researcher provides background information on the study of students at a selected university, discussing the rationale of the study, the gaps in previous studies, the research aim, research question, objectives and key aspects of the methodology employed. The researcher further highlights the key concepts of the study.

1.8.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2 the researcher reports on the findings of literature relevant to this study. The importance of the current study is highlighted in light of the gaps identified in previous studies. In addition, the researcher discusses the existing policy framework for student support services, and the theoretical model that guided the study.

1.8.3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In Chapter 3, the researcher discusses the philosophical foundations of the research and the various choices that had to be made with regard to research approach and design. The population and sampling techniques, the data collection method and the data analysis method selected were important steps in the research method that linked with the chosen qualitative approach and phenomenological design. The researcher further discusses the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study, explaining how and why certain components were important.

1.8.4 Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the research study findings. The demographic profile of the participants is given, along with a discussion on the relevance of the demographics for the study. The findings are presented in the form of main themes and sub-themes, and contextualised in relation to the literature. The researcher identified five themes and 11 sub-themes.

1.8.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the final chapter, the researcher provides a summary, conclusion and set of recommendations based on the themes and sub-themes identified in Chapter 4. Recommendations are made for the selected university, the social work students, social work education and social work policy. Recommendations are also made for future research in this topic.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an understanding of why the current research is important. The researcher has established that a gap exists among previous studies on the health and well-being of students, in that little work has been done in this area on social work students specifically.

The researcher has also provided an overview of the research methodology, further expanded on in Chapter 3. The chapter thus consisted of a synopsis that covered the research aim, question, objectives, methodology and key concepts, which clarified the conceptual underpinnings for the study.

In the following chapter, the literature review is presented. The chapter also examines the theoretical framework used, which provided a deep understanding of the topic and contextualised the findings of the study.
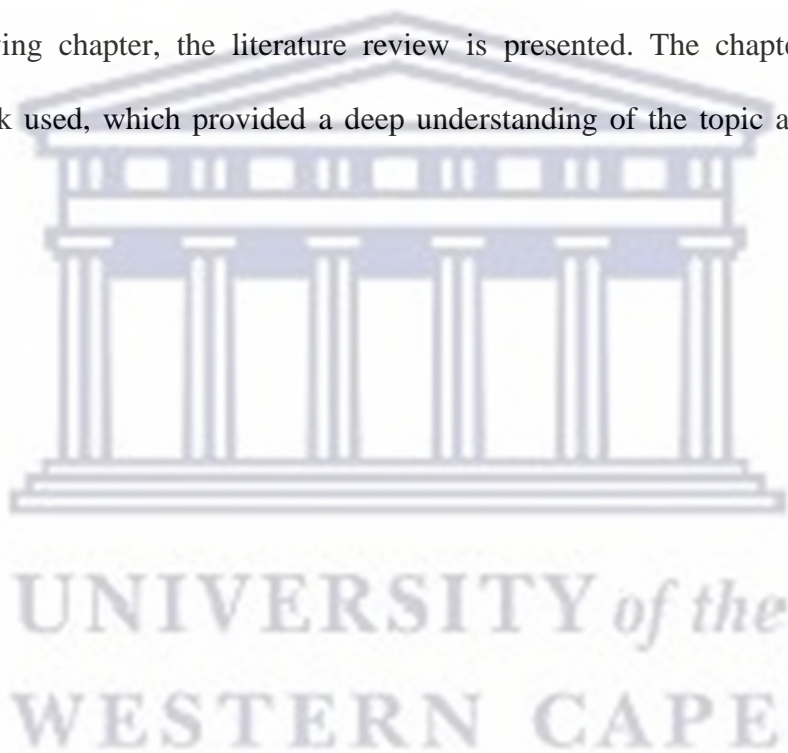
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review assists a researcher to build on the foundation of existing research and to identify possible gaps in it (Häyrinen, Saranto & Nykänen, 2008; Maxwell, 2006). According to Kiteley and Stogdon (2013), researchers use the literature review to evaluate the need for their research topic based on the extent of existing research. During the literature review process, researchers must critically engage with previous studies and examine the negative and positive aspects of existing research (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2013). Two common types of literature reviews to note (amongst many others) are the narrative literature review and the systematic literature review (Aveyard, 2018; Kiteley & Stogdon, 2013; Lau & Kuziemsky, 2017).

According to Kitely and Stogdon (2013), the narrative literature review is most commonly used. In this kind of literature review, the researcher conceptualises the theories and ideas revealed by existing research and, based on these, decides which literature they wish to include and exclude from their research study.

Kitely and Stogdon (2013) state that with a systematic literature review, the researcher reports on the published literature in their field of interest so that they may expand on the topic and improve on the research already conducted. In this form of literature review, the researcher must follow a systematic protocol which guides them on which literature to include and exclude from their research study. According to Kitely and Strogdon (2013), this systematic protocol makes the systematic literature review more transparent and comprehensive than the narrative literature review.

Aveyard (2018) states that even though different authors' literature reviews build on one another, researchers can still be thorough in their literature reviews by familiarising themselves with all the different types of literature review and selecting the type most suitable for their research study.

The literature review in this study focuses on the well-being and health of students in general and social work students in particular. The researcher therefore used the narrative literature review, as defined by Kitely and Strogdon (2013). Owing to the depth of the research topic, the narrative literature review was deemed most appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to examine the literature in some depth rather than to generalise, and to acknowledge existing research while demonstrating the significance of the current research.

In this chapter, the researcher focuses her attention on the well-being of students from international and national perspectives, especially examining the expectations, experiences and attitudes of students, the sources of stress for social work students specifically, social work student profiling, and student support services in universities. These topics guided the literature review, keeping the research focused and yielding an in-depth understanding of these specific factors.

In this chapter, the researcher also outlines the policy framework that guided this research study. It was important to understand the current policies regarding the health and well-being of social work students. Using the existing policy framework as a basis, the researcher was able to identify recommendations where gaps might exist.

The theoretical model used in the study is presented and discussed. The model used allowed the researcher to gain a deep theoretical and structural understanding of the phenomena under investigation, and to analyse the data in greater depth.

Lastly, in this chapter the researcher discusses the importance of the social work educator's role and the interventions that influence the health and well-being of social work students.

2.2 The Role of a Literature Review

Boote and Beile (2005) state that a literature review guides the researcher, helping her to understand previous research conducted on the research topic and in the field. These authors add that a lack of understanding on how to conduct a literature review flaws many dissertations and articles, resulting in gaps in understanding and interpretation.

Fry, Scammell and Barker (2017) state that little has been written to guide and assist researchers on conducting a literature review for a phenomenological study. These authors point out that in many phenomenological studies, researchers intentionally avoid conducting in-depth literature reviews so as to remain unbiased in their research and make effective use of bracketing. The omission allows these researchers to be more flexible and transparent in their research.

According to Randolph (2009), the main purposes of a literature review are to:

- define the research problem;

- gain additional methodological insight;

- identify recommendations for further research;

- determine what was done before and what needs to be done in the future;

- gain new perspective as a researcher;

- understand the significance of the problem; and

- relate ideas and theory to a research study.

The researcher initially obtained a broad overview of the existing literature on the topic. This was to allow the researcher to understand the significance of the research topic as a precursor to the research process. According to Jesson, Matheson and Lacey (2011), in phenomenological studies, researchers complete a more thorough literature review after the data has been analysed. This process allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon and prevents their becoming unduly influenced by the findings of others before they collect their data. In the current study, once the researcher had completed her data

15

analysis, she was able to better understand the existing literature, because of the ways in which the findings of others were demonstrated in her own findings. This process of conducting an initial broad literature review followed by data collection and a more detailed literature review allowed the researcher to gain perspective on the research topic and to more fully understand the significance of the study.

Using the above purposes as a guide, Randolph (2009) states that there are three methods from which researchers may choose for conducting their literature review. These are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Methods of conducting literature reviews

Method	Description
Exhaustive review	The researcher uses every piece of research and article previously written on the topic.
Representative sample	The researcher makes use of one particular research study, basing their review on this one study.
Purposive sample	The researcher searches only for pivotal articles that relate to the specific topic.

In this study, the researcher used a purposive sample as the basis of her literature review, searching for articles and publications that related to the health and well-being of social work students and students in general. This allowed the researcher to identify gaps in the literature (internationally and nationally) that related to the research study. Several research articles and publications were found that related to the health and well-being of students in general. However, little research was found on the health and well-being of social work students in South Africa.

2.3 The Meaning of Health, Well-being and Support

Three main concepts underpin this study: health, well-being and the support of students. The discussion that follows draws from the literature, both national and international, to provide an understanding of what these constructs mean generally and in relation to student functioning. The

16

researcher also discusses existing policy frameworks that have been introduced in relation to students' health, well-being and support.

2.3.1 The Meaning of Health

According to Sainju (2018), health is no longer determined on the basis of whether or not the individual has an illness or disease. Ventegodt, Kandel, Ervin and Merrick (2016) argue for a more inclusive conceptualisation of health, stating that health may be defined as the multidimensional aspects of wellness in individuals. These aspects are the spiritual, psychological, physical, social, intellectual and economic. All these aspects determine the well-being of the individual. Ventegodt et al. (2016) further state that an individual becomes "whole" through interconnections in body, spirit and mind. According to Sainju (2018), health is now determined by the complete state of the individuals' body, spirit and mind – their physical health, psychological health and spiritual health.

Sainju (2018) states that in order to determine the health of an individual, practitioners ought to be able to evaluate the individual based on all three aspects of health, rather than focusing only on illnesses, injury on one specific part of the body. Ventegodt et al. (2016) state that optimum health is dependent not only on body, mind and spirit, but also on how the individual functions in the environment in which they live and work.

According to Mark and Lyons (2010), ancient and traditional health systems held that for an individual to be deemed healthy, their body, spirit and mind had to be fully functional. In addition, individuals were required to find a balance between these aspects in order to live well. Mark and Lyons (2010) state that traditional practitioners would provide movement therapy, singing, dancing, prayer, meditation and mindfulness practices in order for the unwell person to find their sense of balance. Sainju (2018) states that physical, mental and social well-being are the most important aspects of an individual's health.

17

2.3.2 The Meaning of Well-being

Shah and Marks (2004) consider well-being to be more than just happiness. In addition to feelings of satisfaction and happiness, well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled and contributing to the community. According to Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders (2012), a stable, healthy routine or lifestyle implies that individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet their particular psychological, social and/or physical challenges. When individuals have more challenges than resources, their well-being is reduced. Cummins (2010) further adds that it is important to communicate about what well-being entails.

Relating well-being to university students, El Ansari and Stock (2010) argue that students in their 2008 study from the University of Gloucestershire (UK) cultivated bad habits during their studies which often led to unhealthy lifestyles. These bad habits often continue after they have completed their studies and the individuals concerned consequently suffer from future health challenges. Stewart-Brown, Evans, Patterson, Petersen, Doll, Balding and Regis (2000) also found that university students are generally unhealthier than those who are employed.

In South Africa, Rau, Radloff, Coetzee, Nardi, Smit and Matebesi (2014) found that students tend to have high anxiety levels about their studies. This is often the case among students who are first-time university students in their families and students from disadvantaged circumstances. In a quantitative research study by Rau et al. (2014), 85% of female participants stated that they felt under pressure to excel in their studies – more than the percentage of male participants who felt this way. This pressure led to the female participants feeling psychologically and emotionally drained most of the time. The participants further stated that lack of financial support aggravated their stress and pressure levels.

Ying (2009) defined burnout as a situation in which a professional person experiences a high level of stress, with the result that they disengage from their work expectations and experience physical and psychological distress. Ying (2009) adds that even though students do not experience professional

18

burnout, social work education is just as stressful for many students as the working environment may be for qualified social workers.

2.3.3 The Meaning of Support

According to Wilks and Spivey (2010), having a support system is a basic human need. General support systems are found in many forms, such as an individual's friends, family, pets, a professional counselor, a teacher and/or a neighbour. These support systems assist directly and indirectly with people's coping skills, provide a healthier life and increase levels of well-being. Collins, Coffey and Morris (2010) state that direct support can come from those one is close to, such as friends and family. Indirect support can come from organisations, institutions and/or government. Collins, et al. (2010) add that the level of support individuals receive may determine their level of confidence and self-esteem.

In relation to students, Biggs (2011) describes student support services at universities that assist students who face a range of barriers to attaining their educational and developmental potential. Student support services provide broad strategies for coping and specialised support at the individual or group level. In academia, informal support systems can emanate from classmates, lecturers, academic staff, tutors and/or mentors. Others who are experiencing similar challenges often provide a valuable source of support.

In their research, Collins et al. (2008) found that 60% of their student participants received support from the university staff, tutors, mentors and fellow classmates. As early as 2005, Round (2005) proposed that universities provide students with more focused support on a range of issues. Round (2005) further recommended that universities provide first-year students or prospective students with a comprehensive orientation programme specifically for their course programme or field of interest. Brown and Piatt (2001) stated that systems of support should be made available to students if they are to enter and remain in higher education. A dedicated system of support will assist students to develop a positive mindset about their course work and improve their motivation to continue their studies in the face of obstacles.

19

In the selected university, the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) (2016) has a campus-wide peer mentoring programme, and offers academic counselling, assessment services, workshops and skills training to students and academic staff. For therapeutic services, they offer wellness therapy, counselling and therapy, psycho-educational workshops, a community counselling model, crisis responses and 24/7 online services.

2.4 Student Well-being and Profile

2.4.1 Expectations, Experiences and Attitudes

In a quantitative study about student experiences, attitudes and expectations at the University of Northumbria, Round (2005) found that student expectations of university workloads were completely different from what they experienced. Owing to the difficult transition from secondary school to tertiary institutions, they experienced high levels of anxiety and stress. An important finding was that these high levels of anxiety and stress made many students unable to manage their time, balance their workloads and adapt to the life of being a student (Round, 2005). As a result, Round (2005) found that when students' expectations were not met and their experiences were not what they thought they would be, many left the university, feeling unable to cope.

Also in the UK, Collins, Coffey and Morris (2008) conducted research among social work students and found that a third of participants felt worn out most days; worryingly, more than 90% of the participants felt that they were failures and unworthy. The students also felt that they required student counselling services often and/or a support group to provide them with support and motivation to continue studying.

In South Africa, Maritz and Coughlan (2004) found that social work students preferred working on individual interventions than on community development interventions. When students were requested to do community interventions as part of their academic course, their attitudes and enthusiasm changed.

20

Maritz and Coughlan (2004) stated that the participants of the study were aware of the need for community development but were not eager to be actively involved in this aspect of social work. Maritz and Coughlan (2004) stated that when students are not adequately trained and prepared for all kinds of intervention, they become highly stressed because of their lack of basic knowledge and skills. These feelings are evident when they are out in the field doing social work practicals.

Maritz and Coughlan (2004) stated that even though it is difficult to change the mindset of existing practitioners, it is important that the social work educational system become mindful of their students' expectations and attitudes towards the field. This is to ensure that service users receive respect and feel appreciated and valued when receiving services from practitioners.

2.4.2 Sources of Stress in Social Work Students

A quantitative study by Collins et al. (2008) at a university in the UK on social work students' stress, support and sense of well-being found that major stressors in students' lives were finances, personal relationships, studies, their future, and learning how to balance all aspects in their lives. All of these areas were experienced as challenging and affected the students negatively. Dziegielewski, Turnage and Roest-Mari's (2004) research on stress among social work students found that students who were registered for professional programmes such as nursing and social work experienced more stress than students doing non-structured professional programmes. Collins et al. (2008) argued that 77% of their participants wanted to be successful in their studies, to attend class regularly, to meet the requirements of all their coursework and to not worry about their finances. However, only a small percentage of participants stated that they had attained a measure of success in one or more of the above.

In South Africa, Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) found that students' stressors are financial constraints, lack of accommodation at the university, the death of loved ones and insufficient support of family members, resulting in high dropout rates. Bantjes, Saal, Gericke, Lochner, Roos, Auerbach and Stein (2021) found that many universities in South Africa have challenges with students' low academic

21

achievements, with many students suffering from mental health disorders, especially depression. Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) contend that the highest rate of dropout occurs among first-year students, who are considered the most vulnerable group at university.

2.4.3 Social Work Student Profile

Collins and Van Breda (2014) conducted research on the academic support provided to first-year students at South African universities and found that first-year students come from diverse backgrounds, often having to relocate from rural environments into urban environments. Collins and Van Breda (2014) further state that when students enter university straight after their secondary schooling, they are in an experimental phase of life. This affects their decision-making process and can cause poor choices in relationships and general conduct. In addition, researchers found that when students enter the social work programme, they often enter with personal challenges (Cartney, 2004; Dykes & Green, 2015). These challenges could include students' own trauma. These personal challenges affect their ability to apply themselves to their studies and may play a role in the way they engage with clients in the field during their social work practicals (Dykes & Green, 2015).

Rugbeer, Rugbeer and Naidoo (2020) conducted a study in Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa on the first-year experiences of students in a rural university, finding several factors hindering their progress. These included lack of communication from the university, delays in the admission process, poor support from family and friends, especially when the student was the first family member to attend university, and lack of appropriate accommodation. Rugbeer et al. (2020) recommended that the university and the various faculties consider orientation programmes and placement testing of students before admitting them to the various study programmes.

2.5 Policy Framework

In South Africa, the Department of Higher Education and Training Act (101 of 1997) states that university student housing must provide adequate provision for the medical and psychological well-being of students in residences during working hours and ensure that emergency support is available after hours. This policy, however, does not address the general student population, for example those not accommodated in university residences.

The mission and goal of the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) at the university in which the current study was conducted are:

(i) to realise possibilities for success through professional student support;

(ii) to support students holistically so that they are able to reach their full potential and become successful (UWC, 2022).

According to the institution's Institutional Development Plan (2021-2025), goal one recognises the student experience. According to this goal, the university wants to ensure that all students have a meaningful and fruitful tertiary experience from the time they enter to the time they graduate. The university has identified a plan of action to ensure that the above goal is achieved by 2025. In their annual report (2020), the selected university reported that their students experienced non-curricular challenges owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the assistance of the CSSS, the selected university was able to provide additional support to the students during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The annual report (2020) states that the CSSS staff provided students with counselling through online platforms, and that accommodation and food were provided to students who could not return to their homes. The selected university amended their academic calendar to ensure that all students received the same treatment in terms of submissions and examination expectations, and the university collaborated with external service providers to ensure that students were able to access learning resources while at home.

Based on the selected university's annual report of 2020 and their institutional development plan for 2021-2025, despite the challenges experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the selected university ensured that it achieved its first goal of improving the student experience. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the selected university provided statistics in the Cape Argus (2020) the author, Mlamla reported that 94% of the students actively engaged in alternative learning during the Covid-19 pandemic after the university raised funds to provide all students with devices and data for continued learning. These statistics are in line with the selected university's institutional development plan in terms of improving student experiences. However, the researcher found very few studies that examined student experiences of these supportive services at the selected university.

2.6 Summary and Conclusion of the Literature Review

Students, and specifically social work students, appear to be under tremendous stress and pressure, both in South Africa and globally. In view of this, many engage in risky behaviour to cope with their burdens, such as substance abuse, promiscuous behaviour or acts of violence. Student health, well-being and support seem to be a concern worldwide. However, each student is different and all have different experiences based on their institutions, their personal level of support, their family systems and their individual characteristics.

This review suggests that the issue of students' health, well-being and the support they receive are significant issues. However, the reviewed literature did not examine these issues in relation to social work students in South Africa specifically. Therefore, the review revealed that there remains a need to understand the health, well-being and support needs of social work students in South Africa. The use of a phenomenological study design in this research was an advantage, as it allowed the researcher to listen to the participants' narratives and gain an in-depth understanding of their particular experiences, which would not have been possible on the basis of a literature review alone.

Lastly, a review of the policy framework allowed the researcher to identify the policies that are in place for student health, well-being and support, whether or not these policies are being implemented appropriately, and whether or not students can access the services. The selected university has a well-structured and thought-out plan to improve the well-being of students in general; however, there is a dearth of research and publications to attest to whether these policies are fit for purpose, and on students' experiences of the support services.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

Lamon (2007) contends that using a theoretical framework in a research study gives the study direction, makes the evaluation of the study easier and provides a structure for the researcher. The theoretical framework that underpins this research is Ecological Systems Theory (EST) proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1992). According to Bronfenbrenner (1992), the EST shows how different environments in an individual's life influence their behaviour to varying degrees and shows that people are both producers and products of their environment. Thus, Rothery (2008) states that people do not live in isolation but rather live inside complex social structures.

2.7.1 The Philosophical Roots of EST

Guy-Evans (2020) states that Bronfenbrenner (1992) established the EST framework because he recognised that there were multiple aspects of a child's life; EST gave practitioners a framework for identifying those aspects and how they relate to one another. According to Guy-Evans (2020), Bronfenbrenner revised the EST framework in 1994, naming the revised version the Bioecological Model. This is because Bronfenbrenner found it important to understand individuals' development not only in their family context, but in the context of the broader environment too. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007), child development and adult development have become complex owing to the complexity of real-life situations. The overall importance of the Bioecological Model, according to Bronfenbrenner

25

and Morris (2007), is that it reveals the experiences of an individual in relation to various environments. Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny (2017) add that the EST framework provides a holistic understanding of all the systems in which children and families operate, and how each system is related to the others, affecting the individual's development.

According to Christensen (2016), Bronfenbrenner's EST and Bioecological Model are concerned with the relationships between people and their environments. The environments may be seen as different systems that constitute essential aspects of the individual's life. Christensen (2016) adds that Bronfenbrenner's theories provide insight into the development of individuals and the aspects that could possibly hinder an individual from developing to their full potential. Christensen (2016) also asserts that these theories create a foothold for practitioners in the social service field to better understand their service users in the context of their environments. Guy-Evans (2020) states that the theories established by Bronfenbrenner (1992, 1994) created a useful framework for interpretation and understanding of how the environment affects the individual's development.

2.7.2 The Different Systems of EST

Bronfenbrenner (1992) identified five systems in his original EST, with Milner, Myers and O'Bryne (2020) adding a sixth system, the techno system. Table 2.2 presents the six systems, what each refers to and how each is relevant to this study.

Table 2.2: Systems of EST

The system	What the system means	How it applies to the study
The microsystem	This system refers to the direct, intimate environment in the individuals' life.	For the students in this study, the role players in this environment are family, friends, classmates, lecturers and/or partner.
The mesosystem	This system refers to the relationship between the various elements of the microsystem.	Here one would consider the relationships between the family and the university, or between the students friends and their romantic

26

		partner, or between the partner and the classmates.
The exosystem	This refers to the parts of the environment that do not directly interact with the individual but which nonetheless influence their life.	In this study, this might refer to the university policy on student support, or changes in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) curriculum.
The macrosystem	This involves the culture, customs and laws of the country that affect the individual.	In this study, this would refer to national, economic structures that affect the availability of bursaries for students, or the *#FeesMustFall* movement that initially disrupted university life for students.
The chronosystem	This refers to the socio-historical context, or the dimension of time that influences an individual.	Here one would think of the legacy of the colonial and apartheid educational and social policies in South Africa, which are still present in the social fabric of the country and still affect people's lives.
The techno system	This involves the use of modern technology such as cellular (smart) phones, internet, television and social media.	For students in this study, this refers to their degree of access to online platforms. For many students from poorly resourced homes and backgrounds, this aspect may constitute a barrier.

Sources: Bronfenbrenner (1992); Milner, Myers and O'Bryne (2020)

According to Guy-Evans (2020), the six systems are interlinked, all influencing one another. The interactions in the first system (the microsystem) are personal and directly affect the child's development, forming a foundation for all the other systems. The exosystem affects the child indirectly but, as Guy-Evans (2020) points out, if the system is not followed positively, it can have a negative impact on the child's microsystem. Guy-Evans (2020) states that all individuals develop within a specific context, and that the EST is an important theory for social service practitioners, allowing them to understand their clientele not only as individuals, but also as the products of a series of interlinked systems.

Crawford (2020) avers that EST is often used in the social service field as it guides practitioners to use the "person-centered" approach or "person-in-environment" approach. According to Crawford (2020), these approaches are used by social service practitioners to better understand their clients, not only

as individuals but also as products of their environments. In addition, the use of the EST in the social service field allows social service practitioners to intervene and assist clients from all cultures and backgrounds (Crawford, 2020). This is because the EST is not based on a particular culture or background but allows social service practitioners to understand their clients in relation to the clients' own systems and/or environment.

2.7.3 Important Concepts Underpinning EST

In addition to the different subsystems exerting either a positive or negative effect on individuals, Bronfenbrenner (1992, 2005) identified ten important concepts that assist in the functioning and understanding of these systems (see also Carelse, 2018). These concepts relate to the notion of "person-in-environment".

(i) **Person–Environment Fit:** The person–environment fit can be described as the capabilities the person has in relation to their environment. The individual changes over time in accordance with various life stages, and so does their environment. As the individual grows and develops, their environments changes. These changes (both in the person and in the environment) can be beneficial or harmful to the individual. This concept is important in the current research study, since the participants were all at different life stages within the same academic environment. Therefore, each participant's experiences and conceptions of academia were unique.

(ii) **Adaptations:** Adaptations are the ways in which people perceive, behave and feel about themselves and their environment. The terms further describes people's ability to adjust to different environments and social surroundings. Positive adaptations can lead to people being perceived as positive and good. Negative adaptations can lead to people being unable to function in their immediate environment and to develop a negative view of themselves. This concept is important for the research study as positive adaptation has a bearing on the health and well-being of social work students. The concept of adaptation highlights the importance

28

of being flexible and adaptable within the academic environment and thus being able to overcome many adversities.

(iii) **Life stressors:** Life stressors are stressors that individuals experience that are out of their control and hinder them from functioning optimally. These life stressors can range from personal stressors to environmental stressors and/or academic stressors. In addition, Carelse (2018) notes that life stressors vary from person to person, and each individual handles these stressors differently. This research study reveals many of the social work students' life stressors and how these stressors affected their health and well-being personally and academically.

(iv) **Stress:** Related to life stressors, stress may be defined as the internalised emotion an individual experiences as a result of external events. Over time, the suppression of stress and lack of positive outlets could lead to negative outcomes for individuals. Carelse (2018) states that the social work field is often stressful, as social workers are under pressure and must manage high caseloads with limited resources. In addition, many social work students experience high levels of stress owing to the pressures of academia and having to balance the many demands of their personal and academic lives.

(v) **Coping resources:** Coping resources are the ways in which an individual manages their stressful circumstances. These resources could either be negative or positive, depending on the nature of the individual's immediate environment (the microsystem) and their external environment (the mesosystem). This concept highlights the importance of being able to identify the different positive coping resources that are available and accessible to social work students.

(vi) **Belonging or relatedness:** Belonging or relatedness refers to the relationships an individual has with others that form part of their individual ecological system. These relationships provide

29

the individual with a sense of support and a sense of belonging. This concept is important for the research study as it draws attention to the different support systems available to social work students, and how these support systems can work together to the benefit of the social work students' health and well-being.

(vii)   **Mastery or competence:** Mastery or competence refers to the willingness that an individual has to actively change their environment. This willingness provides the individual with motivation to do better; to master a particular skill or situation and thus change their environment or situation to their liking. This concept highlights the important role that the selected university plays in ensuring that social work graduates are healthy and "whole", so that they have the motivation to strive for mastery of their various challenges. Social work students who are supported to strive for mastery or competence will eventually become social workers who can provide communities with positive guidance and help them devise solutions to their problems, doing so with enthusiasm.

(viii)   **Self-esteem:** Self-esteem can be described as a positive view of one's self. The individual's degree of self-esteem influences the way they conduct themselves in different social settings. If social work students have high self-esteem, they are more likely to perform better academically and have a positive outlook on life. If they have low self-esteem, they are more likely to display behaviour that conveys helplessness, to have little sense of direction and to perform poorly academically. Thus, becoming aware of the activities and situations that boost their self-esteem is necessary for social work students, who will be required to help impart this quality to their clients in the working world.

(ix)   **Independence:** Independence refers to an individual's ability to make sound decisions on their own and to take responsibility for their actions. Even though the operations of a university

30

allow many students to practise independence, lack of structure and opportunities could lead students to feeling disempowered and directionless.

(x)   Habitat: Habitat refers to the physical surroundings of an individual, such as their home, school and/or workplace. These surroundings play a vital role in the functioning of individuals and how they are perceived by others. Because many students are first-generation students (for example, the first individuals in their families to attend university), these students could be perceived as entitled or somehow better than others. The current research is important in this regard, as it highlights the many challenges that students face in their various habitats; not only at university but in their homes, too.

These ten concepts were instrumental in assisting the researcher to understand the social work students who formed the participants in this study, enabling the researcher to identify the various elements in the students' different systems, and allowing a nuanced understanding of experiences of students in relation in each system and the relationships between the systems.

2.7.4 Criticism and Limitations of EST

Paat (2013) states that there are limitations with EST, as it does not explicitly state the nature of the effect that the different systems have on children's development. Paat (2013) contends that if there is a disconnection between a child and a particular system, this does not always have a negative effect on the child's development. This observation contrasts with Bronfenbrenners' (1992) theoretical assumption.

Other criticism of the EST is that the theory is too broad and does not assist with particular interventions that may be needed in any of the systems (Darling, 2007). Darling (2007) also argued that it is challenging to evaluate the efficacy of the theory, since at times it views children as objects, failing to consider the child's developmental stages. In addition, the theory does not recognise that there is no standard for what may be considered "normal".

31

Guy-Evans (2020) questioned the practicality of EST, stating that even though social service practitioners have been using the model for decades, it is difficult for researchers to find a relationship between EST and the psychological development of individuals. Guy-Evans (2020) contends that all individuals function differently and that poorly functioning systems do not always negatively affect an individual's development. Paat (2013) concurs, pointing out that although some individuals allow negative aspects of one or another system to hinder their personal development, this is not the same for all individuals; some choose to rise above their circumstances and develop into well-rounded individuals.

Despite these criticisms, this theoretical framework is important for the overall research topic because it sheds light on the influence of various environments on the individual, recognising that the individual is shaped by their family, community and wider society (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided an understanding of why the current research is important, revealing that limited research has been conducted on this topic. This chapter has nevertheless revealed some in-depth information on the findings of studies conducted amongst the general student population, which reveal that students are a highly stressed cohort. It was important to review the literature in order to guide the research process and to make sense of the findings.

The literature review has examined the conceptual framework that underpins this study, showing the importance of Bronfenbrenner's (1992) EST and the ten concepts that are central to it. An understanding of this theory is necessary for understanding the three constructs that form the focus of this study, namely health, well-being and support. These constructs are germane to an understanding of the optimal functioning of students, and, as the literature review reveals, they have been understudied in the context of South African social work students. The researcher has thus established that there is a gap in previous studies on the health and well-being of South African social work students specifically.

32

The theoretical framework, as discussed in some detail, has provided a foundation for understanding the topic and for contextualising the findings of the study. The different systems involved in EST and the ten concepts pertaining to it were important for understanding and interpreting the findings.

In the following chapter, Chapter 3, the researcher discusses the methodological processes followed in terms of data collection and analysis to obtain rich, thick findings.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology is defined by Creswell (2013) as the plans and procedures for research, consisting of steps involved in data collection, analysis and interpretation. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the rationale for the methodological choices made in addressing the research aim, question and objectives. The aim of the study was to explore and describe the perceptions and experiences of social work students at a selected university regarding their health and well-being and the support they needed and received. Therefore, the relevant research question was the following: What are the perceptions and experiences of social work students in a selected university regarding their health and well-being, and the support they need and receive? The study had two objectives, namely:

1. To explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students at the selected university regarding their health and well-being, including the physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions.

2. To explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students regarding the support they needed and used at the specific university.

To achieve the research objectives, the researcher used the qualitative approach because in a qualitative study, researchers gather in-depth data to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. In addition, the researcher was able to listen to the participants' opinions and experiences in relation to the topic. The research objectives and the qualitative approach led the researcher to use a phenomenological research design to further explore the participants' narratives, as the researcher wanted to focus purposively on the emerging essentials of the topic. In this chapter, the researcher outlines and discusses the research approach, the research design, the sampling method, data collection method and

34

data analysis method used in this study. Lastly, the researcher discusses the study's validity and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) define the research philosophy as how the researcher views the world. The researcher's worldview affects the nature of their study and the choices they make regarding the research approach, design and method (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). According to Creswell (2013), there are four main research philosophies: Post-positivism, Transformative, Constructivism and Pragmatism.

3.2.1 Post-positivism

According to Phillips and Burbules (2000), post-positivism is often used when studies are experimental and/or scientific (ie, rooted in traditional science). Phillips and Burbules (2000) assert that post-positivist researchers start their study with a test theory; they then collect their data which either supports or disproves their initial theory. Hammersley (2013) states that post-positivism is closely linked to the quantitative research approach as it is concerned with quantities and numbers rather than qualitative data and rich descriptions. The researcher decided against this philosophy because the study was focused on the in-depth perceptions and experiences of participants using their own narratives.

3.2.2 Constructivism

Mertens (2010) explains that constructivism is closely linked to the qualitative research approach. Mertens (2010) and Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) state that researchers use constructivism when their research is based on participants' understanding of the world in which they play an active role. Lincoln et al. (2011) state that constructivism focuses on the participants' views on a particular topic; when participating in the research, they are asked broad, open-ended questions to yield qualitative data. Creswell (2013) adds that researchers must often reflect on their own worldviews and backgrounds and

35

ensure that they do not influence the data received from their participants. Based on the research aims and topic, the researcher identified constructivism to be the most suitable philosophy for the research study. The constructivism philosophy allowed the participants to reflect on their personal thoughts and experiences. The researcher asked the participants broad, open-ended questions to allow them to reflect and provide the required feedback.

3.2.3 Transformative

Mertens (2010) states that the transformative research philosophy focuses on political change and agendas for action. Mertens (2010) and Creswell (2013) further state that researchers using the transformative philosophy often use social issues as the focal point of their study. The transformative research study seeks to provide a voice for marginalised groups that could possibly benefit from the outcome of the research. The focus of this philosophy did not meet the key requirements of this study.

3.2.4 Pragmatism

According to Creswell (2013), researchers use the pragmatic philosophy to focus on an issue, using many different research methods to understand the research problem. According to Morgan (2007), this is closely linked with the mixed methods approach. Morgan (2007) states that the benefit of the pragmatic philosophy is that the researcher can use different approaches and a vast variety of data collection methods to benefit the outcome of their study. In this study, the researcher chose not to use this philosophy as it would not address the study's aims and objectives.

3.3 Research Approach

Creswell (2013) asserts that the selection of a research approach should be based on the nature of the research study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) state that the researcher should consider their plans and procedures for their research study, identifying their data collection methods, how they will analyse their data, and the research design most suited to their topic. Based on decisions made at this stage, the

researcher arrives at the most suitable research approach for their study. There are three different research approaches; namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed approaches, all related to the philosophy chosen in the previous section. Figure 3.1 shows the four research philosophies and the research approach suited to each.

Figure 3.1: The relationship between research philosophies and research approaches

Table 3.1 shows the two approaches that the researcher did not select, with reasons for the decision.

Table 3.1: Research approaches not selected

Approach	What this is	Decision
Quantitative approach	Quantitative research is related to post-positivism and is used when researchers want to measure variables to examine relationships (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative research uses close-ended questions and structured interviews or surveys to collect data (Watson, 2015; Geoffrey & David, 2005). Watson (2015) adds that quantitative research is normally used by researchers to determine patterns and trends and to verify measurements related to their research studies.	The researcher could not select this approach as this approach is related to post-positivism and would have yielded the in-depth data required.
Mixed approach	Mixed methods involve both quantitative and qualitative data and are used in studies making use of a pragmatic philosophy. Creswell (2013) states that a mixed-method approach is best for researchers when they want to determine more than one variable in their study. According to Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark and Smith (2011), researchers use this method to strengthen their data by ensuring that they obtain both quantitative and qualitative data.	The researcher could not select this approach as this approach is related to pragmatism rather than constructivism.

Sources: Creswell (2013); Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark and Smith (2011); Geoffrey and David (2005); Watson (2015).

37

3.3.1 The Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is related to both constructivist and pragmatic philosophies. It focuses on the experiences, narratives and perceptions of the individual, making use of unstructured or semi-structured individual in-depth interviews or group discussions as a way of collecting data (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2013). Kuper et al. (2008) contend that the important qualitative questions usually begin with "how", "why" and "what". These sorts of questions make the interaction between the participant and the researcher more intense, and the answers to the questions become both broader and deeper, enabling a better understanding of the participants' individual experiences.

3.3.2 The Selection of the Qualitative Approach

Based on the research question, the researcher believed that the qualitative approach was most suited to the nature of the research study. According to Kuper et al. (2008), collecting data for qualitative research involves direct interaction with participants. This was important for the research study because the study was based on eliciting the personal experiences of individual social work students at a selected university. Therefore, qualitative research was more suited than quantitative research, since in qualitative research the information obtained is more in-depth, extensive and insightful (Kuper et al., 2008). The researcher conducted unstructured interviews with open-ended questions with all her participants, ensuring that the participants felt comfortable reflecting at some length about their lived experiences and personal views. The researcher also chose the qualitative approach as it allowed her to have in-depth discussions and conversations with the participants about their lives.

3.4 The Research Design

A research design is the strategy that researchers use to ensure that their study is clear, reasonable and addresses the research problem (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013:42) lists five research designs from which researchers may choose. (Also see seminal writing on this by Corbin and Strauss, 2007; Giorgi,

2009; and Stake, 1995). These are the narrative design, the grounded theory design, ethnographic design, phenomenological design and interpretive phenomenological design. Table 3.1 lists and describes the three designs that were found to be unsuitable for this research.

Table 3.2: Qualitative designs that were eliminated

Narrative	According to Clandinin (2006), researchers use this design to study the lives of their participants. The researcher requests their participants to elaborate on the stories of their lives and in return, the researcher retells the story as a narrative while also making use of the researcher's own narrative.
Grounded theory	According to Charmaz (2006), researchers use grounded theory in qualitative studies to collect data on the processes, actions and interactions of the participants. Charmaz (2006) adds that researchers do not confine themselves to one specific method because of the great variety of data that needs to be collected.
Ethnography	With this design, researchers study the shared patterns that emerge in participants' behaviours, language and actions. The data is often based on interviews and on the personal observations of the researcher. This process occurs over a prolonged period of time (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

Sources: Charmaz (2006); Clandinin (2006); Corbin & Strauss (2007).

The narrative design focuses on participants' narratives, but also makes use of the researcher's personal narrative. Grounded theory focuses on all aspects of the participants and adds these aspects into the data collection process. Ethnography studies the behaviour, actions and language of the participants over an extended period of time. The two objectives of the current research study are to explore the health and well-being of social work students and to explore the essential support needs of social work students. None of the above designs would have allowed the researcher to achieve her two main objectives, as none of the above designs were reasonably related to achieving such an aim.

3.4.1 Phenomenological Design

Using a phenomenological design, researchers describe the lived experiences of their participants by conducting in-depth interviews using open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013). The roots of the design

can be traced to the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). He is considered the founding father of phenomenology, having established a school of phenomenology. Husserl (2012) states that phenomenology is based on "academic disciplines and describes human-beings' experiences". A phenomenological design seeks to uncover the essential meaning of the experiences of participants and to reveal authentic data based on participants' narratives. Giorgi (2012) further states that the term phenomenology means "description" in research. Giorgi (2012) states that there are two different types of phenomenological studies: descriptive and interpretive.

Table 3.3: Types of phenomenological design

Descriptive phenomenological design	Interpretive phenomenological design
In descriptive phenomenological studies, researchers put their assumptions aside so that they do not affect the data, the participants or the overall study. In this way the researcher attempts to remain true to the data.	In interpretive phenomenological studies, researchers do the opposite of what they do in descriptive phenomenology. They do not put their assumptions aside, as they believe their own experiences play an important role in the research study.

Sources: Giorgi (2012); Qutoshi (2018).

3.4.1.1 Data collection methods using the phenomenological design: Qutoshi (2018) states that in phenomenological studies, researchers gather information from their participants by conducting interviews, observing their non-verbal language, holding discussions and/or running focus groups. All these data collection methods might be suitable to the researcher's study, dependent on the research questions and objectives. Qutoshi (2018) further explains that gathering data from the participants using the above methods allows researchers to understand the research phenomena from the point of view of their participants.

3.4.1.2 Making sense of and interpreting the data: Qutoshi (2018) urges researchers to remain objective when conducting research studies and gathering data from their participants when they use a descriptive phenomenological design, and especially when analysing the data. Purwaningrum,

40

Hanurawan, Degeng and Triyono (2019) stipulate that researchers should not analyse or explain their findings, but rather describe the lived experiences of their participants so that the participants' narratives speak for themselves and usher in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Giorgi (2012) adds that in phenomenological studies, researchers are not required to have a large sample of participants; what is important is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. According to Giorgi (2012), in phenomenological studies, the narratives of the participants are more important than the quantity of the participants. However, researchers need to ensure that they are skilled interviewers and can describe the participants experiences exactly the way the participants convey them.

3.4.2 Phenomenology as Choice of Design

The researcher identified the interpretive phenomenological research design as most suitable to this study. The research study is based on the participants' personal lived experiences at the selected university. The phenomenological design made it possible for the researcher to use unstructured interviews with open-ended questions to collect their personal experiences. The researcher asked the participants three broad, open-ended questions to collect crucial information. The researcher did not want to make use of a series of semi-structured questions to guide the participants, but rather wanted the participants to feel completely free to relate their experiences in their own way and at their own pace.

3.5 Research Population and Sampling

Taherdoost (2016)) describe sampling in qualitative research as selecting a number of participants so that one is able to conduct the research. Taherdoost (2016)) further state that sampling is an important process as it influences the outcome and findings of the research study. According to Taherdoost (2016) there are four types of sampling that researchers may use to select members of their research population. For this research study, the researcher's population was all undergraduate social work

41

students at a selected university. The researcher had to ensure that participants were sampled in a way that ensured that they were representative of the population and wanted to participate in the research study for the contribution that they could potentially make.

3.5.1 Research Population

Lopez and Whitehead (2013) refer to population in research as a collective or total number of objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications (see also Polit & Beck, 2004). Lopez and Whitehead (2013) explain that a population comprises individuals who are of interest in a research study, whereas sampling refers to the process of selecting members of that population (individuals of interest). The researchers' population for the current study was social work students from all five-year levels at the DoSW at a specific university. It was necessary to sample the population for the research study because it enabled the researcher to reach a section (a sample) of the population and explore the topic with a manageable number of subjects.

3.5.2 Research Setting

According to Anderson (1993), the selected university was known as a derogatory term during the apartheid era (also see Dykes, 2014). The university was established by the government of the time to win the support of the Coloured people in the Western Cape Province and to create a division between the Coloured people and other indigenous African people. According to Anderson (2003), in 1982 the university attempted to change this narrative and became the first tertiary institution in South Africa that diverted from having a racial admissions criterion, admitting all people who wished to study there. Anderson (2003) adds that over the years, the university has become known as a multi-racial university which welcomes all prospective students, advocating for racial equality.

3.5.3 Research Sampling Strategies

According to Taherdoost (2016) in qualitative studies, non-probability sampling allows a researcher to select a specific section of the population based on the research approach and objectives of the study. Qualitative researchers commonly use non-probability sampling rather than probability sampling, where all members of the population have a statistically equal chance of being selected to participate in the study (Alvi, 2016). Qualitative researchers may use one (or more) of the four common non-probability sampling methods. These are convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling and theoretical sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). Figure 3.2 shows the two main types of sampling – probability and non-probability – and the four methods that are used in each type.

| Probability Sampling Strategy | • Simple random
• Systematic
• Stratified
• Cluster |
| Non-probability Sampling Strategy | • Convenience
• Purposive
• Snowball
• Theoretical |
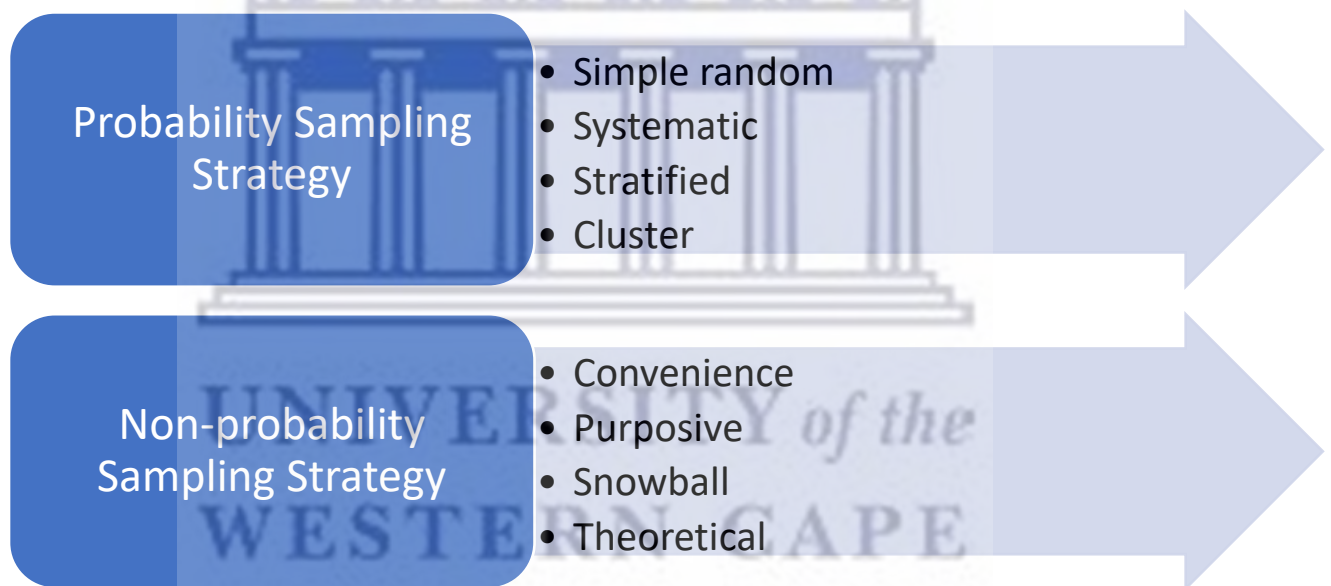
Figure 3.2: Sampling strategies and methods

In this research study, the researcher used two sampling methods that form part of non-probability sampling – snowball sampling and purposive sampling. One main inclusion criterion defined who would be suitable to participate in the study.

43

3.5.3.1 Snowball sampling: Snowball sampling is used when a researcher contacts potential participants to be involved in the research study and each one recommends another potential participant (Coyne, 1997). Taherboost, (2016)) describe snowball sampling as networking, because the researcher contacts one participant and depends on this participant to connect the researcher with other individuals in their network. The disadvantage of this method is that the researcher has to rely on the participants for referrals to other potential participants. The researcher chose this sampling method as it allowed participants the freedom to decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the research study. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to allow for networking amongst social work students.

3.5.3.2 Purposive sampling: According to Taherboost (2016) purposive sampling is used to obtain in-depth findings, as the sample usually comprises people who are experts (whether formally or informally) in the research topic in which they are participating. The researcher establishes criteria for inclusion in the sample based on people's knowledge, age, gender or profession, amongst other possible kinds of criteria. The researcher needs to ensure that the participants meet the criteria to achieve the objectives of the study. The main criterion for the current research study was that the sample had to comprise undergraduate social work students at the selected university. The researcher could not interview other undergraduate students as the focus was specifically on social work students, not all students.

3.5.3.3 Inclusion criteria: The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling methods to recruit the sample, partially in order to allow the participants to decide on their own whether or not they wished to participate in the study. Potential participants were checked to confirm that they had the characteristics that the researcher was looking for to achieve the objectives of the study and to obtain rich, thick quotes. The inclusion criteria were that participants had to be current social work students who were willing to participate, able to articulate their experiences and opinions, and having had an experience of needing and asking for support services at the selected university. In line with the chosen design, the researcher attempted to ensure sampling for representativeness in terms of gender, race, culture and class,

44

but the researcher found that complete diversity was not possible to achieve because of the challenge of recruiting appropriate participants. There was a great deal of reluctance to participate in the study and snowball sampling delivered participants who were closely associated with the initial volunteer participant (see Section 3.5.5). Therefore, most participants were Coloured females.

3.5.4 Sampling Size and Data Saturation

The researcher targeted ten participants; however, seven eventually participated in this phenomenological study. The researcher stopped recruiting participants after interviewing the seventh as at that time, data saturation appeared to have been reached. Fusch and Ness (2015) state that in phenomenological studies, the researcher uses probing questions with the participants to ensure that the data collected is authentic and comprehensive. Fusch and Ness (2015) add that phenomenological studies are different from other studies in that most other designs make use of structured parameters and guidelines. The small sample in the current study did not detract from its validity as the in-depth interviews ensured optimal understanding of the perceptions and experiences of social work students. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) state that to achieve data saturation, researchers need to ensure that they have collected enough data for their research study and that further information is no longer required.

3.5.5 Sampling Procedures

The researcher used her network, contacting a colleague in the Department of Social Work to request cooperation in the recruitment of social work students as participants. The colleague provided the researcher with the potential participants' email addresses after obtaining their permission to provide the researcher with this information. With the prior permission of the registrar of the university, the researcher then contacted the potential participants via their student email addresses. The researcher provided the students with an information sheet on the study, a consent form and instructions on how to sign the consent

45

form. The researcher further stated that only students that were interested in participating should complete the necessary documentation.

The researcher received feedback from only three participants. The researcher then followed up with the three participants to find out whether their classmates or friends in other study levels would be interested in participating in the study. The researcher eventually settled on seven participants, who ranged from the ECP level to the fourth-year level. Data saturation was reached with these seven participants.

3.5.6 Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown Rules and Effects on the Study

Owing to Covid-19 protocols, the researcher could not conduct interviews face-to-face with the participants. According to Pragholapati (2020), the severity of the virus meant that economies across the world almost shut down as governments required businesses and institutions to close. This lockdown affected businesses, tourism, and all institutions, including learning institutions. Citizens all over the world were asked to remain in their households and not go out unless absolutely necessary (Pragholapati, 2020). Under these conditions, interviews had to be conducted telephonically. The snowball sampling method was ideal in the circumstances, since there were initially insufficient volunteers for the research study.
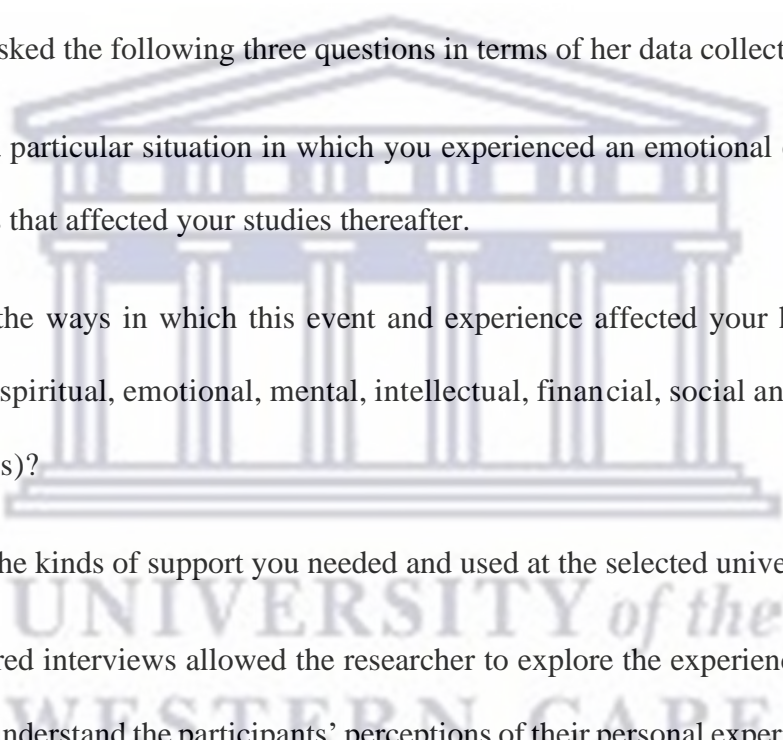
3.6 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Phenomenological research studies make use of a variety of methods to gather data. According to Chan, Fung and Chien (2013), phenomenological studies may include interviews, conversations, participant observation, active research, focus meetings, and an analysis of diaries and other personal texts to collect data. The researcher used the accepted unstructured interview format to obtain data, in which participants were asked open-ended questions.

3.6.1 Unstructured Interviews

Open-ended questions were used in interviews to understand the experiences of the participants. Cater, Machtmes and Fox (2013) state that when researchers interview participants in phenomenological

studies, they should not have a structured (nor even a semi-structured) interview schedule. Instead, interviews should be unstructured and the researcher should ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions for clarification and probing for further detail. Englander (2012) advises researchers using phenomenological methods to limit themselves to asking at most two main questions, with follow-up questions based on those two questions. The first question should be for the participant to describe a particular situation that relates to the research topic of the study; the second question should be about the effect this situation had on their life. The researcher added a third question focused on support. The researcher therefore asked the following three questions in terms of her data collection tool:

(i)   Describe a particular situation in which you experienced an emotional event(s) that occurred on campus that affected your studies thereafter.

(ii)   What are the ways in which this event and experience affected your health and well-being (physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions)?

(iii)   What are the kinds of support you needed and used at the selected university?

The unstructured interviews allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of the participants in some depth and to understand the participants' perceptions of their personal experiences. The researcher probed participants' responses to gain further understanding of their experiences and their effects, and to identify links between their experiences and the objectives of the research study. It was difficult for the researcher to observe the non-verbal cues, since interviews were telephonic. Nonetheless, some non-verbal cues were noted.

47

3.6.2 Interview Procedures

Because of Covid-19 protocols, the researcher could not conduct interviews face-to-face with the participants. Therefore, the researcher conducted interviews with the participants via voice calls, recording each with the permission of the participants. The participants had already informed the researcher that because of their financial struggles, they were unable to purchase data for video calls. That was when the researcher requested permission to contact the interviews via telephone. The researcher requested that the participants remain seated in a quiet room and ensure that they would not be interrupted for the duration of the interview. After each interview, the researcher transcribed it. Interviews ranged in duration from 30 to 45 minutes. In addition to audio-recording the interviews, the researcher made handwritten notes during each interview about the important points that participant was making. All interviews followed a similar process:

(i) Beginning phase: Before each interview, all participants had received an information sheet on the study and a consent form to sign, with instructions on how to sign it. Once signed, all participants emailed the consent forms to the researcher. The researcher started each interview by introducing herself and the topic and purpose of the study, as presented in the information sheets. The researcher confirmed that the participants were comfortable with the interview being recorded. In addition, the researcher ensured that she was in a quiet setting where she would not be disturbed, checking that the same was true of the participants.

(ii) Middle phase: This phase encompassed the key data gathering phase where the researcher posed the three open-ended questions. After participants responded to these questions, the researcher probed to gather more information.

(iii) Closing phase: At the close of each interview, the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions and if they were emotionally "intact", as many had reflected on emotional

48

experiences. The researcher would then thank the participants for participating in the study and say goodbye. Thereafter, the researcher would immediately transcribe the interview.

According to Giorgi (2012), phenomenology also presupposes four interrelated important practices in the collection of data, namely bracketing, and the use of intuition, analysis and description. Table 3.4 lists and defines these terms, showing how each was implemented in this study.

Table 3.4: Phenomenological practices during data collection

Practice	Explanation	Implementation
Bracketing	Bracketing is a process in which the researcher "brackets out" or boundaries herself from influencing the research data to avoid bias.	The researcher ensured that the literature review was brief and gave only general background information on the research topic. This was to ensure that the researcher was not influenced by previous research conducted.
Intuition	Intuition occurs when the researcher becomes aware of her influence in the study and opens up to the participants in a way that allows the participants to speak freely about their experiences.	The researcher had an advantage in this area as she is a qualified and practising social worker. This allowed the researcher to set aside her personal experiences and allow the participants to speak freely about their own experiences. She used her intuition in probing questions to gain more insight.
Analysis	Analysis is the process of decoding, categorising and organising the descriptive data collected from the participants.	The researcher transcribed the interviews from the participants in four columns; 1. Speaker; 2. Dialogue; 3. Non-verbal communication; and 4. Code. As the researcher identified key ideas in what each participant had said, she would highlight that section of the transcript, assigning a code and a general name to it. After completing this process with each transcript, she reduced the key codes to a smaller number by combining units of data and assigning sub-themes where necessary.
Description	Description is the process of reporting on participants' narratives in way that shows that they have been fully understood.	After identifying the common themes and sub-themes in participants' narratives, the researcher inserted the narratives as quotations in Chapter 4. This allowed the reader to identify direct links between the participants' narratives and the themes and sub-themes discussed.

Sources: Giorgi (2012).

Because of the serious and emotion-laden nature of the research topic, the researcher ensured that careful attention was given to specific non-verbal cues such as long periods of silence in narratives or

changes in the tone of participants' voices. The researcher furthermore reminded the participants that they were welcome to withdraw from the research study should they no longer feel comfortable with continuing, and that a referral could be done to a professional counsellor. All the participants chose to continue with the interview. However, the researcher often remained quiet to allow the participant to feel their emotions and to continue speaking when they were ready. Often, when the participant reported valuable information to the researcher, she would repeat that information back to the participant to ensure that she had correctly understood what the participant was saying, and to ensure that there was validity in the research study.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. A qualitative thematic analysis method is used for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns and themes within the data. It organises and describes the data set in detail. It also interprets various aspects of the research topic" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:77). Rossman and Rallis (2012) assert that coding is the process of organising the data, comprising pictures and texts, by writing a word representing a category in the margin. Thus, it involves considering all text data or pictures gathered during data collection, putting those texts or pictures into categories and labeling those categories with a term. The researcher used the eight steps for analysing data by Tesch (1990), found in Creswell (2013: 142-149). These are presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Data analysis using Tesch's eights steps

(1) Read the transcript carefully and make notes as you read.	The researcher organised and prepared the data collected by transcribing the interviews. The researcher would listen to the audio tape recording and transcribe what was said onto a document. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read through the transcripts, making notes in the margins about what the participant was saying in terms of relevance to the study and common trends that were emerging.
(2) Place the documents in order of relevance to the research study.	Since there were only seven participants and all narratives were valuable, the researcher placed the transcripts in numerical order.
(3) Make a list of all the themes you picked up when reading the transcript. Then put all the themes of the transcripts together.	When the researcher identified two or more common trends among transcripts, the researcher would colour code the information in the margin, highlighting the words of the participants. At the end, the researcher would collate the information gathered and assign themes to the data that was relevant to the research topic.
(4) Abbreviate all the themes and make a code for each one. Go back to the transcripts and next to the text where you found the theme, write the code.	The researcher coded the research data by hand and on the computer, giving each important section of text a code based on the main themes and sub-themes identified. The researcher then printed all the transcripts and then, by hand, established links between the important themes and sub-themes based on the words of the participants.
(5) Create descriptive words for your themes and categorise them. Look for relationships between your themes as well.	The researcher used colour codes (see Table 3.6) to identify each theme, with the same colour used for each theme's sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes were identified based on the key words of the participants.
(6) Abbreviate each theme and the code that relates to it, then put it in alphabetical order.	Having identified the main themes, the researcher examined how each could be broken down into sub-themes, ensuring that each sub-theme bore a strong link to participants' narratives.
(7) Put all the data together and perform a preliminary analysis.	The researcher submitted numerous drafts of her discussion on the themes to her research supervisor to ensure that the themes and sub-themes corresponded to what the participants were saying.
(8) Recode the data if necessary. This step is used to combine data into fewer themes which will be easier for the researcher to interpret and discuss.	The researcher had to complete the above-mentioned steps several times before she arrived at her final themes and sub-themes. This was to ensure that no valuable information received from the participants was lost, and also that none of the themes or sub-themes were repetitive.

Source: Creswell (2013).

Table 3.6 shows the colour coding that was done for the themes.

Table 3.6: Colour coding

COLOUR	THEME
OLIVE GREEN	THEME 1: ADJUSTMENTS TO SOCIAL WORK STUDIES
PURPLE	THEME 2: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STUDENTS' WELL-BEING
BLUE	THEME 3: THE FINANCIAL WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS
PASTEL ORANGE	THEME 4: SUPPORT SYSTEMS
DARK ORANGE	THEME 5: THE NEED FOR SELF-CARE

The researcher followed all of Tesch's eight steps (1990), an onerous and time-consuming task. The researcher had to verify her information countless times, constantly ensuring that participants' direct quotations were recorded correctly and that she understood clearly what the participants were saying. However, what was useful for the researcher was the fact that after every interview, she transcribed the interviews immediately, noting her impressions. This was to ensure that the non-verbal cues were not forgotten and that all interviews were accurately transcribed.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

According to Walker (2007), researchers need to anticipate ethical issues that might occur when they engage with their participants. This will assist the researcher to protect the participants, and shows that the researcher has conducted her research with integrity. Ethical clearance was obtained from the faculty's Higher Degrees Research Committee and the University's Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, while the Registrar and the Head of the DoSW granted permission to access students for the study. The study was conducted in strict accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) Code of Conduct for Research cited in Adams, Adeleke, Anderson, Bawa, Branson, Christoffels and Ramsay (2021). Observing the stipulations of the Act ensured that the researcher

complied legally with the requirements for processing participants' personal information and narratives and the management of this information after it had been obtained.

Therefore, the following ethical guidelines were adhered to by the researcher during the study (Israel & Hay, 2006):

Informed consent: According to Gunawan (2015), informed consent refers to the fact that the participants must understand the purpose of the research study and give their willing consent to participate in it. The researcher provided the participants with an information sheet via their student email addresses that explained the purpose of the study, who would have access to the information, what the participants' roles in the study were, the risks of participating in the research study and how they would benefit from participating in the research study. The participants were asked to sign a consent form indicating that they were aware of the study details, and consented to having their interviews recorded should they choose to participate. The researcher emailed all the participants instructions on how to sign the consent form digitally, and asked them to return the signed consent form to the researcher by email.

Confidentiality and anonymity: According to Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles (2008), anonymity in research means hiding participants' identities and keeping all their information anonymous and confidential throughout the research process and in the written study report. No participant's information may be divulged outside of the study parameters. The researcher ensured that the participants would not be mentioned by name, assigning each an identification number that would ensure that their identity remained private and confidential (Wiles et al., 2008). The researcher provided each participant with a unique number, ranging from SWS001 to SWS007.

Minimising risk: According to Smythe and Murray (2000), researchers need to ensure that all participants are protected from any physical and emotional harm while participating in the research study. To ensure the safety of the participants, the researcher informed the participants about what the research was about and made it clear to them that they had the right to withdraw from the research study at any

time should they wish to do so. Furthermore, because of the intensity of the topic discussed, the researcher informed the participants at the start of the interview that should they require counselling services, this was available; the researcher had prearranged appropriate counselling services and was able to refer participants to such a service if they requested it. Some of the participants declined the services as they did not need it; others were already receiving counselling from external organisations and did not see the need for additional counselling.

Debriefing with participants: According to Berg, Lune and Lune (2004), debriefing with participants is a short semi-structured interview that occurs after the research interview has been conducted. They argue that researchers cannot end their interaction with their participants without giving the participant a time to reflect on the discussion and debrief. In cases where the researcher felt that participants required further consultation with a social worker or any other professional, she made it known that she could refer them to a registered social worker for further intervention and counselling. The researcher further ensured she did not end any interview without first ascertaining if the participant was emotionally intact.

Storage of data: Data was stored on a password-protected laptop that only the researcher had access to, ensuring privacy. The UWC data management system was used to store data on a secure platform. Data will be kept for five years, after which hard copies will be shredded and soft copies deleted.

3.9 Research Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

According to Gunawan (2015), steps that ensure validation and trustworthiness occur throughout the process of research. Before the research even begins, the researcher should consider the procedures that will be taken for validating the findings. In qualitative research, validity means that the researcher is able to show that the findings are trustworthy. This is done by implementing certain procedures.

Seminal work by Lincoln and Guba (1985) has paved the way for all qualitative researchers, establishing four criteria for judging the levels of trustworthiness in qualitative studies. These are credibility, transformability, dependability and conformability, as discussed below.

Credibility: Credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants in the research. The researcher used direct quotes and made a verbatim transcript of her interviews with the participants. The researcher also recorded her own words used during the interview. Furthermore, the researcher followed the eight steps identified by Tesch (1990) to ensure that the information recorded from the participants was accurate.

Transferability: Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative studies can be transferred to other contexts or settings. It is a consideration that ensures that the research findings will be applicable to different contexts, and for this a detailed description is needed of the steps taken. To achieve this, the researcher ensured that the interviewing process was thoroughly described and that verbatim transcript and quotations were provided – the direct quotations can be seen in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the researcher described the demographic aspects of the participants to allow readers to understand the participants' cultural background, social context and political history, which affected not only the participants but the selected university, too.

Dependability: The traditional quantitative view of dependability is that it is a measure that allows readers of the research report to gain a thorough understanding of the methods used and their effectiveness. The researcher made use of an audit trail, which consists of a dissertation chapter dedicated to methodological aspects of the study and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the analysis process undertaken.

Confirmability: Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results may be confirmed or verified by others. The researcher documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. According to Chan, Fung and Chien (2013), self-reflexivity helps to ensure

55

confirmability. The researcher is required to reflect on their capabilities to provide effective analysis of the research (also see Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). This allows the researcher to identify their personal biases regarding the research topic. In this study, self-reflexibility was combined with the process of bracketing (see Section 3.6.2, Table 3.4). The researcher also ensured that there was a chain of evidence throughout her study to corroborate her findings.

Self-reflexivity and bracketing were particularly important in this study. These were implemented through certain steps, as shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Strategies for self-reflexivity and bracketing

(i) Strategy for Mental Preparation	The researcher is expected to reflect on the research topic. Chan et al. (2013) advise that researchers ask themselves questions to which their answers should be affirmative. The researcher asked herself if she was able to be "ignorant" about the research topic and the data collected, and if she wanted to learn more about the experiences of all social work students from their perspectives. The researcher had to ensure that before she delved into the study itself, she took a step back as a social work student and a social worker, and became instead neutral (in as far as possible) researcher.
(ii) Strategy for Deciding the Scope of the Literature Review	In this strategy, the research is required to do minimum research for the literature review. This is to ensure that there are limited influences from external sources. Chan et al. (2013) contend that when researchers conduct limited research on the research topic, they are better able to manage the preconceptions that the literature naturally gives rise to. The researcher ensured that she started with a basic literature review to identify gaps in the research topic. The literature review was completed after the researcher had completed the data collection and analysis. This process ensured that the researcher was able to interview the participants and analyse the data without any preconceptions.
(iii) Strategy for Planning Data Collection	In this strategy, researchers are recommended to conduct themselves in a manner that allows participants to be open and honest with the researcher and tell their personal experiences in a truthful manner. This allows the researcher to gain in-depth information regarding the study topic, as anticipated. The researcher had three set questions that were asked in the interviews. However, as the interviews progressed, the researcher would probe the participants for further information. The set questions allowed the researcher and the participants to remain on the research topic and not divert to new issues that might have been irrelevant. This strategy allowed the researcher to remain curious throughout the interviews, and to come up with natural and logical probing questions in the context of what had already been said.
(iv) Strategy for Planning Data Analysis	In this last strategy, the researcher had to analyse the data received to ensure trustworthiness. As mentioned, the researcher recorded the interviews with the participants, transcribed each interview and coded the important aspects that related to

	the research topic. The researcher ensured that this process was followed correctly and thoroughly.

Source: Chan et al. (2013).

The researcher had to ensure that before she embarked on this research study, she worked on possible biases (see self-reflexivity report in Appendix G) and analysed the data based only on what was presented to her and not on her personal experiences. This process was difficult, but the researcher's social work training was helpful, helping her to set everything aside and become curious about the experiences of the person being interviewed.

3.10 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter 3 has described the methodological processes followed to obtain accurate data and ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher provided reasons for why certain processes were followed, and why others could not be followed, highlighting the challenges encountered during the research. Various research approaches, designs and philosophies were discussed, and explanations were given for those that were selected for this study. Ethical considerations were discussed in detail.

The study was hampered by difficulties in recruitment of a range of participants who met the criteria for diversity. At the time of data collection, the researcher could not meet with the participants face-to-face owing to the strict lockdown rules and safety measures put in place by the national government. The researcher had to resort to interviewing the participants telephonically. This created a delay in data collection as many of the participants were not available at certain times. In this chapter, the researcher identified her own shortcomings and strengths. Completing this chapter was an exercise in self-reflexivity for the researcher, allowing her to gain further insight into the research study.

In the next chapter, the findings are presented and analysed in light of the literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This research study sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of social work students regarding their health and well-being at a selected university. Two objectives drove the data collection process; to understand the social work students' health and well-being and to understand their need for and use of support systems. A phenomenological research design was ideal for the attainment of these objectives. This design required the researcher to ask only three broad questions for the participants to explore, with probing questions asked where necessary. According to Connelly (2010), a phenomenologist needs to explore the lived experiences of the participants for the research study to achieve its objectives. The researcher should give the participants scope to tell their story in their own way and in their own time. The three broad questions posed to the participants were the following:

1. Describe a particular situation in which you experienced an emotional event(s) that occurred on campus that affected your studies thereafter.

2. What are the ways in which this event and experience affected your health and well-being (physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions)?

3. What are the kinds of support you needed and used at the selected university?

The chapter has the following key components. The first section presents the demographic profile of the participants, giving non-identifying information regarding who participated in the study. The second section presents the main themes and sub-themes that were contained in the participants' narratives, with their verbatim quotes. The researcher has framed the findings within a literature control of previous studies

and the theoretical model that underpins this study. The researcher concludes the chapter to highlight the significant findings and their value.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Participants

The main criteria set for the research was that the participants had to be social work students from any of the five-year levels registered for the undergraduate Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree or for the extended curriculum programme (ECP) in the DoSW at the selected university. These participants were furthermore required to be able to articulate their opinions and experiences and to have undergone an experience where they required and obtained support services. The researcher used a purposive snowballing sampling method to recruit willing participants. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown rules prohibited the researcher from approaching social work students face-to-face. Therefore, the researcher emailed all social work students after obtaining the necessary consent to do so. The researcher recruited seven participants from four year levels, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Distribution of participants across year levels

BSW year level	Type of programme	Number of participants
1st year	ECP	1
1st year	BSW	2
2nd year	Combined ECP/BSW	1
3rd year	Combined ECP/BSW	1
4th year	Combined ECP/BSW	2
		7 participants in total

Table 4.1 shows that participants were drawn from the two programme types under the social work degree, one of five years (ECP) and one of four years (BSW).

Table 4.2: Demographic profile of each participant

Participant number	Age	Gender	Social Work Programme
SWS001	24 years old	Female	1st year (BSW)
SWS002	23 years old	Male	4th year (ECP/BSW)
SWS003	21 years old	Male	3rd year (ECP/BSW)
SWS004	21 years old	Female	2nd year (ECP/BSW)
SWS005	51 years old	Female	1st year (ECP)
SWS006	56 years old	Female	4th year (ECP/BSW)
SWS007	44 years old	Female	2nd year (ECP/BSW)

Five participants identified themselves as females and two identified themselves as males. Two of the females were classified as youth, being between the ages 18 and 25; the other three females were 39 years or older. The two males were also youth aged 18 to 25. These statistics are further discussed in the next section.

Figure 4.1 shows the distribution in terms of gender and age for the participants as a cohort.
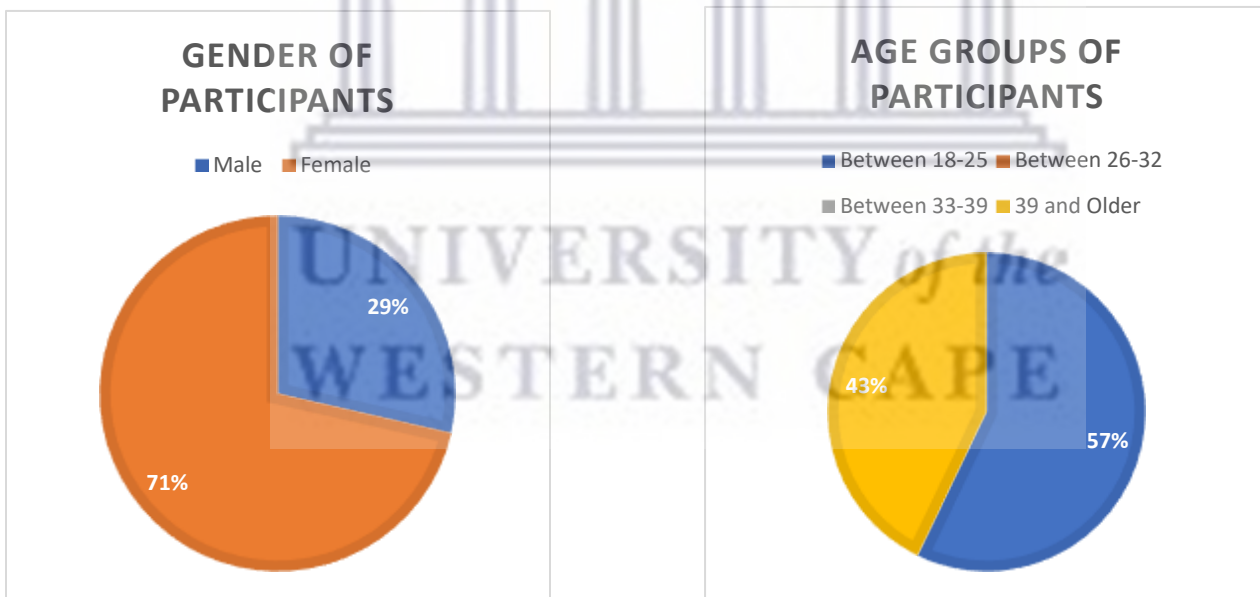
Figure 4.1: Demographic profile of participants

Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1 show that the majority of participants were female students (five out of seven participants); a slight majority (57%) were younger students (18-25 age group), generally and

traditionally thought to being age appropriate for undergraduate studies. The balance of 43% reflected a significant number of older students (3 out of 7).

The findings below reflect the perceptions and experiences of these participants and by no means infer an aggregate experience across all first-year students.

4.3 Key Findings: Themes and Sub-themes

The researcher identified five themes and eleven sub-themes from the data, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES	ECO-SYSTEMS THEORY
1. **Adjustments to social work studies**	1.1 Emotional preparation and self-reflection opportunities	Microsystems and Mesosystems
	1.2 The challenges of being a mature student	
2. **The impact of Covid-19 on students' well-being**	2.1 The effects of lockdown rules	Macrosystems and Technosystems
	2.2 E-Learning (online) experiences	
3. **The financial well-being of students**	3.1 Funding for studies vs living expenses	Macrosystems
	3.2 The cost and toll of travelling to and from campus	
4. **Support systems**	4.1 Peer support	Microsystems and Mesosystems
	4.2 Institutional and lecturer support	
	4.3 Family support	
5. **The need for self-care**	5.1 The implications of students' adverse childhood experiences	Microsystems
	5.2 Self-care and work-life balancing strategies	

The themes and sub-themes focused on aspects and obstacles that affect the health and well-being of students, and emerged from responses to the three main questions asked.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Adjustments to Social Work Studies

Many kinds of curriculum exist. Mitchell (2016) states that overall, the environment and personal influences of the student (including the institution itself) have an impact on the implementation of curricula at all levels. Theme 1 concerned the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) curriculum followed by

61

the selected university and the support that it provided to assist and guide the social work students. Two sub-themes, namely, emotional preparation and self-reflection opportunities, and the challenges of being mature students, emerged from participants' narratives.

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Emotional preparation and self-reflection opportunities

Collins and Van Breda (2014) contend that when students enter university immediately after secondary schooling, they are in their experimental phase of development. This phase affects their decision-making and choices in terms of relationships, conduct and commitment to studies. Dykes and Green (2015) state that huge adjustments have to be made, which creates a challenge for them in terms of managing their learning and lifestyle. This sub-theme emerged from information given on emotional preparation before entering university and on coping with the curriculum. The following are some of the verbatim responses.

I would say that uhm ... being, basically, being not an orphan but being without parents at this age and having to study full time and having to cover my own personal needs as an individual and having to pass all my academic modules. So I feel like ... there is never self-reflection in class or never something personal happening in class. I don't feel human in my Social Work class. I feel more like a robot ... you know, I was reflecting and thinking to myself that I am really grateful for the mind and heart that I have. But like ... what I realised is that me myself, as a person, as a young person ... I'm so broken and hurt and I'm dealing with a lot of things you know ... like I'm dealing, myself, you know ... I'm seeking help for myself from a psychological and spiritual and emotional point of view, you know, but, like, I'm only one of those people who, like, you know, who have like self-interest in myself. **[Participant 3]**

When you do go out, to the field ... the emotional preparation is key. I remember once in a report it was about what was your emotional preparation. But they (the department) should stress that every day. Like, I don't know if I must emotionally prepare myself or check myself

before I go into the field. Emotional preparation should be part of the helping process in Social Work. **[Participant 4]**

I think I am very aware of my issues. I think I also love connecting with people, that's why I'm getting a degree to practise this professionally and fulfil what I know I am able to do. But I am aware of my issues and, not resolve it, but to constantly work on yourself to at least deal with it in a better way, so that you do not do any harm to anyone else and yourself. **[Participant 5]**

Participant 3 noted that in lectures he does not get the opportunity to self-reflect, yet agrees that self-reflection is important, especially in social work practice. Participant 3 was quite profound about being disconnected from herself as a human being while in class. He also stated that students come from different social backgrounds which have an impact on the mindset for practice. Participant 4 confirmed that "emotional preparation is key" and added that emotional preparation should be part of the lecturer's daily routine with the students, to allow for thorough processing of their study material, both practically and theoretically. Participant 5 noted that her life experiences enabled her to become more self-aware and to practise self-reflection on her own without the assistance and guidance of her lecturers.

Mayfield (2008) describes the concomitant curriculum (one of seven types of curriculum) as one in which self-reflection is practised, creating a setting for students to explore their own autonomy. Furman, Coyne and Negi (2008) state that students have the capacity to self-reflect but that they become even better at self-reflection if it is consistently implemented in the classroom. Mulder and Dull (2014) contend further that learning institutions should promote self-reflection in the classroom as it can assist students to recognise their own biases and the diversity of the real world. Rooney, Rooney, Hepworth and Strom-Gottfried (2017) argue that when social work practitioners are open, honest, truthful and appropriate about their personal feelings and experiences to their clients, their clients (service users) reciprocate, which makes the intervention processes easier for everyone involved. Rooney et al. (2017) further add that social

workers often make use of self-awareness with their clients, which allows their clients to express how they feel, what they want and what they believe, and to understand their behaviours. In their research on alternative methods of self-reflection in and out of the social work classroom, Mulder and Dull (2014) found that when students are new to social work practice (or social work studies), it is difficult for them to understand the concept of self-reflection, but that it was important for students, as it would allow them to intervene and assist their service users without prejudice. Therefore, Mulder and Dull (2014) argue for the prudent use of self in practice, arguing that students should be well prepared for self-inquiry and the emotional consequences of such scrutiny.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: The challenges of being a mature student

Being a mature student amongst mostly younger students is not without its challenges, as mentioned by the participants. Graham (2015) states that adult education is offered to adults who are no longer in the schooling system but want to return to the educational system for further knowledge or for employment purposes. Giddens and Sutton (2021) therefore contend that it is important to create opportunities for adults to continue their educational journeys, as this improves their quality of life and contributes to the economy. However, being a mature student at a university has some unique challenges, as the quotes from the following students show.

They [the selected university] *don't worry if you 50 years old and the other is 20. You all sit at the same table. There is no leniency for age. I think they could have done something for us much beautiful older people … the terminology that they use is like out of the world … make it not so heavy for mature students.* **[Participant 7]**

You've got a lot of responsibilities like a house and children and a husband … okay, that is part of the package and you as the student knew what you are signing up for … I just still feel that they could bear those challenges in mind and not be so demanding in terms of submissions and attendance. Some of us are also trying to work part time to support our families.

64

I had to sell clothes over a weekend to support my family and was forced to submit most my assignments late because I just didn't have the time. **[Participant 6]**

Being an adult student, I must say ... first, it was difficult to connect because I felt we are not in it for the same reasons, because it is not easy, you know. I come home from university and I don't bring that life to my family, I don't think it's fair. And then I need to sort them out and then only to discover later the night that I have to still sit with my schoolwork. Whereas other students have all the time in the world. It hasn't been easy but thank God I'm getting through it thus far. I just need to maintain my healthy mindset for the next semester. **[Participant 5]**

From the above narratives, it appears that the older participants had not fully realised how substantial the academic workload would be and struggled with juggling their adult responsibilities with those of being a student. Consequently, they suggested that the academic programme be adjusted to meet their needs. For example, Participant 7 could not understand the terminology used in the class. Participant 7 also felt that her age was being disregarded and that preference was given to the younger students who were fresh out of high school and familiar with the current education system. Both Participants 5 and 6 acknowledged the difficulties of being full-time students while also having the responsibility of caring for families. Participant 6 pointed out that finding a balance between academia and personal life is important for success. She was aware that the academic programme in the selected university is a full-time programme, which prevents students from being fully employed and therefore affects their financial well-being as older family members.

Van Rhijn, Lero, Bridge and Fritz (2016) found in their study that mature students experience significantly more challenges at HEIs than younger students do. According to Van Rhijn et al. (2016) and Graham (2015), older students face various challenges such as external social responsibilities, social disconnect from their peers and the institution, and having to balance their different life roles. Graham

(2015) argued that it was evident that most HEIs have traditionally been established with younger students in mind.

In South Africa, most (if not all) HEIs implement a programme called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). According to Breier (2001), RPL allows students access to HEIs based on their past experiences instead of their credits or their qualifications. Osman (2003) similarly found that many academics struggled to engage with students who were previously employed in their fields but had to enroll at a university for extra qualifications. Both Breier (2001) and Osman (2003) recommended that HEIs focus on supporting and mentoring mature students.

A study by Dykes (2009) at the selected university found that students enrolled in the RPL programme often contributed to the lectures with their life experiences and embraced the learning opportunity. However, Dykes (2009) contended that students enrolled in the RPL programme often become lost and overwhelmed if they do not receive much-needed academic support. In Dykes's (2009) study, participants stated that their experiences as adults who had worked was not acknowledged at university and that they required assistance to help with adjusting to their unfamiliar environment. Based on the current research and the narratives from the research participants, it would appear that the selected university (or the social work programme) has not heeded these findings.

4.3.1.3 Theme 1 and EST: Micro- and Mesosystems

Brandell (2014) states that in the microsystem, an individual experiences many physical and emotional changes, influenced by their immediate environment. Over time, these emotions change and the environment broadens and changes. Christensen (2016) argues that a mature individual can compensate for the difficulties experienced at this earlier stage of life and appreciate different experiences, if they have a positive support system that allows them to behave appropriately in all circumstances. Brandell (2014) contends that according to Ecological Systems Theory, relationships operate in a circular way, which means that each system affects the functioning of all the other systems. In the narratives in

this study, the participants identified how they had to overcome various obstacles to be able to obtain a tertiary education. They noted that to be able to excel at their education, they required support from everyone involved in their individual ecological systems.

4.3.2 Theme 2: The Impact of Covid-19 on Students' Well-being

Theme 2 was about the role that Covid-19 played in terms of students' health and well-being. The theme recognised the impact of Covid-19 on learning institutions and student development. The researcher identified two sub-themes: The effects of lockdown and e-learning.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: The effects of lockdown rules

According to Pragholapati (2020), the severity of the coronavirus forced governments around the world to institute harsh lockdown regulations that effectively halted their economies as businesses and institutions closed. Pragholapati (2020) added that citizens had to remain in their homes and not venture out any more than absolutely essential. Most learning institutions were compelled to halt their face-to-face classes and resort to e-learning on online platforms. The respondents reported that these regulations had a strong impact on them

> *But I feel that I do miss the … being on campus physically. Because I'm the type of person when I don't understand, I would go to the lecturer and I would make them know that I don't understand and I would ask you until I understand.* **[Participant 7]**

> *In the beginning, I was very overwhelmed with Covid-19 and very fearful because should I get it what will my chances be but, I think … because I am psychologically sorted I am able to navigate my life, my family's life through this pandemic. … just a month ago I lost two close family members and one very close colleague of mine. The mental state of everyone around me is a concern to me. The community members come to me when they need someone to talk to, but now I have a submission … but I can't close the door on my neighbours.*

Then I end up submitting my assignments late and they (selected university) does not understand.

[Participant 6]

These two participants admitted that they struggled academically during the lockdown. Participant 7 stated that she was accustomed to physically approaching a lecturer when she did not understand something in the classroom setting, and that being able to do so was a challenge for her. Participant 6 acknowledged that the loss of her close relatives during the time of Covid-19 lockdown took a toll on her and she struggled to remain focused on her academics while also trying to manage her personal life. Participant 6 added that the selected university was not always mindful of her struggles especially during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Sahu (2020) conducted a study on the effect of the Covid-19 outbreak on students at a university in Jamaica and found that the global pandemic impacted students' learning and psychological health and well-being. Aucejo, French, Araya and Zafar (2020), whose study was conducted in USA, indicated that 13% of students were delayed with their graduation, 11% of students withdrew from their classes, 12% were planning to change their majors and 50% reported a decrease in their academic performance. In China, Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong and Zheng (2020) also found that almost 25% of students experienced anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic that stemmed from their living circumstances, financial constraints and relatives falling ill from the Covid-19 virus. Cao et al. (2020) concluded that people had to adapt to a new life during the Covid-19 outbreak and this adjustment affected their psychological well-being. Most importantly, Cao et al. (2020) found that during this time, students required more academic, emotional and financial support to continue with their studies. Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj, Tomaževič and Umek (2020) conducted a global study on the impact of Covid-19 on higher education students and found that even though many students' physical health was not jeopardised, there was a concern for their psychological health and well-being. Aristovnik et al. (2020) reported that almost 40% of their participants were suffering from anxiety, almost 46% of the participants reported

being bored and almost 20% of the participants reported feeling hopeless, which would continue if Covid-19 and the global lockdown prevailed.

Naidoo and Cartwright (2020) conducted a study in South Africa regarding the impact of Covid-19 on South African students in higher education. Naidoo and Cartwright (2020) state that many students in South Africa suffer from a variety of psycho-social issues, such as substance abuse, gender-based violence, poverty, unemployment, trauma, peer pressure and discrimination (to mention only a few). According to Naidoo and Cartwright (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic intensified the psycho-social issues that already existed for most students. In addition, even though student counselling services were available, facilitating these services during the pandemic was challenging for both students and staff. Mhlanga and Moloi (2020), who conducted a study on the digital transformation of education in South Africa, found that the South African educational system was forced to implement an alternative way of teaching at all levels of schooling. Mhlanga and Moloi (2020) state that although daily academic routines provided students with responsibilities, structure and safety, the implementation of alternative learning methods also provided students with self-control, discipline and time management challenges.

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: E-Learning (online) experiences

Fee (2013) defines e-learning as online-based learning that requires the use of an internet connection. Li and Masters (2009: 246) further define the "e" as "evolving, enhanced, everywhere, every time and everybody" and disregard the normal meaning of "e" in that context as "electronic". Participants had the following to say about their experiences of e-learning.

> *Online is a real … it's not a struggle, it's just confusing at times because now I need to Zoom and I have a problem with Zoom. … I am a dwanky* [stupid] *when it comes to technology.* **[Participant 7]**

> *The university said that they will give us data and a device. I have a device so I didn't apply for that but I applied for the data. It's been two months now and I still didn't receive*

my data. I'm not working, I must hustle to get data money so that I can do research and submit my assignments on time. **[Participant 3]**

The thing is ... now, with lockdown ... we not having the actual classes. It has become a bit of a challenge. Because you can't just ... you can't just ask the questions ... or you don't get the information, or the information isn't, like, explained to you. You can't also ask questions while you are busy listening to audios over lecture slides. And you can't just send a whole email with a lot of questions. Because, like, you feel like it would be a burden for the lecturer. This creates an emotional challenge. We have to have one-on-one. Like, uhm ... we need the experience of going to schools and then engaging with the children and the clients and we aren't doing that right now. I'm submitting reports without physically engaging with clients or conducting group sessions. This creates so much anxiety because once you go into the field, you've never worked with people so now like... how is this gonna work? **[Participant 2]**

The e-learning phenomenon clearly raised a number of challenges for these participants. Participant 7 reported that logging onto the required online platforms for her lectures was a struggle as she was unfamiliar with the platform. Participant 2 reported that he was uncomfortable asking for assistance while using the online platforms to communicate with his lecturers. Participant 2 reiterated the importance of face-to-face learning and how, especially in the social work field, face-to-face guidance would assist to alleviate his anxiety. Participant 3 reported that even though he knew how to operate the online platforms, it was difficult for him to access them because of his lack of resources. Participant 3 stated that the selected university informed all students to register for data so that they could have internet access; however, no data had been received and he had been forced to provide his own just to keep up.

In their international study spanning 62 countries, Aristovnik et al. (2020) found that most universities resorted to e-learning during the Covid-19 pandemic (also see Ellis, Ginns & Piggott, 2009). Aristovnik et al. (2020) stated that the use of e-learning should not have been an unknown phenomenon

70

to many universities and that lecturers and students should have been able to effectively use the e-learning experience fully during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Abou El-Seoud, Taj-Eddin, Seddiek, El-Khouly and Nosseir (2014) conducted a study in Egypt and found that many non-Information Technology students found e-learning challenging, which is in keeping with the findings of this study. Interestingly, Aristovnik et al. (2020) found that African students, particularly from South Africa and Egypt, were found to be less satisfied with the online experience of learning than students from other countries were. Aristovnik et al. (2020) stated that this could be due to the lack of access to a stable internet connection, especially among students from poorer households.

Abou El-Seoud et al. (2014) encouraged students to engage with e-learning and increase their e-learning skills to fully optimise their own learning experiences. These authors further encouraged teachers and lecturers to reevaluate their course material so that it was more e-learning friendly for the students and familiarise themselves with e-learning skills so as to be able to present course material to students effectively. As far back as 2010, Nehme (2010) encouraged lecturers to be more aware of their students' situations and allow students to be open with them about their e-learning challenges and general anxiety. Nehme (2010) and Abou El-Seoud et al (2014) stated that e-learning should not be an isolated learning experience.

4.3.2.3 Theme 2 and EST: Macrosystem and techno system

As explained by Bronfenbrenner (1992), the macrosystem includes the values, cultures and laws that affect the individual and the other systems in Ecological Systems Theory. From the findings in Theme 2, it is clear that the global Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on participants' macrosystems, owing to the change in global and national laws and protocols which directly affected them academically and personally. Furthermore, the sixth system, the techno system, according to Milner et al. (2020), was particularly relevant to the participants, as access to online platforms for learning and levels of familiarity with these platforms determined how well they were able to keep up with studies during the pandemic.

71

The participants identified how the use of technology directly affected them during the global pandemic because of the unexpected and sustained use of e-learning technology and platforms.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Financial Well-being

Theme 3 was the impact of students' financial constraints on their peace of mind and ability to manage. Mensah (2019) argued that a lack of financial assistance and support can discourage prospective students from aspiring to higher education and exert pressure and anxiety on those who are studying. Two sub-themes emerged under this theme: funding for studies vs living expenses, and travelling to and from campus (pre-pandemic).

4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Funding for studies vs living expenses

Many factors affect the well-being of university students and financial constraints are a significant one. Cloete (2016) argued that the South African government was underfunding universities at the undergraduate level. Therefore, according to Cloete (2016), there is a severe shortage of skilled graduates because students (and their families) are unable to afford tertiary education. Previously, Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2015) conducted a study and found that government subsidies for universities had decreased from 49% to 40% in the ten years prior to their study, which had an impact on universities. Most were forced to increase their tuition fees from 24% to 31% over same ten-year period.

Participant had the following to say about the challenge of balancing payments for studies with living expenses.

> *So … being at university full time and having to cover all my needs by myself was like … not detrimental towards my studies but, uhm … it decreased my ability to excel on my studies, you know. I mean, to do better and to exceed my potential. So … then, like, ja, having to be unemployed and being a full time student … there is no, like, income besides your student stipend and your student stipend is really not enough to maintain your everything you need because like … if I had someone covering my food, for example, I know I would do much more better on*

university, you know. Because I'll have more time to read, more time to study, more time to focus on my studies but because I have to focus on a lot of things, for example money, it's like one of the main problems I need to focus on every day. So yes, it motivates me to do better but no, because it keeps me back a little, like … it restrains me from reaching my fullest potential.

[Participant 3]

I was awarded a bursary. It covered accommodation, travelling allowance, food. I just felt these policies addresses us marginalised women. However, unfortunately everything didn't work out like that because administrative side from the financial aid … really impacted on my self-esteem and ability of a student. They made me feel like a failure as a student because just presenting yourself at the financial aid office, you get talked down to, you're not treated on an equal basis and it's like begging. I have a landlord knocking on the door because you haven't paid for 5/6 months' rent, you are in and out of the financial aid offices and they cannot tell you anything. And you know in that time I studied, I basically moved seven times. And the reason why I moved was because I could not pay the rent, uhm … and by the time I finally got the money, the landlord and myself relationship had broken down because now obviously in my area people rented their homes because it is an income to them and they cannot wait 5/6 months. So for me,… they wasn't upfront where they said, "Hey look, you gonna have to wait for your money." So now you have to hustle for food and stuff, sometimes I had to go do some second hand selling so that I can give the landlord something so that he can just stay away from my door. So then tell me how do I sit and concentrate on my assignment when I as the sole provider for my family had to see to the children? Basic needs as well as seeing that there is a roof over my head, so this impacted a lot. Uhm … by the time they finally paid out you had so much debt that you had to pay putting you in the very same position with a result that … at the end of the day … now in my final year … I am now in so much debt that I owe the university because most times I would say

73

what is more important? At the end of the day, the most pressing need was the survival of my family and then I couldn't give my assignments in on time which put a bad reflection on me as a person to the lecturers. **[Participant 6]**

From the narratives, it was clear that participants experienced the effects of having inadequate financial resources for their needs while at university. Participant 3 reported that because of his financial constraints, it was difficult for him to fully focus on his academics. He felt that he had the potential to excel academically, because despite the financial instability he was doing exceptionally well at the selected university, but felt that he could be doing better if he were less worried about finances. Participant 3 also stated that he depended on the financial support of the university through a bursary, but that it was not always sufficient. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 6, who struggled when the bursary did not pay her on time, with the result that she went into debt and struggled to pay her rent. She was now facing the dire consequences of this.

Gärling, Kirchler, Lewis and Van Raaij (2009) argue that students who want to abandon their studies because of financial struggles often display symptoms of poor mental health, poor social functioning and a lack of self-esteem. Furthermore, Gärling et al. (2009) state that those students who hang onto their studies despite the financial strain are found to suffer worse mental health and emotional challenges that those who leave. Crockford, Hordósy and Simms (2015) conducted a study at a university in England, where many students were compelled to work part-time while studying. Crockford et al. (2015) found that having to work while studying prevented students from being able to fully engage with their studies and enjoy their student experience.

In a study at a South African university, Cele (2014) found that insufficient financial assistance received from government or other funding sources affected university students. Reinforcing the point made by Participant 6, Cele (2014) states that students are greatly affected by extended delays in bursary

pay-outs, which caused many to have nowhere to sleep and no money for food. As a result, these delays caused students to contemplate whether or not they should complete their studies.

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: The cost and toll of traveling to and from campus

This sub-theme focused on the financial and emotional toll of travelling to and from the university to the family home for those who were not accommodated in a student residence on campus. Stark, Singleton and Uhlmann (2019) conducted a study in Vienna, Austria, and found that students' moods and general alertness were affected by the different methods of travelling to and from school. Addington and Yablon (2011) found that female students were particularly fearful of using public transport when travelling to and from school.

I live in Paarl [about 50 km from the university]. *So I have to travel all the way to campus every day. So that is a challenge but, uhm … in my first year, I travelled by train. Public transport, basically. So I had to wake up at like 5 am to take a 6h15 am train in the morning. And from home, I had to take a taxi to the train station and then … I don't know how many stations, all I know is, it took forever to get to campus. So that in itself created so much anxiety. Like, you feel like you going to be late. The train times are very unpredictable. But the thing is, because I live in Paarl, I still had to wake up very early. So, the travelling on its own creates a lot of anxiety because you don't know if you going to make the first class.* **[Participant 2]**

That time that they striked, I was like going to campus, like, two, three times a week and when I got there, there was no classes. How do these people communicate? I'm travelling from Lavender Hill to Bellville [about 30 km from the selected university] *to get there, and I can't even enter the gates and that was also when I thought, nah man … this isn't gonna work for me and I'm thinking … must you rather stop this or continue with what you doing, because I mean its financial constraint on my pocket and its time limited … I would get so upset because I'm thinking of all the time I wasted travelling when I could've finished an assignment or go over*

75

some of my work. Mentally it messes you up a little, cause now you thinking hey, am I doing the right thing? You think to yourself, what am I doing here? Psychologically, its playing on my mind. It takes a lot of thinking and a lot of stress. Why am I doing this? Is this the way it's going to be for the rest of the five years I'm going to be here? **[Participant 7]**

Participants 2 and 7 reside 30 to 50 kilometres away from the university. Both of these participants expressed how travelling affected their emotional and financial well-being. Participant 2 reported that he had to wake up extremely early to take the train, and would still suffer anxiety all the way to campus because of the unpredictability of the train schedules. Participant 7 reported that not only was the travelling onerous, but the lack of communication from lecturers was frustrating. Participant 7 reported that she would arrive on campus after travelling for 30 km only to find that she could not enter the gates of the university because of an on-going strike. All of these factors contributed to doubts about whether or not she should continue with studies.

Limanond, Butsingkorn and Chermkhunthod (2011) found in their study conducted in Asia that students who made use of public transport (such as buses, trains or taxis) were less engaged and took less initiative in their studies at university than those who used private transport. Gurrutxaga, Iturrate, Oses and Garcia (2017) conducted a study at the University of San Sebastian in Spain and found that universities should consider the travel time not only of students, but of staff and visitors who use public transport to and from campus.

Van Rhijn et al. (2016) suggested that universities establish a more flexible study option that would allow students enough time to travel to and from school, and allow students to work part-time and be able to fully use the university experience. Van Rhijn et al. (2016) further suggested that the university fully engage with the e-learning process to allow everyone access to all lessons and course materials to allow for this flexibility.

4.3.3.3 Theme 3 and EST: Macrosystems

In terms of sub-theme 3.1, Christensen (2016) states that in the past, women were seen to be domesticated while men would go out to work and provide for the family. However, over time this phenomenon has changed. It can now be seen that more women (mothers) are working and trying to provide for their families. This change is partly due to the economic strain most families are experiencing. However, the patriarchal way in which society is still constructed means that many fathers have not yet assumed their full responsibilities, leaving women with most of the housework and family duties in addition to having to work. According to StatsSA 2018, most (70%) of black South Africa children live with the phenomenon of absent fathers (Mndende, 2022). This has a significant effect on a child's development and a mother's ability to pursue her dreams and goals. In their narratives, participants noted how lack of sufficient resources not only affected them but also their families, and their functioning in the different ecological systems in which they lived. In Sub-theme 3.1, for example, the financial constraints that most participants experienced at a personal level may be linked to the macrosystem, as the public transport system in South Africa may be considered dysfunctional. It is certainly not conducive for everyday travelling in terms of safety, punctuality and affordability.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Support Systems

Themes 4 covered three types of student support systems that emerged from participants' narratives; namely, support from peers, institutions and family. In most studies conducted on student support, family support seemed the most crucial, and more significant in its effects than teacher–student support, peer support or any other support (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Family support, according to Roksa and Kinsley (2019), promotes psychological, emotional and often financial well-being for students, allowing them to focus primarily on their academics and engage fully with their course material. In addition, Britto and Rush (2013) contend that students who attend counselling services to improve their academic performance showed improvement in their academic achievements.

77

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Peer support

Peer support was an important concept that emerged from participants' narratives. Peers are "people in a similar situation to each other who do not have a role in that situation as teacher or expert practitioner; they may have considerable experience and expertise or they may have relatively little; they share the status as fellow learners and they are accepted as such" (Boud & Prosser, 2002, cited in Sinclair, 2017, p. 280). What follows are participants' narratives on the role of peer support in their studies.

> *I met this one other student and from … since then we buddies. Now she's been a huge support in my life … she is my support up till now … My varsity friends … if we do assignments, we would help each other, we guide each other.* **[Participant 7]**

> *You know, when I need help, I always ask for help. You know, like, I'm never shy to ask for help. Whether it's family, whether it's friends, whether its colleagues. So I do have like, uhm … I have a strong network.* **[Participant 3]**

> *I always speak to the alumnus that were there before me, they have this collective and togetherness and supportive relationship. I don't even feel it between the students, and I'm not sure if the lecturers are not picking this up because, it's not even happening in the class.* **[Participant 6]**

Participants 7, 3 and 6 did not share sentiments when it came to peer support. Participant 7 found that peer support was beneficial for her academic growth, stating that her peers would assist her with her academic assignments and would often help each other when there was a lack of understanding. Participant 3 identified the importance of having a strong network and support system, and felt that he had this. When the need arose for him to ask for help, he would do so, especially from the people who would understand. Participant 6, on the other hand, felt that there was almost no peer support in class and could not identify the benefits of such.

Smailes and Gannon-Leary (2011) contended that peer support was found to be one of the most effective support systems for students, but that it was only effective when peers had common goals. Boud and Cohen (2014) found that the physical contact between students when receiving peer support allows for peer mentoring without the interference of lecturers, which is essential for the learning process. Britto and Rush (2013) found that students consulted their course tutors and their course peers (also see Milman, Posey, Wright & Zhou, 2015). Britto and Rush (2013 found that their study sample also consulted with their friends and family outside of the university setting.

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Institutional and lecturer support

This sub-theme centres on institutional support (in the form of student counselling services) and lecturer support. Britto and Rush (2013) assert that although students are aware of various counselling services provided for them, they do not easily consult or seek assistance from these organisations or services. Britto and Rush (2013) concluded that counselling services should be more usable to students as their services could play a significant role in students' academic achievements. The participants in this study had the following to say about institutional support services and lecturer support.

> *The discussions with lecturers and staff and like … there is one particular lecturer, like, the motivation that we get from them and stuff like that that just motivates you to do better and the encouragements that they give you. I haven't gone to ask for more support. I don't, uhm … really know of other support systems at university because I haven't really enquired … I would say the bigger classes where people are, like, they aren't getting the one-on-one attention. Or not really attention but like the psych and sociology classes are like so big. So the lecturer can't pay attention to each and every one in the class. Where in the social work modules, we feel very connected to the lecturer… So the university as a whole don't provide support but there are certain lecturers that do. There are also supervisors that are contactable. That is the support that we need.* **[Participant 2]**

79

I am so depressed and I remember one morning in my third year, I just couldn't anymore. The more I came nearer to campus, the more I couldn't move. Then I found myself walking straight to the wellness centre. And when I got there, they were still closed. And I just sat on the steps, crying. I was so close to committing suicide that day. And then the psychologist and staff from the wellness centre came and opened up. I saw somebody and they contained me and ... sjoe, that day ... I just felt like a failure. And you must remember, people in the community and your friends they don't have sympathy for you. I won't say that CSSS was very effective. They were okay for containment immediately. They did crisis intervention but they had such a lot of students. The list was so long. They couldn't really assist. They said I had to call them again and make an appointment because there was such a lot of students at that time that were going through the same thing. And they didn't have the capacity. Another thing is, on campus, you walk in there and you feel like you need to speak to someone but then they say you must come back unless a student cancel and then you can come. I feel this does not do students any good. I feel sometimes you just decide today is the day you going to speak to somebody and then you get there and you just can't. So now you have to find your own mechanisms to cope and find your own resources, or maybe just another colleague that you can speak to to feel a bit better and then you go on. I just feel CSSS isn't very supportive for long term and even immediate. But, there is definitely a gap in the student and lecturer connection and I'm not talking about all lecturers.
[Participant 6]

Yes, the lecturers at the department are quite supportive, even though I am only receiving lectures from three of them. The lecturers are very approachable. I am in a WhatsApp group with one of them. **[Participant 5]**

Most of the participants identified a positive support system from the university and their lecturers. Participant 2 reported that there was one lecturer who motivated the class to do well despite their

challenges. In addition, this lecturer encouraged students to reach out when they were having academic challenges. Participant 5 shared the same sentiment as Participant 2, reporting that she had experienced only supportive encounters with the lecturers at the university. In terms of institutional support, Participant 2 stated that he was unfamiliar with the counselling services offered. Participant 6, on the other hand, was familiar with the counselling services but dissatisfied with the service received because she had to wait to be seen to. Her comments highlight a perennial problem; when students are going through a crisis, they usually cannot afford to be told to wait and make an appointment for another day. Students in crisis require immediate counselling, and not only counselling on an appointment basis, which is what the university offers.

In terms of lecturer support, Gazza and Hunter (2014) observed that students in their study conducted in the USA progressed better when lecturers paid attention to their individual needs in addition to making the course work understandable. In the same country, Milman, Posey, Pintz, Wright and Zhou (2015) conducted a similar study, finding that the support students received from their lecturers and tutors was important.

The nature of institutional processes and support emerged from participant narratives. Milman et al. (2015) found that the support received from the admissions offices significantly assisted students with the administration inherent in studying. Although some of these participants in the current study did not find the career counselling and student centre services beneficial, Milman et al. (2015) suggest that students nevertheless reach out to these services as they can benefit them both academically and personally.

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Family support

According to Schnettler, Miranda-Zapata, Grunert, Lobos, Denegri, Hueche and Poblete (2017), one of the most important domains in which satisfaction in life is found is the family. Kwok, Cheng and Wong (2015) contend that positive family relationships help individuals overcome challenges and develop

resilience, especially in the case of university students. Thus, Kwok et al.'s (2015) conclusion is that university students require family support to be able to manage the demands of their academic life and coursework. Participants in this study concurred with this finding.

And my family is always there. I have a grandson now, so when I have to do assignments there is always someone that would look after him. Then my husband. Like financial wise, emotionally and every type of support you can think of, he is there. **[Participant 7]**

This year my mentor [a family friend but not seen as a peer] *said to me that I need to finish. She was adamant that I need to finish. She supported me with the deposit for registration. My one daughter is working so she is paying off my fees. I have to pay my fees myself this year.* **[Participant 6]**

So, yes. I actually do have an organisation that I work for or that I belong to since high school so I do have that organisation that has been supporting me. Like, uhm … that organisation made sure I passed my matric well, they paid for my MATs, they paid for my applications, they paid for transport, when I needed transport they made sure, with my necessary needs, man, like my textbooks, if I ran short they would cover it. Like the Director … I basically call her my guardian because she has been my guardian, you know, ever since my mom passed away. So her whole organisation helps me a lot. So I feel like that organisation is the foundation to my success because they have always been there for like everything, and they like family, man. That's why I'm saying, like, my support network is really strong, man. Even though it's not like fancy but uhm … it's sufficient or suffice for me, man, just to make me succeed. So ja … all I have to do is pass and do well at university. **[Participant 3]**

Many of the participants identified individuals and organisations outside of their immediate family when speaking about their family support. Participant 6 identified that a family friend whom she considered a mentor was supportive of her, as was her daughter, whom she said was supporting her

financially. In the interview, Participant 3 shed light on the role that organisations can play in mentoring, equipping, guiding and assisting students. This student identified a particular organisation which was like a family to him. The staff of this organisation had been consistent in their help, having been part of his life since high school. Not only has this organisation seen to his academic growth, they have also provided financial support when needed.

Cheng, Ickes and Verhofstadt (2012) conducted a study on the importance of family support for students and the impact it has on academic performance. These authors found that family support was rated the highest form of support that students needed in order to achieve good academic results. Cheng et al. (2012) clarified that family support ranges from emotional to economic support. Klink, Byars-Winston and Bakken (2008) conducted similar research and found that if students and their families have a positive relationship, the students achieve higher academic scores than those who have a difficult relationship with their families. Klink et al. (2008) concluded that family support boosts students' confidence and increases their desire to achieve academically. In addition, Klink et al. (2008) found that the students with the highest family support were capable of managing more academic stress and challenges than those students who did not have any form of family support.

4.3.4.4 Theme 4 and EST: Microsystems and mesosystems

According to Bronfenbrenner (1992), the microsystem consists of the individual as a unique human being in direct relationship with the family, school and neighbours. The mesosystem refers to the relationships between the different structures/relationships (family, school and neighbours) identified in the microsystem. The individual's microsystem (ie, the biological and environmental aspects) has an influence on how they view the world and affects their overall functioning and cognitive growth over time (Blažević, 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1992). It can be seen from the participants' narratives that the support of significant others in participants' mesosystems was vital for the participants to be able to function at their best academically and to develop resilience and perseverance.

4.3.5 Theme 5: The Need for Self-care

Theme 5 was the ability to engage in self-care routines. Self-care may be defined as the individual strategies that one implements to find a balance between personal and professional life. These strategies promote mental, emotional, physical and professional well-being (Lee & Miller, 2013). The narratives reflect how participants were able to care for themselves while focusing on their studies and their personal lives. This theme had two sub-themes: the implications of students' adverse childhood experiences and their self-care strategies.

4.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: The implications of students' adverse childhood experiences

According to Newcomb, Burton and Edwards (2017), social work students are often found to have traumatic and harmful childhoods. This being the case, Newcomb et al. (2017) are of the view that social work education does not focus sufficiently on the importance of self-care for students in general, and more specifically on students with adverse childhoods. The narratives of the participants supported this observation.

> *A lot of social work students graduate and they have license to practice but they in themselves are so broken and so hurt. My question is: How are they a support to help other people if they can't even help themselves? You know, like, in my class, about 50% of the students struggle with a lot of personal things and you can see that because after graduating – we graduate next year – but you can see this person is not even mature enough to be a young adult, so how is this person mature enough to be a social worker? You know what I mean? This questions the whole phenomena around, especially in South Africa, around incompetent social workers. I mean, if I identify myself as incompetent at this level already ... like, I reflect a lot and I'm always looking for room to grow. But my thing is, they pushing a lot of incompetent students out, and those people are dealing with a lot of trauma and, my question is, who at university are there to help us heal? You know, the lecturers don't focus on the individual healing. They just*

84

focus on the individual graduating. I mean, Social Work is not about graduating. It's about healing and restoring, but how can you restore someone if you yourself is broken? **[Participant 3]**

I feel like in the first year we touched on it a bit. Like, if you suffer from emotional traumatic events, maybe you should, like, check yourself. But they do not say that you have to emotional prep yourself. Like they do not say, they should enforce it like from first year and say that you should check yourself, are you emotionally stable? I think self-care is essential for any work that you do. 'Cause everyone burns out at some point. That's how I feel, and I know that some people feel that in supervision they expressing self-care but I feel like … (fieldwork) supervision does kind of help, but that's only after you freak out or stuff like that. **[Participant 4]**

Speaking to the lecturers and the supervisors, some of them are like amazing and then when you have group sessions they would tell you … it's almost like they would brainwash you that self-care is important. And then I also realised that I'm going seven days a week for four weeks or months, like a clock. Like I'm never stopping, man. And the only time I rest is when I sleep at night and I don't sleep at times. **[Participant 7]**

Participant 3 drew attention to the fact that there are many practising social workers who are unfamiliar with the phenomenon of self-care and are themselves still "broken" and ill-equipped to help others. As a final year student, Participant 3 reflected on his peers and their ability to provide effective social work services upon graduation. He felt that the university should be held accountable for allowing graduates out into the field without adequate self-awareness.

Participant 4 expressed a similar sentiment, reflecting on her first year of higher education when the lecturers emphasised self-care. This participant said that the emphasis was unfortunately dropped as the course progressed. Participant 7 had dissimilar experiences from Participants 3 and 4; she felt that her

85

lecturers and supervisors were constantly emphasising the importance of self-care. Her experience was that this emphasis had made her aware of the need for self-care and that through self-care, she had managed to find a balance between her academics and her personal life.

Dykes (2014, 2011) conducted research at the same university with social work students, focusing on their adverse childhood experiences. She found that students' childhood traumas and experiences stemmed from a range of factors such as being exposed to child abuse, substance abuse, impoverished circumstances and strenuous (often violent) relationships. Dykes (2011) concluded that although many students had become resilient because of their negative childhood experiences, this was not the case for everyone. A significant concern expressed by Dykes (2014, 2011) was that some social work students were not able to separate their own experiences from those of their clients and that countertransference was a distinct possibility. Dykes (2014) concluded that students need to be made more aware of their childhood experiences and how these experiences could affect them professionally. Her contention was that to assist these students, emotional and social support was needed. This could assist students to make the correct ethical decisions and always remain professional. Her findings echo the observations of Participant 3.

Moore, Bledsoe, Perry and Robinson (2011) conclude that when social work students do not practice self-awareness or self-care, the concern arises as to how they would be able to assist clients, since they themselves are unaware of their need for self-care. Mindfulness practice allows individuals to be more present, open and emotionally available when the practice is implemented correctly and practised daily (Gockel, Burton, James & Bryer, 2013; Lee & Miller, 2013).

4.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Self-care and work-life balancing strategies

Zahniser et al. (2017) state that self-care is crucial amongst new graduates before they enter their different fields of practice, as self-care allows them to understand themselves and implement a balance

between personal and professional concerns. Moore et al. (2011) and Napoli and Bonifas (2011) argue that many social work students experience emotional, academic and financial stress, fatigue and personal trauma. It is therefore vital that self-care is stressed in professional programmes.

I don't even know what self-care is and what versions of self-care is there. The way I do it, I just detach myself from anything that is not good for me and anything that is unhealthy. So I just go into myself and do some self-reflection. I just filter out the things that kind of like aren't good. Those kind of things where you just spend time with yourself completely. That is kind of my self-care. And journaling down what I'm thinking. **[Participant 1]**

Well, I am a very logical person. Very analytic. If I am doing social work, I am doing social work. If I am not doing social work, I am either doing sports or at a family gathering. So uhm … plus, I'm a loner. My self-care is always doing what I want and knowing that whatever I was doing, was for the better of my health. So my family, we have a huge family … so sitting there and like laughing reminds me that I am in a safe environment. I don't have any hobbies but then my sport is something that I want to do that makes me happy. **[Participant 4]**

So … what I'm doing now is, like, weekends … I try to do whatever I need to do before weekends. Like assignments and stuff. And so when I have free time, I would now uhm … go to the beach, go sit in the park. I would never do that before. I'm not that type of person. I would always sit in front of the TV and just stay in the house. But this is what I started doing. I go sit in the park, I sit here on a field by me where there's benches now and a tree. Then I just take a moment to breath and be still. I'm spending time with God also. It seriously works for me … and that is one of the reasons why I resigned from my work because I told myself it's either I'm going to lose myself or I can go find myself. So I had to choose and that was when I told myself, uh-uh, I chose myself. I realised my own self-worth. **[Participant 7]**

The participants identified numerous ways in which they practised self-care. Participant 4 reflected on the fact that she was assertive and did not allow her professional, personal and academic lives to mingle with one another. Participant 7 reflected on how she enjoyed sitting in the park, relaxing in nature. Participant 7 informed the researcher that prior to studying, she had been unaware of the importance of self-care and finding her sanity. Her new self-care regime had assisted this participant with discovering her self-worth and choosing her own mental well-being over her current job. In contrast, Participant 1 stated that she was unaware of what self-care was and could not identify any self-care strategies that she practised. Upon further probing, she realised that she did indeed practise self-care and identified how she enjoyed journaling, which allowed her to process her thoughts through writing.

On the role of self-care, Diebold, Kim and Elze (2018) conducted a study on self-care among social work students, and whether or not they implemented self-care strategies to cope with the demands of their studies and personal lives. They found that self-care strategies were essential for social work students to be able to function professionally, academically and personally. Newell and Nelson-Gardell (2014) concur, stating that self-care assists students with preventing professional burnout before they enter professional practice. Newell and Nelson-Gardell (2014) found that social work students were more vulnerable to compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress when they lacked professional practice experience and experience of self-care strategies in social work education. Zahniser, Rupert and Dorociak (2017) suggest that professional academic programmes play an important role in educating and promoting self-care practices amongst students. Zahniser et al. (2017) also found that when self-care was integrated into student courses, their academic achievements and their stress management increased tremendously (also see O'Neill, Yoder Slater & Batt, 2019). O'Neill et al. (2019) found that training social work students to practise self-care would assist their professional competence, reduce academic stress and increase academic achievement. Newell and Nelson-Gardell (2014) also emphasise that integrating self-care in social work education is important, as it allows social work students to become competent and confident

88

and, once they are in the field, it allows them to become more resilient and self-aware. O'Neill et al. (2019) added that when professionals practise self-care, their durability (resilience) in the field increases and fatigue decreases.

Shannon, Simmelink-McCleary, Im, Becher and Crook-Lyon (2014) found in their study that their participants struggled to identify healthy self-care strategies. However, many students in that study reported using journaling and mindfulness activities, stating that these were the easiest self-care strategies to implement.

4.3.5.3 Theme 5 and EST: Microsystems

According to Christensen (2016), for ecological systems to work effectively, one should take care of oneself first. To do this, Christensen (2016) states that good nutrition, physical exercise, mindfulness and avoidance (of certain situations) are key practices. These aspects will ensure that the body and the mind are kept from harm so that the individual (in this case, the student) can function optimally in all aspects. Functioning optimally in the microsystem positively affects functioning in the other systems. Functioning optimally also presupposes that the individual's basic needs are met. Thus the well-being of students and the ability to practise self-care can be contingent upon family situations and macro circumstances (Nazar, 2020).

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

This study has focused on the health and well-being of social work students in the social work study environment. Five themes emerged from participants' narratives that reflected their state of well-being, their main concerns and challenges.

In the first theme, the adjustment to social work studies affected not only the students who were fresh out of high school, but also challenged the mature students who felt out of their depth with the academic requirements. Based on the findings, emotional preparation for all students is important, but

89

especially for social work students who need to enter the domain of clients who battle their own emotional pressures.

The second theme was the well-being of social work students during the Covid-19 lockdown. Narratives provided insight on how social work students managed their academic life and personal life struggles in the online learning environment. The narratives provided guidance on ways in which the university could assist social work students other than academically.

Theme 3 showed the inadequacy of students' financial resources and how they struggled to meet their obligations. Many students had to travel far to get to campus each morning (before lockdowns) and often failed to use all the services that the university has to offer. The researcher found limited literature about the travelling or commuting of students to and from campus. This is certainly a gap as the travelling or commuting of students, especially in South Africa, affects their academic and personal life. Furthermore, it is evident that the lack of financial assistance for university students greatly affects their academic performance, which in return affects their health and well-being.

In Theme 4, student support systems, both family and institutional, were the focus. Being a university student comes with much pressure and participants' narratives showed the power of receiving the necessary support, especially from family.

In the final theme, the need for self-care was discussed in relation to the participants' experiences of stress and being overwhelmed by their responsibilities which placed themselves as persons on the backburner. The findings showed that most students were aware of how to take care of themselves, but the implementation of it was not always as it should be for optimal functioning.

In Chapter 5, the final chapter, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made for social work practice, education, policy and future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The researcher conducted her research with social work students at a specific university to explore their health, well-being and support. During the research process, the researcher was concerned by the lack of knowledge most of the participants displayed on self-care and the importance of their health and well-being. The researcher found limited research that specifically examined the health and well-being of social work students, who, it could be argued, face greater emotional demands in their future working lives than many other professionals do. In addition, as has been established, many individuals who have suffered trauma in their lives choose to study social work (Newcomb, Burton & Edwards, 2017). The gap in the literature on this topic and her own personal experiences created an interest in the researcher on this topic.

The researcher used the following objectives to anchor the research study and the interviewing questions for the participants. These objectives were:

1. To explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students at the selected university regarding their health and well-being, including the physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions.

2. To explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students regarding the support they needed and used at the specific university.

To further achieve these objectives and in line with the phenomenological design, the researcher asked the participants three questions that guided the objectives. These were:

- Describe a particular situation in which you experienced an emotional event(s) on campus that affected your studies thereafter.

- What are the ways in which this event and experience affected your health and well-being (physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions)?

- What are the kinds of support you needed and used at the selected university?

In this research study, the researcher used the qualitative study approach with a phenomenological research design to ensure rich data and to achieve the objectives. The researcher conducted telephonic interviews with seven participants from the university, all of whom were appropriately located across the different levels of the BSW degree. In Chapter 3 (Methodology), the researcher explained the limitations and challenges she experienced with recruiting the study sample and the data collection process. The participants interviewed were registered at the university as social work students, which allowed the researcher to explore the health, well-being and support of these student participants. The researcher analysed the data using qualitative thematic analysis.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses and summarises the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data, linking these to the objectives of the study. The researcher also provides recommendations for interventions, policies and future research.

5.2 Conclusions and Implications of the Empirical Findings

A qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design was used, allowing the researcher to explore the experiences of the social work students at the selected university. The qualitative approach allowed in-depth data to be revealed and provided the researcher with an advanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher's goal was for the participants to explore and describe

92

their personal experiences and how these experiences affected their health and well-being. This goal was achieved, as the researcher was able to identify five themes and 11 sub-themes. The researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the data collected through strategies that facilitated validity and reliability of the data collected. In view of this, the researcher was able to successfully execute the empirical study.

5.2.1 Conclusion and Implications of the Demographic Profile of Students

The researcher recruited seven participants for the research study. All seven fit the inclusion criteria, which was registered social work students, studying at the specific university, willing and able to articulate their experiences. These participants were appropriately and importantly located across the different year levels of the social work degree's five study levels; for example, ECP, first year, second year, third year and fourth year. These participants were able to understand the expectations of the research study and to respond to the three main questions during the interviewing process. In addition, the participants were able to communicate their experiences, opinions and feelings to the researcher without any imposed restrictions and/or language barriers. The participants included more females than males and came from one ethnic background, identifying as Coloured. This was not a criterion in the research study; however, the sampling method of snowballing determined the nature of the sample, since all were connected in a loose social network. In a phenomenological design, the emphasis is not so much on diversity than on the essence of the lived experiences of participants.

The researcher initially aimed to interview ten participants; however, only seven individuals voluntarily agreed to participate. Data saturation also determined the suspension of further recruitment.

In conclusion, the demographic profile of the participants could not be related to a diverse set of characteristics; however, the nature of the study topic and the phenomenological research design focused on the essence of the lived experiences and not significantly on the social connections of participants. Data analysed from the seven participants allowed the researcher to provide in-depth findings for the research study. The participants were located across the BSW degree which allowed the researcher to gain insights

across year levels. The implications for the research study are that although there might be limitations in terms of participants not being representative of all ethnic backgrounds, the findings are phenomenologically located and therefore the essence of the lived experience are more important than the diversity of participants. The interviews yielded in-depth data on the health, well-being and support of the social work students at the selected university.

5.2.2 Conclusions and Implications of the Themes and Sub-themes

The researcher identified five themes and 11 sub-themes from the data analysed. This allowed the researcher to provide in-depth findings, based on the participants' experiences. To better understand the participants experiences, the researcher linked these with the EST.

5.2.2.1 Main theme 1: Adjustments to social work studies

Theme 1 was the impact of the curriculum on all levels of social work study. This theme explored the participants' experiences of the BSW curriculum in relation to support, assistance, assessment and guidance. Within this theme, the researcher identified two sub-themes:

- Sub-theme 1.1: Emotional preparation and self-reflection opportunities
- Sub-theme 1.2: The challenges of being a mature student

In Sub-theme 1.1, participants reported on the difficulty they had regarding self-reflection in their course work. Participants felt that it was important for them to be able to reflect on their personal and professional experiences, as this would allow them to improve their competence. Self-reflection was important as it provided a means for participants to introspect and thus be better able to bracket their feelings when working in the field. Another aspect to the ability to self-reflect is the fact that older or more mature participants with broader life experiences felt better able to practise self-reflection independently.

In Sub-theme 1.2, maturity was not viewed as advantageous, as participants identified the difficulties of being a mature student in relation to the course material and lectures. These participants had difficulty adapting to the expectations of tertiary education while also having to maintain their households

94

and take care of children. One example was the very real temptation felt by a student to drop out of the social work programme owing to significant stressors in her personal life.

Conclusion of Theme 1: It can be concluded that self-reflection and self-awareness are vital aspects of the social work curriculum, allowing students to identify their own strengths and limitations, and position themselves appropriately in relation to their clients. Another conclusion is that mature students experience significantly more challenges in having to adapt to tertiary education than younger students do. This indicates that although it is now easier for mature students to enter academia, considerations need to be given in terms of whether the curriculum speaks to their needs and vice versa. The implication is that the coursework should take into consideration the realities of mature students and ought also to be more cognisant of the social issues that many social work students face, whether of normal student age or older. Another implication is that pre-assessment of all social work applicants could be implemented to assess whether students are emotionally and psychologically prepared for the expectations of academia and the professional practice of social work. This would be an onerous task in terms of the administering and processing of such assessments, but is worth considering, especially in light of the observation made by a participant that many of his peers were immature or "broken" and ill-equipped to help others.

5.2.2.2 Theme 2: The impact of Covid-19 on students' well-being

Theme 2 was the role and impact of Covid-19 on students' health and well-being. Theme 2 recognised the impact that Covid-19 had on tertiary institutions and student development. This theme had two sub-themes.

- Sub-theme 2.1: The effects of lockdown rules

- Sub-theme 2.2: E-learning (online) experiences

In Sub-theme 2.1, participants identified how they struggled with their academic responsibilities owing to Covid-19 lockdown rules and the trauma of being sick and witnessing relatives being sick or

95

dying. One participant reflected the feelings of many students when she averred that she required physical interactions with her peers and lecturers, as this allowed her to understand her coursework better. Another participant reflected on how difficult it was to find the motivation to continue with her studies during this time. These two opinions represented many participants' challenges.

In Sub-theme 2.2, participants reflected on the challenges with online learning which, up to that point, was unfamiliar to most of them. The difficulties lay in their lack of resources regarding access to wi-fi and data. This aspect is linked strongly to the socio-economic circumstances of most of the students in the BSW degree, and the general student profile. Participants expressed concern about how online learning would affect their overall learning and preparation for practice once they graduated, since as social workers they would be expected to engage face-to-face with clients, which they had not done during their studies.

Conclusion of Theme 2: Theme 2 revealed students' concerns about their future social work careers, as they had not been exposed to engaging with real clients with real-life challenges during their studies, owing to pandemic-related lockdowns. Online learning presented a restricted learning environment that students found difficult to engage with. The implication is that this extended period of online learning might hinder the way this entire cohort of students practise in the field, and their intervention processes with clients. It would appear that a great number of social work students will be beginning their careers never having interacted face-to-face with a client in need of their services. This is likely to have an effect on their confidence and competence. The client system is likely to feel the impact of this gap in student learning for many years to come unless HEIs and students alike reach agreements for continuous professional development to help to address this gap.

5.2.2.3 Theme 3: The financial well-being of students

Theme 3 was the financial constraints many students experienced during their studies. This theme had two sub-themes:

96

- Sub-theme 3.1: Funding for studies vs living expenses

- Sub-theme 3.2: The cost and toll of travelling to and from campus

In Sub-theme 3.1, the participants expressed their experiences of having insufficient financial resources during their studies and having to decide between studies and living expenses. The lack of financial resources compromised the ability of many students to focus fully on their academics, as the financial aspects were pressing. Therefore, participants also expressed how their financial circumstances hindered them from excelling academically.

In Sub-theme 3.2, the participants expressed their negative experiences of having to travel to and from the university to attend classes. The participants stated that much of their time was spent travelling, on a public transport system that was unreliable and frustrating to use. In many cases, they felt they were wasting time while travelling, and some even wondered whether they would get to classes on time, despite setting off from home early enough. This sub-theme revealed the issue of the cost of living at home versus living in residence on campus, and the fact that there is insufficient accommodation at the selected university.

Conclusion of Theme 3: The financial aspects of students' lives completely consumed and overwhelmed some to the point that they doubted themselves and their academic abilities. A concern emerged among these participants that they were constantly having to fight obstacles to achieve their full academic potential. The implications are that many students and potential students might not make it through the degree because of financial constraints. In addition, students' emotional well-being was severely compromised because of this aspect.

5.2.2.4 Theme 4: Support systems

Theme 4 was the different student support systems available to students. These support systems are there to guide and assist students while studying at the university. Three sub-themes were identified:

- Sub-theme 4.1: Peer support

97

- Sub-theme 4.2: Institutional and lecturer support

- Sub-theme 4.3: Family support

In Sub-theme 4.1, participants were divided as to the value of peer support during their studies. Some had the benefit of peer support and some did not. Those who had experienced peer support were positive about the experience, saying it was helpful and effective. Those who had not received any peer support could therefore not identify with the experience and consequently could not see the importance of peer support.

In Sub-theme 4.2, the participants were also divided in terms of the support received. Some identified resources and support offered by the selected university, while others stated that they were unaware of the support offered. Many of the participants stated that the selected university should promote and advertise their supportive services more often and more effectively. Furthermore, those that were aware of the support provided stated that the support services were not well-structured and not beneficial to the needs of the students. Lecturer support was felt to be helpful, but variable.

In Sub-theme 4.3, many of the participants reflected on their own family support. Many defined family support as not only support from relatives, but also from organisations and individuals that they had grown attached to and from whom they received support akin to that of family support. These participants stated that much of the support received was emotional, in the form of mentorship, or financial.

Conclusion of Theme 4: The participants identified the need for support and the importance of it. They recognised that there were several sources of support and that it was up to them to make use of the individual, institutional and organisational support that existed. A concern that emerged was that although there are supportive measures in place, they are not effectively structured or organised according to participants' needs. The issue of the immediacy of some student crises came up; a support service that cannot respond adequately to an emotional breakdown on the spot, but requires the individual to make an

appointment for some future date, is ill-equipped to be of real assistance. Clearly the Centre for Student Support Services was also understaffed and overwhelmed. The implication is that positive and effective support is important for students as it allows students to reach their full potential. Students' needs are all different and thus supportive measures currently in place need to be revised and be more flexible, commensurate with evolving students' needs – particularly in the aftermath of Covid-19, which has left society traumatised in many respects.

5.2.2.5 Theme 5: The need for self-care

Theme 5 was the participants' ability to practise self-care. There were two sub-themes:

- Sub-theme 5.1: The implications of students' adverse childhood experiences
- Sub-theme 5.1: Self-care and work–life balancing strategies

In Sub-theme 5.1, the socio-emotional experiences of participants were foregrounded along with their need for self-care. Some participants were unaware of the concept of self-care in an academic context. Some participants felt that there was a lack of emphasis of self-care by their lecturers, but this sentiment was not shared by all participants.

In Sub-theme 5.2, the participants identified numerous ways in which they practised self-care. One participant in particular highlighted that having come to realise how important self-care is, she now practised it and found that it assisted with advancing her sense of self-worth. Participants recognised the value of finding a balance between their academic and personal life.

Conclusion of Theme 5: The implementation of the practice of self-care was emphasised in the academic programme and some participants took this on board, while others did not. Most recognised the importance of self-care and the positive impact it had on their sense of worth. This is especially important in the light of the programme's student profile and the existence of some students' adverse childhood experiences. The implications are that although the selected university encourages self-care, the practice of self-care is not sufficiently emphasised in the coursework. More consideration should be given to the

concept of self-care and how to practise it while studying. This would create a foundation for social work practitioners to incorporate future self-care as a routine practice.

5.2.3 Overall Conclusion of Findings

The participants were able to convey their state of health and well-being, their academic concerns, the financial struggles and their support needs in some depth with the researcher. The findings were well associated with the participants' verbatim quotes and links with the literature were found. Five main aspects emerged from the findings.

1. Self-reflection and self-awareness are vital aspects for the social work curriculum and speak to the self-positioning of students in the context of becoming social workers and dealing with clients.

2. There is concern on the part of students themselves about their competence as future social work practitioners, as they had not had the experience of engaging with real clients with real-life challenges through online learning during Covid-19 lockdowns.

3. The insufficient financial support for students and their many financial burdens had a definite effect on their emotional well-being and their academic performance.

4. There was clear need for additional support services apart from what is currently provided by the selected university. More ongoing emotional and academic support would enable more students to achieve their academic goals, although at the same time it must be noted that existing services were not being effectively used by participants.

5. Self-care emerged as an important concept that some students felt was insufficiently emphasised in the curriculum. Participants acknowledged the importance of implementing self-care in their current context of studying and in their future context as practising social workers.

5.3 Research Findings in Relation to Research Objectives of the Study

The research study had two main objectives that the researcher aimed to achieve. In this section, the researcher will discuss how the findings achieved the two main research objectives.

5.3.1 Objective 1: Explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students at the selected university regarding their health and well-being including the physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions.

This objective was achieved by exploring the health and well-being of social work students at the selected university. To achieve this objective, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews with the participants using the following two main questions:

(i)   Describe a particular situation in which you experienced an emotional event(s) on campus that affected your studies thereafter.

(ii)   What are the ways in which this event and experience affected your health and well-being (physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, intellectual, financial, social and occupational health dimensions)?

The data collection method allowed the researcher to gather appropriate data that was linked to the objectives. The participants' personal experiences and narratives guided this process, as is shown in Chapter 4. The following themes and sub-themes relate to achieving Objective 1.

Theme 1 emerged because participants' narratives focused on their adjustments to the higher education context. They paid attention to the increasing need for emotional preparation and self-reflection now that they were studying social work (Sub-theme 1.1). A further adjustment affected the more mature students (Sub-theme 1.2), in that the mature students were not aware of the academic

101

workload and how to adjust to the new environment, having been away from a formal learning environment for so long.

Theme 2 emerged because the data collection took place during the lockdown period brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and participants felt the full impact of the disconnect and separation that this caused, from the institution and from their peers (Sub-theme 2.1). The unfamiliarity of online learning further affected their will to learn and their emotional well-being (Sub-theme 2.2).

A further impediment to students' well-being and motivation to study involved their financial instability (Theme 3). Participants expressed how their insufficient financial resources affected them while at university, with many having to sustain themselves outside of university as they were the providers in families (Sub-theme 3.1). Students' compromised finances propelled many of the participants into survival mode while at university, causing them to perform poorly. For many, their travelling costs to and from the university became insurmountable (Sub-theme 3.2).

The above findings in each of the three themes and six sub-themes resulted in Objective 1 of the research study being achieved.

5.3.2 Objective 2: Explore and describe the essentials of the experiences of social work students regarding the support they need and used at the specific university.

To achieve Objective 2 the researcher used one main research question, as follows:

- What are the kinds of support you need and use at the selected university?

Using the data collected, the researcher was able make certain findings about the support needed and used by the participants at the selected university. These findings can be found in Chapter 4. They clearly indicate that there is a need for support in all systems, according to Ecological Systems Theory. The content of the following themes and sub-themes supported the achievement of Objective 2.

102

Theme 4 emerged because the participants identified the various support systems they required to do better academically and personally. Some participants identified the importance of peer support in the academic setting, especially peers that are in the same course programme (Sub-theme 4.1). Others identified the importance of institutional and lecturer support as a further resource to achieving improved academic results and understanding of the coursework (Sub-theme 4.2). Most participants believed that family support was crucial to them as a positive family system provided them with security and comfort, which resulted in their achieving better academic results (Sub-theme 4.3).

In addition to the support systems, the need for self-care was vital to the overall health and well-being of students (Theme 5). Many of the participants identified that their childhood experiences and personal backgrounds had an impact on their decision to study social work; however, few of the participants realised the implications of not receiving counselling or practising self-care (Sub-theme 5.1). Participants were mostly unaware of the importance of practising self-care and of finding ways to balance their personal life with their academic life (Sub-theme 5.2). Through the findings made under the two themes and five sub-themes, the researcher can conclude that Objective 2 of the research study was achieved.

5.4 Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Model of the Study

The researcher linked the five themes to the appropriate systems identified in Bronfenbrenner's (1992) EST.

In Theme 1 (Adjustment to social work studies), the identified systems of the EST were the micro- and mesosystems. The participants identified the numerous ways in which they had to overcome the obstacles they faced while studying. In order for them to do so, they made use of the support systems in their micro- and mesosystems.

In Theme 2 (Impact of Covid-19 on students' well-being), the identified systems were the macro- and techno systems. The participants were forced to rely on their macro- and techno systems during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants articulated the impact of Covid-19 on their personal and academic lives and expressed how the use of the techno system was a necessity at this time.

In Theme 3 (The financial well-being of students) the identified system was the macrosystem. Lack of financial resources affected not only the participants, but also their immediate families. Funding for tertiary studies is provided mostly by government institutions. However, the lack of sufficient financial assistance and delays in receiving it affected the functioning of families and the participants' safety, punctuality, academic performance and livelihoods.

In Theme 4 (Support systems) the identified systems were the microsystem and mesosystem. The functioning and relationship between the micro- and mesosystems played a vital role in the participants' support systems. Certain resources within their micro- and mesosystems allowed the participants to function optimally, academically and personally. It further allowed the participants to be able to engage in self-reflection and reflection on the world.

In Theme 5 (The need for self-care), the identified system was the microsystem. The participants reflected on the fact that if they cared for themselves positively, the other ecological systems would also function effectively. The participants further identified the importance of practising self-care in order to become well-rounded individuals and professionals.

5.5 Recommendations Emerging from the Study

The following recommendations, linked to the objectives and the five themes identified, can be made, based on the findings:

104

5.5.1 Recommendations Based on Study Themes

5.5.1.1 Recommendations based on Theme 1: Adjustments to social work learning

The social work programme at the selected university should consider the inclusion in the curriculum of a component where students are asked to reflect on the reason why they chose the social work field. This could be a personal reflection or a guided small group discussion in which students are asked a number of questions, including whether or not there is anything in their personal experiences and backgrounds that was traumatic to them and which still needs to be dealt with. In addition, emotional preparation from first year is imperative for social work students. They need to be taught a technique for self-reflection, and be encouraged to create the space, perhaps weekly, to practise it. Social work students should also make use of the many orientation programmes at the selected university and not feel that they will not benefit. The social work programme could also consider a mentoring or buddy system for first-year students to help them acclimatise and adjust, benefitting from experience of an older student or even a peer.

5.5.1.2 Recommendations based on Theme 2: Impact of Covid-19 on students' well-being

Online learning and teaching are here to stay, but these may not continue in the form experienced during the lockdown period. Therefore, the lecturers and students should make use of the many training opportunities offered by the selected university so that online learning and teaching can become more participatory and efficient. Furthermore, a more sustainable and long-term system for consistent internet provision for all students should be implemented to eliminate the continuous struggle of poor connections for students not residing on campus. External organisations should also be able to provide social work students with additional support and guidance when conducting their fieldwork to ensure that social work students are able to link and apply their theories to their fieldwork.

5.5.1.3 Recommendations based on Theme 3: Financial constraints of students

A more sustainable and long-term implementation of reliable transportation for university students should be considered. Students spend long hours on public transport, and much of it is inefficient and expensive.

Students are burdened by the lack of financial assistance they receive; therefore, a re-evaluation of the current financial assistance for students should be conducted, in line with the current economic situation. Other programmes to support students could be implemented at the selected university, including for meals. Many students who lack a stable income do not have the means to sustain themselves and/or are financially unable to provide for their basic needs. The aforementioned recommendations would prevent students from having to worry about transportation to and from campus and about their next meal. In return, the students would be able to excel academically by focusing mainly on their academics and not on their finances and how to sustain themselves.

5.5.1.4 Recommendations based on Theme 4: Support systems for students

The selected social work programme should implement regular team-building activities for students within the coursework programmes. This would provide cohesion and unity amongst peers and the students would not feel isolated. Wellness activities could also be implemented, facilitated by the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS). These would allow students to become more familiar with the counselling services the university offers and the counselling services would be able to identify the needs of the students. In return, the counselling services would be able to re-evaluate their current way of rendering services to students. Lastly, the university could implement an annual Family Day (besides the Orientation Day), where the families of the students could become familiar with the expectations of academia and be educated on how to support the students. Alternatively, the university could publish information leaflets about the ways to support students.

106

5.5.1.5 Recommendations based on Theme 5: Self-care strategies

The selected programme should incorporate the teaching of self-care strategies, especially in their fieldwork modules. Some of these self-care strategies and routines could be integrated into the coursework assessments. Course designers could also design a dedicated stress management course for all students, focusing on the physical, mental and emotional health of students.

5.5.2 General Recommendations for the Health and Well-being of Social Work Students

The following recommendations are made for the health and well-being of social work students in terms of the objectives of the study:

- **Emotional preparation**: Social work students should have opportunities alongside their theoretical modules for self-reflection with a trained professional. This would enable students to develop insight on their own shortcomings and personal experiences that might negatively affect their way of intervening with clients. Furthermore, it should be recognised that not all potential social work students are appropriate candidates for social work, because of the significant emotional toll that working in the field can take on their well-being

- **Mentorship programme**: The selected university should partner with external and (perhaps veteran) social workers who would be willing to partner with the university to render mentorship services to those students who might need additional support. This would allow students to become more aware of the expectations of social workers in the field.

- **Additional support for mature students**: The selected university should provide a specific orientation for mature students. This orientation could include administrative processes, computer training and an introduction to the university environment. The facilitators could divide the students into sub-groups for mentoring and peer support. These support groups would

be required to work together for a year to build relationships with one another for the purposes of mentorship.

- **Increased online capabilities and access**: The selected university could create specific computer facilities for all coursework programmes. This means that each faculty and their specific courses would have a designated computer facility for their students. In this computer facility, an individual would be employed to assist students with technical issues that arise. This person would also ensure that the students are using the computer facilities for academic purposes.

- **Special transport**: This recommendation is a long-term plan and not easily implemented, as it will need considerable funding to facilitate. However, students need special university transport for those who are not able to live in the residences. These services could operate at a certain time of the day and should be able drop off students closer to their homes than is the case with public transport. This would ensure that students are not spending too much of their time travelling and prevent their having to spend excessive amounts on transport.

5.5.3 General Recommendations for the Support of Students

The following recommendations are made for the support of students:

- **Financial support**: It is clear that most students at the selected university struggle under significant financial constraints. It is recommended that the existing financial model of support offered to HEI students be revised in accordance with their current financial needs. Factors to consider are that the cost of living has increased and that many students carry an additional financial burden of providing for their families.

- **Academic support**: Even though there are current academic support programmes for students, many of the participants identified that it was not sufficient for their needs. A possible

108

recommendation would to allow students to identify specific modules where they struggle the most, and to put in place a tutor support programme for those modules. This recommendation is based on the premise that students would attend the tutoring, as this is not always monitored or compulsory.

- **Peer support**: The selected university should encourage peer activities at least twice a year for students to become familiar with their peers and to be able to engage with one another outside of the classrooms. The lecturers should facilitate these activities, as this would also allow the students to become familiar with their lecturers.

- **Mentorship**: The selected university could seek mentorship from alumni who can assist students from the time they enter the university to the time they graduate. These mentorship programmes could include financial support and emotional support.

5.5.4 Recommendations for Policy

- The Department of Higher Education and Training Act (101 of 1997) should make provision for medical and psychological services at hospitals to provide intervention for students at no cost or reduced rates.

- The selected university should redesign their psychological support policy to provide a more comprehensive and structured support system for students, who should not be required to be on a waiting list for such services.

- The selected university and the Centre for Student Support Services should implement a quarterly wellness programme for all registered students. It would be a prerequisite for all students to attend at least once per annum so that they are aware of the supportive services available to them at the university and any changes to the services provided.

5.5.5 Recommendations for Social Work Learning and Teaching

- The Social Work Department at the selected university should implement a stress management course. The course would run over the four years of studying, during the first semester of each year, with each year focusing on one aspect. The course would cover self-reflection and self-awareness, how to maintain a good balance between one's academic and personal life, emotional preparation for working in the field, and understanding stress sensitivity and mindfulness therapy.

- The aforementioned recommendation would further assess the students' growth and resilience. As part of these assessments, students would be required to submit weekly journals reflecting on their past week's experiences, and whether or not they have managed to implement what they have learned on the course. The students should be encouraged and indeed required to reflect on themselves and the areas in which they require more support academically and personally.

- The Social Work Department at the selected university could implement voluntary support groups led by skilled facilitators, where students can discuss their academic and personal challenges. This would prevent social work students from feeling so alone and isolated as they face their many personal struggles. The support groups would encourage partnerships and friendships, and provide the students with a sense of belonging.

5.5.6 Recommendations for Further Research

Although there is literature on the health, well-being and support of students, there is a clear dearth of studies on this topic with regard to social work students in South Africa, who face particular challenges. Therefore, more research should be done on this topic. Owing to time constraints and the scope of this study, this study did not examine the implications of insufficient and inadequate care for social work students in terms of their future professional practice. Studies on the health and well-being of newly

graduated students could be conducted to identify taps in the social work education system. Once these studies are conducted, additional and relevant topics might also emerge.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

Limitations in the study include the following: The sample size was limited in accordance with the phenomenological design, and therefore transferability is limited. The objective of the study was to understand the essence of participants' lived experiences. The research design was appropriate for the research study as it allowed the participants' narratives to be highlighted and discussed. The phenomenological study further provided insight on how the participants were feeling and how they viewed themselves. In terms of methodological limitations, the diversity of participants was limited; unfortunately, access to a culturally diverse group who met the criteria was not feasible in the circumstances. At the time of data collection, the researcher could not meet with the participants face-to-face owing to the strict lockdown and safety measures put in place by the government. The researcher had to resort to interviewing the participants telephonically, which was a limitation in terms of being able to observe all non-verbal cues. In addition, many of the participants identified Covid-19 as a substantial threat to their health and well-being.

5.7 Significance of the Study

This study on the health, well-being and support of social work students illustrates the importance of ensuring that social work students know how take care of themselves before they provide therapeutic services to the broader community. The research has drawn attention to the many emotional needs of social work students and has provided the programme with an alternative perspective on their curriculum, recommending the inclusion of more practical personal development activities in addition to the theoretical components of the course.

This research study and other literature may be used as a guide for social work students, helping them to identify the risk factors of not taking care of their health and well-being.

Social workers play an important role in society and therefore social work practitioners need to be equipped to take care of themselves and others. This research study therefore contributes to the awareness of the health and well-being needs of social work practitioners and the necessity of formal ways to support these practitioners. It became abundantly clear during this study that social work students do not arrive at their institutions of learning sanitised of the socio-emotional conditions that prevail in their families and communities. Consequently, it is important that social work academic programmes take the fallibility of students into account when designing and redesigning their curricula. This research study has identified specific recommendations to improve social work teaching and learning.

5.8 Chapter Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the health and well-being of social work students at a selected university. The sample included seven participants who were social work students at different study year levels at the selected university. The narratives of the participants reflected their state of well-being, their main concerns and their challenges. The narratives further provided insight on the participants' emotional preparation for the social work coursework, their personal and academic struggles, the support they required to excel academically, their insufficient financial assistance and the importance of self-care and self-reflection.

Chapter 5 has presented the conclusions and implications of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the research study. It is clear from the conclusions that many of the participants lacked emotional preparation for their work, that the stress of financial support hindered many of the participants from excelling academically, and that, even though many of the participants were aware of self-care, they did not all implement it fully. The researcher has provided recommendations which highlight the

importance of the above. Recommendations have been given for the selected university, for the social work students, for the social work learning and teaching environment, and for adjustments in policies.

5.9 Overall Conclusion

Students, and specifically social work students, appear to be under tremendous stress and pressure, not only in South Africa but globally. In view of this, some engage in risky behaviour to escape their burdens, such as substance abuse, promiscuous behaviour and acts of violence. Student health and well-being and their support is a concern worldwide. There has been limited research conducted specifically on the health, well-being and support of social work students nationally and internationally. Thus, this research is important as it highlights the importance of the health, well-being and support of social work students who are about the enter careers where they support entire communities – which also suffering from trauma, stress, financial constraints and a variety of social ills. It is important that the professionals who support communities know how to take care of themselves and are supported in their formative years as social workers. This research will assist universities to identify their own limitations and establish new methods where needed.

Chapter 1 provided background information on the topic, discussing the context and rationale for the study, the gaps in previous research, the research aim, research question, objectives and key concepts and definitions.

Chapter 2 explored the literature on the topic. The researcher was able to identify the gaps in the research topic and thus discussed the importance of the current research study. The researcher further highlighted the theoretical framework that guided the research study – Bronfonbrenner's (1992) Ecological Systems Theory.

Chapter 3 discussed the chosen methodology for the research study. The study used a phenomenological research design and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, with data

drawn from seven participants. The researcher discussed the trustworthiness and ethical considerations that formed part of the study.

Chapter 4 presented and analysed the data. The demographic profile of the participants was presented, together with their academic study year levels. Five themes and 11 sub-themes emerged from the participants' narratives. These were discussed in relation to the study's objectives and the findings of the literature. Participants narratives were presented in quotations from the transcripts of interviews, to ensure a close link between raw data and conclusions drawn.

Chapter 5 provided a conclusion to the research study and made recommendations for the selected university, the Social Work Department, the social work students and policy developers.

The researcher provided insight into the importance of the research topic. Gaps in previous research studies were identified and recommendations made for further research on social work students. Social workers play a vital role in many communities and provide much-needed knowledge and support. However, little to no research covers the nature of social work education. Social work students experience numerous challenges academically and personally and their current lack of understanding and self-care could result in a generation of burned-out social work practitioners. This is a clear indication that consideration should be given to social work students before they enter the professional environment. Social work students should be adequately empowered on how to cope with the demands of social work, their academics and their personal lives. This would provide a firm foundation for future social workers and possibly minimise the exodus of social work practitioners from the field. Importantly, it would increase the number of social workers in practice who are empowered and equipped to take care of their own emotional needs and the many needs of the clients they serve.

REFERENCES

Abou El-Seoud, M. S., Taj-Eddin, I. A., Seddiek, N., El-Khouly, M. M., & Nosseir, A. (2014). E-learning and students' motivation: A research study on the effect of e-learning on higher education. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, *9*(4), 20-26.

Adams, R., Adeleke, F., Anderson, D., Bawa, A., Branson, N., Christoffels, A., & Ramsay, M. (2021). POPIA code of conduct for research. *South African Journal of Science*, *117*(5-6), 1-12.

Addington, L. A., & Yablon, Y. B. (2011). How safe do students feel at school and while travelling to school? A comparative look at Israel and the United States. *American Journal of Education*, *117*(4), 465-493.

Alvi, M. (2016). *A manual for selecting sampling techniques in research*. University of Karachi, Iqra University. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70218/1/MPRA_paper_70218.pdf

Aristovnik, A., Keržič, D., Ravšelj, D., Tomaževič, N., & Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on life of higher education students: A global perspective. *Sustainability*, *12*(20), 8438.

Anderson, G. M. (1999). *Building a people's university in South Africa: Race, compensatory education and the structural limits of democratic reform at the University of the Western Cape*. City University of New York.

Anderson, G. M. (2003). Racial identity, the apartheid state and the limits of political mobilization and democratic reform in South Africa: The case of the University of the Western. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, *3*(1), 29-52.

Aucejo, E. M., French, J., Araya, M. P. U., & Zafar, B. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on student experiences and expectations: Evidence from a survey. *Journal of Public Economics*, *191*, 104271.

Aveyard, H. (2018). Doing a literature review in health and social care: A practical guide. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Banerjee, D. (2020). The Covid-19 outbreak: Crucial role the psychiatrists can play. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, *50*, 102014.

Bantjes, J. R., Kagee, A., McGowan, T., & Steel, H. (2016). Symptoms of posttraumatic stress, depression and anxiety as predictors of suicidal ideation among South African university students. *Journal of American College Health*, *64*(6), 429-437.

Bantjes, J., Saal, W., Gericke, F., Lochner, C., Roos, J., Auerbach, R. P., & Stein, D. (2021). Mental health and academic failure among first-year university students in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *51*(3), 396-408.

Bettinger, E. P., Boatman, A., & Long, B. T. (2013). Student supports: Developmental education and other academic programs. In: *The Future of Children*, 93-115.

Biggs, J.B. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does*. McGraw-Hill Education.

Biggs, A., Brough, P., & Drummond, S. (2017). *The handbook of stress and health: A guide to research and practice*, 351-364.

Blaževic, I. (2016). Family, peer and school influence on children's social development. *World Journal of Education*, *6*(2), 42-49.

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*, 65-93.

Boote, D. N., & Beile, P. (2005). Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher*, *34*(6), 3-15.

Boud, D., & Prosser, M. (2002). Appraising new technologies for learning: A framework for development. *Educational Media International*, *39*(3-4), 237-245.

Boud, D., & Cohen, R. (2014). *Peer learning in higher education: Learning from and with each other*. Routledge.

Brandell, J. R. (Ed.). (2014). *Essentials of clinical social work*. Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Britto, M., & Rush, S. (2013). Developing and implementing comprehensive student support services for online students. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *17*(1), 29-42.

Breier, M. (2001). How to bridge "the great divide": The dilemma for the policy and practice of' Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) in South Africa: Current issues in education law and policy. *Perspectives in Education*, *19*(1), 89-107.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). *Ecological systems theory*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2007). The bioecological model of human development. *Handbook of Child Psychology*, *1*.

Brown, R., & Piatt, W. (2001). *Funding widening participation in higher education: A discussion paper*. Council for Industry and Higher Education and Institute for Public Policy Research.

Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: How is it done. *Qualitative Research*, *6*(1), 97-113.

Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J., & Zheng, J. (2020). The psychological impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry Research*, *287*, 112934.

Carelse, S.Z. (2018). *Social work services provided by non-profit organisations to adult methamphetamine users: An ecological perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University).

Cartney, P. (2004). How academic knowledge can support practice learning: A case study of learning styles. *The Journal of Practice Teaching in Health and Social Work*, *5*(2), 51-72.

Cater, M., Machtmes, K., & Fox, J. E. (2013). A phenomenological examination of context on adolescent ownership and engagement rationale. *Qualitative Report*, *18*, 31.

Cele, M. B. (2014). *Student politics and the funding of higher education in South Africa: the case of the University of the Western Cape, 1995-2005* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape).

Centre for Student Support Services. (2016). University of the Western Cape. *CSSS Centre for Student Support Services Your one-stop for … - UWC PDF. https://www.uwc.ac.za/files/files/UWC-STUDENT-GUIDE-2016.pdf.*

Chan, Z.C., Fung, Y.L., & Chien, W.T. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in data collection and analysis process? *The Qualitative Report*, 18(30), 1.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.

Cheng, W., Ickes, W., & Verhofstadt, L. (2012). How is family support related to students' GPA scores? A longitudinal study. *Higher Education*, *64*(3), 399-420.

Chitanand, N., Rathilal, S., & Rambharos, S. (2018). Higher education well-being: A balancing Act. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *32*(6), 168-176.

Christensen, J. (2016). A critical reflection of Bronfenbrenner s development ecology model. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, *69*, 22-28.

Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *27*(1), 44-54.

Cloete, N., Mouton, J.M., & Sheppard, C. (2015). The doctorate in South Africa: Discourse, data and policies. *African Minds*.

Cloete, N. (2016). For sustainable funding and fees, the undergraduate system in South Africa must be restructured. *South African Journal of Science*, *112*(3-4), 1-5.

Collins, S., Coffey, M., & Morris, L. (2010). Social work students: Stress, support and well-being. *British Journal of Social Work*, *40*(3), 963-982.

Collins, K., & Van Breda, A. (2014). Academic support for first-year social work students in South Africa. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, *46*(1).

Connelly, L.M., 2010. What is phenomenology? *Medsurg Nursing*, *19*(2),127.

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, J. M. (2007). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (3rd ed.). Sage.

Coyne, I.T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *26*(3), 623-630.

Crawford, M. (2020). Ecological Systems theory: Exploring the development of the theoretical framework as conceived by Bronfenbrenner. *J Pub Health Issue Pract*, *4*(2), 170.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., Klassen, A. C., Plano Clark, V. L., & Smith, K. C. (2011). Best practices for mixed methods research in the health sciences. *Bethesda (Maryland): National Institutes of Health*, *2013*, 541-545.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). Steps in conducting a scholarly mixed methods study. DBER Speaker Series.

Crockford, J., Hordósy, R., & Simms, K. S. (2015). "I really needed a job, like, for money and stuff": Student finance, part-time work and the student experience at a northern red-brick university. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, *17*(3), 89-109.

Crowder, R., & Sears, A. (2017). Building resilience in social workers: An exploratory study on the impacts of a mindfulness-based intervention. *Australian Social Work*, *70*(1), 17-29.

Cummins, R. (2010). Subjective wellbeing, homeostatically protected mood and depression: A synthesis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11, pp.1–17.

Darling, N. (2007). Ecological systems theory: The person in the center of the circles. *Research in human development,* 4(3-4), 203-217.

Department of Higher Education and Training. (2013). Act 101 of 1997. Government Gazette of the Republic of South Africa. Government Printers: Pretoria.

Diebold, J., Kim, W., & Elze, D. (2018). Perceptions of self-care among MSW students: Implications for social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *54*(4), 657-667.

Dodge, R., Daly, A.P., Huyton, J., & Sanders, L.D. (2012). The challenge of defining well-being. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *2*(3).

Dykes, G. Z. (2009). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Support: Are the Learning Needs of RPL First-Year Students Different? *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, *45*(3).

Dykes, G. (2011). The implications of adverse childhood experiences for the professional requirements of social work. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, *47*(4).

Dykes, G. (2014). Phronesis and adverse childhood experiences of social work students. *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, *26*(3), 331-348.

Dykes, G., & Green, S. (2015). Learning profiles of social work students: Who are you and how should this influence my teaching? *Social Work*, 51(4), 577-598.

Dziegielewski, S., Turnage, B., & Roest-Mari, S. (2004). Addressing stress with social work students: A controlled evaluation. *Journal of Social Work Education, 40*(1), 105-19.

El Ansari, W., & Stock, C. (2010). Is the health and wellbeing of university students associated with their academic performance? Cross sectional findings from the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health*, 7, 509–527.

El Ansari, W., Labeeb, S., Mosely, L., Kotb, S., & El Houty, A. (2013). Physical and psychological well-being of university students: Survey of eleven faculties in Egypt. *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 4(3), 293-310.

Ellis, R. A., Ginns, P., & Piggott, L. (2009). E-learning in higher education: some key aspects and their relationship to approaches to study. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *28*(3), 303-318.

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *South Africa GE Open*, *4*(1).

Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43(1), 13-35.

Fee, K. (2013). Delivering e-learning. A complete strategy for design, application and assessment. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*.

Fink, G. (2010). *Stress science: Neuroendocrinology*. Academic Press.

Fry, J., Scammell, J., & Barker, S. (2017). Drowning in muddied waters or swimming downstream? A critical analysis of literature reviewing in a phenomenological study through an exploration of the lifeworld, reflexivity and role of the researcher. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *17*(1).

Furman, R., Coyne, A., & Negi, N. J. (2008). An international experience for social work students: Self-reflection through poetry and journal writing exercises. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *28*(1-2), 71-85.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(9), 1408.

Gärling, T., Kirchler, E., Lewis, A., & Van Raaij, F. (2009). Psychology, financial decision making and financial crises. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, *10*(1), 1-47.

Gazza, E. A., & Hunter, D. F. (2014). Facilitating student retention in online graduate nursing education programs: A review of the literature. *Nurse Education Today*, *34*(7), 1125-1129.

Geoffrey, M., & David, D. (2005). *Essentials of research design and methodology*. John Wiley & Sons.

Giddens, A., & Sutton, P. W. (2021). *Essential concepts in sociology*. John Wiley & Sons.

Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. *Journal of Phenomenology Psychology*, 43(1), 3-12.

Graham, H. (2015). Re-engaging with education as an older mature student: Their challenges, their achievements, their stories. [Masters dissertation, Technological University Dublin]. Social Sciences.

https://web.archive.org/web/20200320032525id_/https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=aaschssldis

Grant, L. (2014). Hearts and minds: Aspects of empathy and wellbeing in social work students. *Social Work Education*, *33*(3), 338-352.

Grant, L., & Kinman, G. (2012). Enhancing wellbeing in social work students: Building resilience in the next generation. *Social Work Education*, *31*(5), 605-621.

Gockel, A., Burton, D., James, S., & Bryer, E. (2013). Introducing mindfulness as a self-care and clinical training strategy for beginning social work students. *Mindfulness*, *4*(4), 343-353.

Gurrutxaga, I., Iturrate, M., Oses, U., & Garcia, H. (2017). Analysis of the modal choice of transport at the case of university: Case of University of the Basque Country of San Sebastian. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, *105*, 233-244.

Gunawan, J. (2015). Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Belitung Nursing Journal*, *1*(1), 10-11.

Guy-Evans, O. (2020). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html. [Accessed 28 August 2022].

Häyrinen, K., Saranto, K., & Nykänen, P. (2008). Definition, structure, content, use and impacts of electronic health records: a review of the research literature. *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, 77(5), 291-304.

Hayes, N., O'Toole, L., & Halpenny, A. M. (2017). *Introducing Bronfenbrenner: A guide for practitioners and students in early years education*. Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (2013). *The myth of research-based policy and practice*. Sage.

Husserl, E. (2012). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. Routledge.

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research ethics for social scientists: Between ethical conduct and regulatory compliance*. Sage.

James, H., Handu, S.S., Al Khaja, K.A., Otoom, S., & Sequeira, R.P. (2006). Evaluation of the knowledge, attitude and practice of self-medication among first-year medical students. *Medical Principles and Practice*, 15(4), 270-275.

Jesson, J., Matheson, L., & Lacey, F. M. (2011). Doing your literature review: Traditional and systematic techniques. South Africa GE Open.

Kiteley, R., & Stogdon, C. (2013). *Literature reviews in social work*. Sage.

Klink, J. L., Byars-Winston, A., & Bakken, L. L. (2008). Coping efficacy and perceived family support: potential factors for reducing stress in premedical students. *Medical Education*, *42*(6), 572-579.

Kuper, A., Lingard, L., & Levinson, W. (2008). Qualitative research: Critically appraising qualitative research. *BMJ: British Medical Journal, 337*(7671), 687-689.

Kwok, S. Y., Cheng, L., & Wong, D. F. (2015). Family emotional support, positive psychological capital and job satisfaction among Chinese white-collar workers. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *16*(3), 561-582.

Lamon, S.J. (2007). Rational numbers and proportional reasoning: Toward a theoretical framework for research. *Second handbook of research on mathematics teaching and learning,* 1, 629-667.

Lau, F., & Kuziemsky, C. (2017). Handbook of health evaluation: An evidence-based approach. University of Victoria.

Lee, J. J., & Miller, S. E. (2013). A self-care framework for social workers: Building a strong foundation for practice. *Families in Society*, *94*(2), 96-103.

Li, H., & Masters, J. (2009). E-Learning and knowledge management in the early years: Where are we and where should we go? *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal*, *1*(4), 245-250.

Limanond, T., Butsingkorn, T., & Chermkhunthod, C. (2011). Travel behavior of university students who live on campus: A case study of a rural university in Asia. *Transport Policy*, *18*(1), 163-171.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Establishing trustworthiness. *Naturalistic inquiry*, *289*(331), 289-327.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences, revisited. In N.K Denzin & Y.S Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp 97-128). Sage Publications Inc.

Lopez, V., & Whitehead, D. (2013). Sampling data and data collection in qualitative research. *Nursing & midwifery research: Methods and appraisal for evidence-based practice*, 123-140.

Maritz, A., & Coughlan, F. (2004). Developmental social work: Exploring the attitudes and experiences of South African social work students. *Community Development Journal*, *39*(1), 28-37.

Mark, G. T., & Lyons, A. C. (2010). Maori healers' views on wellbeing: The importance of mind, body, spirit, family and land. *Social Science & Medicine*, *70*(11), 1756-1764.

Maxwell, J. (2006). Literature Reviews of and for, Educational Research: A Commentary on Boote and Beile's 'Scholars before Researchers'. *Educational Researcher, 35*(9), 28-31.

Mayfield, K. (2008). *'I love being a freak.' Exploring the ways adolescent girls on the margins create worlds of power in high school classrooms*. University of Wyoming.

Mensah, P. K. (2019). *Funding dilemmas in tertiary education institutions: The case of internally generated revenue (IGR) in public universities in Ghana* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Kwazulu-Natal.

Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. (2007) Baumgartner. *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*, *3*. Sage Publications Inc.

Mertens, D. M. (2010). Philosophy in mixed methods teaching: The transformative paradigm as illustration. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, *4*(1), 9-18.

Mhlanga, D., & Moloi, T. (2020). Covid-19 and the digital transformation of education: What are we learning on 4IR in South Africa? *Education Sciences*, *10*(7), 180.

Miller, S.E. (2013). Professional socialization: A bridge between the explicit and implicit. Routledge.

Milner, J., Myers, S., & O'Byrne, P. (2020). *Assessment in social work*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Milman, N. B., Posey, L., Pintz, C., Wright, K., & Zhou, P. (2015). Online Master's Students' Perceptions of Institutional Supports and Resources: Initial Survey Results. *Online Learning*, *19*(4).

Mitchell, B. (2016). Understanding curriculum. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, *4*(4).

Mlamla, S. (2020, October 27). 'UWC'S response to Covid-19 pandemic lauded'. *Cape Argus.* *https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/uwcs-response-to-covid-19-pandemic-lauded-b9cafbaf-14e3-4997-a773-29bdec4815ba*

Morgan, D. L. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *1*(1), 48-76.

Moore, S. E., Bledsoe, L. K., Perry, A. R., & Robinson, M. A. (2011). Social work students and self-care: A model assignment for teaching. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *47*(3), 545-553.

Mndende, A. (2022). The language factor in students' experience of assessments: A case study from the University of the Western Cape. [Masters dissertation].

https://etd.uwc.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11394/9230/mndende_m_art_2022.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Mulder, C., & Dull, A. (2014). Facilitating self-reflection: The integration of photovoice in graduate social work education. *Social Work Education*, *33*(8), 1017-1036.

Murphy, L., Markey, K., O'Donnell, C., Moloney, M., & Doody, O. (2021). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its related restrictions on people with pre-existent mental health conditions: A scoping review. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, *35*(4), 375-394.

Naidoo, P., & Cartwright, D. (2020). Where to from here? Contemplating the impact of Covid-19 on South African students and student counselling services in higher education. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 1-15.

Napoli, M., & Bonifas, R. (2011). From theory toward empathic self-care: Creating a mindful classroom for social work students. *Social Work Education*, *30*(6), 635-649.

Nazar, N. (2020). The ecosystem approach in health social work. *Mental Health: Global Challenges Journal*, *3*(2), 16-18.

Nehme, M. (2010). E-learning and students motivation. *Legal Education Review*, *20*(1/2), 223-239.

Newcomb, M., Burton, J., & Edwards, N. (2017). Childhood adversity and self-care education for undergraduate social work and human services students. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *37*(4), 337-352.

Newell, J. M., & Nelson-Gardell, D. (2014). A competency-based approach to teaching professional self-care: An ethical consideration for social work educators. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *50*(3), 427-439.

O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2013). 'Unsatisfactory Saturation': a critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *13*(2), 190-197.
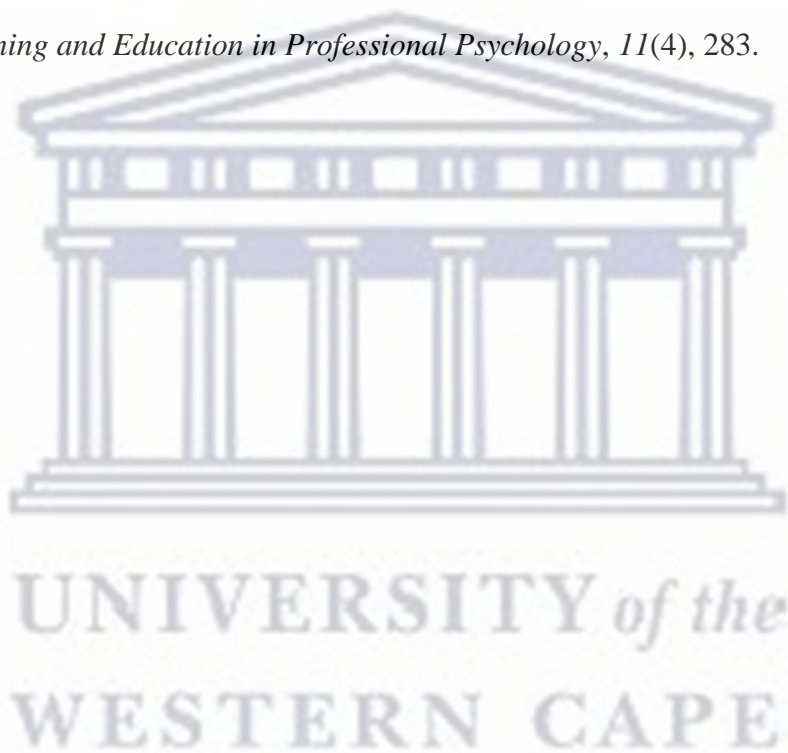
126

O'Neill, M., Yoder Slater, G., & Batt, D. (2019). Social work student self-care and academic stress. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *55*(1), 141-152.

Osman, R. (2003). The recognition of prior learning (RPL): An emergent field of enquiry in South Africa. (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand).

Paat, Y. F. (2013). Working with immigrant children and their families: An application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *23*(8), 954-966.

Pragholapati, A. (2020). Covid-19 impact on students. file:///C:/Users/C1950630/Downloads/EFFECT%20OF%20COVID-19%20FOR%20STUDENT.pdf

Prebble, T., Hargraves, H., Leach, L., Naidoo, K., Suddaby, G., & Zepke, N. (2004). *Impact of student support services and academic development programmes on student outcomes in undergraduate tertiary study: A synthesis of the research*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Phillips, D. C., & Burbules, N. C. (2000). *Postpositivism and educational research*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Pillay, A.L., & Ngcobo, H.S. (2010). Sources of stress and support among rural-based first-year university students: An exploratory study. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *40*(3), 234-240.

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2004). *Nursing research: Principles and methods*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Purwaningrum, R., Hanurawan, F., Degeng, I. N. S., & Triyono, T. (2019). School counselor's psychological well-being: a phenomenological study. *European Journal of Education Studies*. [Doctoral dissertation]. file:///C:/Users/C1950630/Downloads/2418-9559-2-PB%20(1).pdf

Qutoshi, S. B. (2018). Phenomenology: A philosophy and method of inquiry. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, *5*(1).

127

Randolph, J. (2009). A guide to writing the dissertation literature review. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, *14*(1), 13.

Rau, A., Radloff, S., Coetzee, J.K., Nardi, C., Smit, R., & Matebesi, S.Z. (2014). Students perceiving risk: a quantitative assessment on three South African university campuses. *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, *18*(1), 65-90.

Roksa, J., & Kinsley, P. (2019). The role of family support in facilitating academic success of low-income students. *Research in Higher Education*, *60*(4), 415-436.

Rooney, G.D., Rooney, R.H., Hepworth, D.H., & Strom-Gottfried, K. (2017). *Direct social work practice: Theory and skills*. Cengage Learning.

Rossman, G., & Rallis, S. F. (2012). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. Sage.

Rothery, M. (2008). Critical ecological systems theory. *Theoretical perspectives for direct social work practice: A generalist-eclectic approach*, 89-118.

Round, A. (2005). *A survey of student attitudes, experiences and expectations*. School of Education, University of Waikato.

Rugbeer, Y., Rugbeer, H., & Naidoo, G. M. (2020). First-year experience at a rural comprehensive university in KwaZulu-Natal. *African Journal of Rhetoric*, *12*(1), 143-166.

Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19): Impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, *12*(4).

Sainju, N. K. (2018). Holistic approach to health. *Journal of Kathmandu Medical College*, *7*(1), 1-3.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research methods for business students*. Pearson Education Limited.

Schnettler, B., Miranda-Zapata, E., Grunert, K. G., Lobos, G., Denegri, M., Hueche, C., & Poblete, H. (2017). Life satisfaction of university students in relation to family and food in a developing country. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*, 1522.

128

Shacklock, G., & Smyth, J. (1998). *Being reflexive in critical educational and social research* (Vol. 18). Psychology Press.

Shannon, P. J., Simmelink-McCleary, J., Im, H., Becher, E., & Crook-Lyon, R. E. (2014). Developing self-care practices in a trauma treatment course. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *50*(3), 440-453.

Shah, H., & Marks, N. (2004). *A well-being manifesto for a flourishing society*. The New Economics Foundation.

Sinclair, E. (2017). A *case study on the importance of peer support for e-learners*. *CSEDU, 2,* 280-284.

Simpson, B. (2015). Large classes in social work education: A threat to the professional socialisation of social work students? *Social Work*, *51*(4), 565-576.

Smailes, J., & Gannon-Leary, P. (2011). Peer mentoring – is a virtual form of support a viable alternative? *Research in Learning Technology*, *19*(2).

Smythe, W.E., & Murray, M.J. (2000). Owning the story: Ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics & Behavior*, *10*(4), 311-336.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.

Stark, J., Singleton, P. A., & Uhlmann, T. (2019). Exploring children's school travel, psychological well-being and travel-related attitudes: Evidence from primary and secondary school children in Vienna, Austria. *Travel, Behaviour and Society*, *16*, 118-130.

Statistics South Africa. (2018). 2018 mid-year population estimates. https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022018.pdf. [Accessed on 28 August 2022].

Stewart-Brown, S., Evans, J., Patterson, J., Petersen, S., Doll, H., Balding, J., & Regis, D. (2000). The health of students in institutes of higher education: An important and neglected public health problem? *Journal of Public Health Medicine*, *22*, 492–499.

Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology; how to choose a sampling technique for research. *How to choose a sampling technique for research*. https://deliverypdf.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=686112110110065127127030087011079117041064093064074050004004118102127122098112124089057097038029010061121125022121120087000093024002094022065086070092070107001127007064048071009115071006022006088093005030090116096027011002112005007005123127097110068101&EXT=pdf&INDEX=TRUE

Tesch, R. (1990). Qualitative research: *Analysis types and software tools*. Falmer.

University of the Western Cape. (2020). *Annual Report 2020*. https://n2r6x9i3.stackpathcdn.com/files/files/UWC-Annual-Report-2020.pdf. [Accessed 20 August 2022].

University of the Western Cape. (2022). Centre for Student Support Services. https://www.uwc.ac.za/campus-life/resources/centre-for-student-support-services-csss. [Accessed 20 August 2022].

Van Rhijn, T. M., Lero, D. S., Bridge, K., & Fritz, V. A. (2016). Unmet needs: Challenges to success from the perspectives of mature university students. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, *28*(1), 29-47.

Ventegodt, S., Kandel, I., Ervin, D. A., & Merrick, J. (2016). Concepts of holistic care. In: *Health care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the lifespan*, 1935-1941. Springer

Walker, W. (2007). Ethical considerations in phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher*, *14*(3).

Watson, R. (2015). Quantitative research. *Nursing Standard (2014+)*, *29*(31), 44.

Webster, J., & Watson, R.T. (2002). Analyzing the past to prepare for the future: *Writing a literature review*, 9-xxiii.

Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., & Charles, V. (2008). The management of confidentiality and anonymity in social research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *11*(5), 417-428.

Wilks, S.E., & Spivey, C.A. (2010). Resilience in undergraduate social work students: Social support and adjustment to academic stress. *Social Work Education*, 29(3), 276-288.

Ying, Y. W. (2009). Contribution of self-compassion to competence and mental health in social work students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *45*(2), 309-323.

Zahniser, E., Rupert, P. A., & Dorociak, K. E. (2017). Self-care in clinical psychology graduate training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, *11*(4), 283.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UWC Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

60 YEARS of hope, action & knowledge

09 June 2020

Mrs A Brown
Social Work
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Ethics Reference Number: HS18/9/7

Project Title: Exploring the health, well-being and support to Social Work students at a selective university.

Approval Period: 08 June 2020 – 08 June 2023

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.

The permission to conduct the study must be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Mr Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

Director: Research Development
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
Bellville 7535
Republic of South Africa
Tel: +27 21 959 4111
Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC-130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

APPENDIX B: Information Sheet (English)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: 021 9592851

E-mail: gdykes@uwc.ac.za

<u>INFORMATION SHEET</u> – SOCIAL WORK STUDENT

Project   **Exploring the health and well-being of Social Work students at a selective university**

Title:

What is this study about?

This research project will be conducted by Adwina Brown, a Masters' student in Social work at the University of Western Cape. You are therefore invited to take part in the study because you have been identified as a social work student that would provide relevant information for the topic on exploring the health and well-being of social work students. This research study aims to gain a deeper understanding on the health and well-being of social work students and their need for support and the kinds of appropriate support.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

The researcher will conduct at least a 1 hour interview with you at a venue of your choice or in the social work department on the topic. The researcher will ask you to talk about your health and well-being as a social work student and the kinds of support you need. Please know that there is no right or wrong answer when answering the questions because we are interested in knowing your experiences and opinions. Lastly, for the purpose of accurately documenting the information, the interview will be audio recorded.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Information gathered from you and all other participants will be handled in professional and confidential manner. This includes information obtained from the audio recording which will be stored in a safe and secure location. The information collected will be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor of this study only and yourself, if you want to see it. Your names and any identifying information will not be used when publishing the resulting. Instead, the researcher will make use of identification codes, such as 'Participant A' and the gender (male or female). All information gathered will be stored on a

133

computer and it will be secured with a password. When writing up a report, your identity will be protected at all times. There are however limits of confidentiality which is in accordance with legal requirements and professional standards, where information must be made available to appropriate individuals and/or authorities for example, when it comes to information about ethical behavior, child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.

What are the risks of this research?

Taking part in the study may not expose you to physical risks; however, you may experience emotional discomfort as you talk about your personal experiences. Should you need any counselling, one will be provided to you.

What are the benefits of this research?

Some of the benefits of taking part in this study include providing a deeper understanding on the topic at hand. The research study will be exploring the state of health and well-being of social work students and appropriate kinds of support and services that could be helpful. The information from the study can also be used to help plan and implement more appropriate support for students as well as inform departmental policies.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. This means that no one can force you to participant in the study. If you take part in the study and wish not to continue anymore, you may stop participating at any time. You will not be penalised.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

If you experience emotional distress during or after participating in the study, you will be referred to a counsellor for professional assistance if you feel the need for it.

What if I have questions?

This research study will be conducted by Adwina Brown, a student in the Social Work Department at the University of the Western Cape. Should you have further questions about the research study itself contact Adwina Brown at: Cell – +27 74 375 8888 or E-mail – adwinabrown@gmail.com / 3460210@myuwc.ac.za. If you have any questions regarding this research study or your rights as a participant or want to report any problems please contact:

Dr Glynnis Dykes (Study Supervisor)

Department of Social Work

Sciences

Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

University of the Western Cape

Tel: 021 9592851

Email: gdykes@uwc.ac.za

Professor Althea Rhoda

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health

University of the Western Cape

Tel: 021 959 2631/2746

Email: arhoda@uwc.ac.za

APPENDIX C: Deelnemer Inligtingsbrief (Afrikaans)

Universiteit van Wes Kaap

Privaatsak X 17, Bellville 7535, Suid-Afrika

Tel: +27 74 375 8888

E-pos: **adwinabrown@gmail.com** */* **3460210@myuwc.ac.za**

DEELNEMER INLIGTINGSBRIEF – MAATSKAPLIKE WERK STUDENT

Titel van navorsingsprojek: Die ondersoek van gesondheid en welstand van Maatskaplike werkers in 'n selektiewe Universiteit.

1. Inleiding

As maatskaplike werk student word U uitgenooi om deel te neem aan bogenoemde navorsingsprojek wat onderneem word deur Adwina Brown, 'n Meesters student van die Departement van Maatskaplike Werk aan die Universiteit van die Wes Kaap.

Rede vir die versoek na U deelname aan hierdie navorsingsprojek, is aangesien dat U as 'n student met die toepaslike inligtings kan bydra tot die onderwerp. Die rede vir die studie sal verduidelik word en wat dit behels. Lees asseblief die volgende inligting sodat jy kan weet wat die studie behels.

2. Wat behels hierdie studie?

Die studie beoog om 'n dieper begrip van gesondheid en welstand van die student te he, gefokus op jou ervaringe in die veld, hul negatiewe ervaringe, die impak op hulle emosionele toestand en die uitwerking daarvan op hul akademiese prestasie. Die doel van hierdie studie is om die gevolge van veldwerk ervaringe, van jou as 'n maatskaplike werk student te begrip, jou persoonlike ervaringe en die vorms van ondersteunende toesig wat verskaf word deur jou veldwerk toesighouer(s).

3. Wat sal van my as deelneemer verwag word?

Daar sal ten minste 1 uur onderhoud met jou gevoer deur die navorser. Die afspraak kan plaasvind by 'n lokaal by die geselekteerde univeriteit. Daar is geen reg of verkeerde antwoorde nie; ons wil net jou mening oor die onderwerp hê. Die onderhoud sal met ń klankopnemer opgeneem word sodat ons nie inligting verloor wat jy tydens die onderhoud bespreek het nie.

4. Hoe sal jou deelname aan hierdie studie vertroulik gehou word ?

Inligting sal op 'n professionele en vertroulike wyse hanteer word. Die inligting wat deur die klankopname opgeneem word, sal veilig gestoor word en alle inligting sal slegs toeganklik wees vir die navorser en toesighouer van hierdie studie, dit kan wel ook aan u beskikbaar wees, as u dit sou vereis. U sal anoniem bly; ons gebruik slegs identifikasiekodes, soos manlik of vroulik. Alle inligting sal op 'n rekenaar gestoor word en sal met 'n wagwoord beskerm wees. Wanneer die finale verslag opgestel word, sal jou identiteit ten alle tye beskerm word. Daar is egter beperkinge op vertroulikheid wat in ooreenstemming is met wetlike vereistes en professionele standaarde, waar inligting byvoorbeeld aan toepaslike individue en/of owerhede beskikbaar gestel moet word, met betrekking tot etiese gedrag, kindermishandeling of verwaarlosing of potensiële skade aan U of ander.

5. Wat is die risiko's van hierdie navorsing ?

Daar blyk geen fisiese risiko's betrokke te wees nie, maar indien 'n risiko ontbloot word soos byvoorbeeld emosionele ongemaklikheid, tydens die onderhoud oor U veldwerk ervaringe, sal die nodige verwysings gedoen word. Indien nodig sal daar egter reëlings getref word om U die nodige ondersteuning te verskaf en jy sal dan na 'n berader werwys word.

6. Wat is die voordele van hierdie navorsing?

Die studie sal die nodige inligting vir veldwerk toesighouers behels en insig gee oor hul metodes van betrokkenheid tuidens toesig, en is gebaseer op die implementering van emosionele hulp in student leiding. Die resultate van hierdie studie sal die veldwerk toesighouers meer bewus maak oor ondersteundende toesig met fokus op 'n meer waardevolle leer ervaringe te skep. Die studie sal die leer ervaringe van die maatskaplike werk studente van 1ste tot 4de jaar vlak, sowel as toesighouers and dosente se bydrae saamstel.

7. Is my deelname verpligtend en mag ek op enige tyd die studie/projek verlaat?

Deelname aan die navorsing is heeltemal vrywillig. Dit beteken dat niemand jou kan dwing om voort tegaan met die navorsing nie. As jy kies om deel te neem aan die studie en op 'n later staduim nie meer wil voortgaan nie, kan jy op enige stadium stop. Jy sal dus nie gepenaliseer word nie.

8. Is daar enige hulp beskikbaar as ek negatief geraak word deur deelname aan hierdie studie?

137

As jy emosioneel of andersins ongemaklike voel tydens of na die deelname van die studie, sal jy an 'n berading verwys word as jy 'n behoefte daarvoor het.

9. Enige verder onsekerheid ?

Hierdie navorsingstudie sal deur Adwina Brown van die Departement van Maatskaplike Werk aan die Universiteit van die Wes-Kaap gedoen word. Indien jy nog verdere vrae oor die navorsing studie self het, kontak Adwina Brown op:

 Cell – +27 74 375 8888 of

E-pos – adwinabrown@gmail.com / 3460210@myuwc.ac.za.

 As jy enige vrae het oor hierdie navorsing studie of jou regte as deelnemer of wil enige probleme rapporteer, kontak asseblief:

Dr Glynnis Dykes (Studie Toesighouer)   Professor Anthea Rhoda

Departement van Maatskaplike Werk   Dekaan: Fakulteit van Gemeenskap en

                                                                                              Gesondsheids wetenskappe

Fakulteit van Gemeenskap en Gesondsheids wetenskappe   Universiteit van Wes Kaap

Universiteit van Wes Kaap   Tel: 021 959 2631/2746

Tel: 021 9592851   Epos: arhoda@uwc.ac.za

Epos: gdykes@uwc.ac.za

APPENDIX D: Consent Form (English)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: 021 9592851

E-mail: gdykes@uwc.ac.za

CONSENT FORM – SOCIAL WORK STUDENT

Title of Research Project: Exploring the health and well-being of Social Work students at a selective university

The research project focuses on your experiences and perceptions regarding your health and well-being as a social work student in a selected university and the kinds of support you think you would need. The study has been described to me in a language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone by the researchers. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

I agree to be audio-taped.	Yes	No

Participant's name……………………………………

Participant's signature……………………………….

Date…………………………………………………...

139

APPENDIX E: Toestemming Brief (Afrikaans)

Universiteit van Wes Kaap

Privaatsak 17, Bellville 7535, Suid-Afrika

Tel: +27 74 375 8888

E-pos: adwinabrown@gmail.com / 3460210@myuwc.ac.za

TOESTEMMING BRIEF – MAATSKAPLIKE WERK STUDENT

Titel van navorsings Projek: Ondersoek die gesondheid en welstand van maatskaplike werk studente by 'n gekose universiteit.

Die navorsing projek fokus op die verkenning en beskrywing van die ervaringe deur ondersteunende toesig in 'n gekose universiteit. Die navorsing studie is aan my verduidelik in 'n taal wat ek verstaan en ek stem om vrywillig deel te neem. Ek verstaan alles in die inligtingsblad en my vrae oor die studie is beantwoord. Ek verstaan dat my identiteit nie ge-openbaar sal word nie, en dat ek enige tyd die studie mag verlaat sonder verduideliking en dit sal my in geen manier negatief beïnvloed nie.

Ek stem in dat 'n klankopnemer gebruik kan word	Ja	Nee

Naam van die deelnemer: …………………………..

Handtekening van die deelnemer:………………………

Datum :………………………

APPENDIX F: Transcript of one participant

Transcript of: Participant 7 – SWS007

SPEAKER			
R (Researcher) **P** (Participant)	**DIALOGUE**	**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**	**Code / Key**
R	Hi. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research study. How are you doing?		
P	Hi. No thank you for allowing me to participate in this research. I am so blessed and content. How are you?		
R	I am well thank you so much for asking. So, to start off, I am Ms Adwina Brown a Masters in Social Work Student at UWC. My research topic is about 'Exploring the health and well-being of Social Work Students at a selective University'. I would like to confirm you have received the Information sheet and Consent form? Do you have any questions based on the Information sheet and Consent form? In addition, can you confirm that you give verbal permission for this interview to be audio-taped?		
P	I read everything yes and I give my full consent. And yes I give my full		

141

	permission and consent for the interview to be recorded.		
R	Thank you so much. Everything discussed in this interview is confidential. This interview is for academic purposes. Before we start, please note, I am not here as a Social Worker but as a researcher and if you need any Social Work assistance or counselling, I will refer you to someone towards the end of the interview.		
P	Thank you yes.		
R	So the first question is, 'Describe a particular situation in which you experienced an emotional event or events that occurred while being on campus and that affected your studies thereafter?'		
P	Oooh jinne… I would say the one time… uhm… my studies had an effect on me was when I did the… it was the portfolio. I cant remember which one now. I felt so overwhelmed cause I didn't understand the context of the portfolio and I did the whole thing and it was wrong. And this tutor she liked marked me and I felt it was like unfair and then I went back to her and the responds or her… her attitude she gave me it did not sit well with me cause im		

142

http://etd.uwc.ac.za/

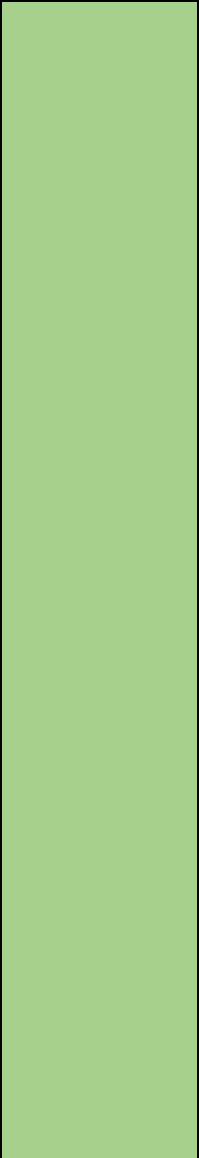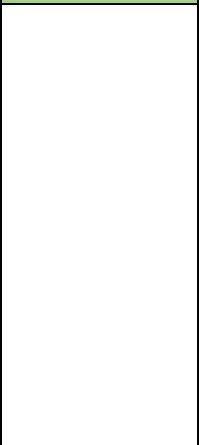|			
	thinking like yor… its my first year here… and this is the way you treat me. I know nothing about university work and I just felt that she could treat me differently. Or just have some sort of compassion. You understand… and I just felt yooor. That had a huge impact on me and I told myself like no… here I need to figure out how to do things better or smarter and that was when I approached the one lecturer. I approached him and I spoke with him and he guided me along the way.		
R	Okay… so that was the support you got? Was there any other support that you needed it in that time?		
P	No then I met this one other student and from… since then we buddies now so shes been a huge support in my life. Because she did like uhm… she worked in the social work profession before but not as a social worker as a social auxiliary worker and yeah… she is my support up till now.		
R	Okay that's good. And was there any other event or something that happened besides your studies, anything else that happened but had an effect on your studies.		
P	Yes. That time that they striked. I was like going to campus like two three		

	times a week and when I got there like yoor there was no classes. And im like how the hell. How do these people communicate? Im travelling from Lavender Hill to Bellvile to get there and I cant even enter the gates and that was also when I thought nah man… this isn't gonna work for me and im thinking… must you rather stop this or continue with what you doing because I mean its financial constrain on my pocket and its time limited and eventually that event also slowly disappeared and it got back to track again.		
R	But obviously that particular event. Like you said it was financial strain but on top of that, im sure it impacted you in other ways as well.		
P	Oh yes most definitely. I would get so upset because im thinking of all the time I wasted travelling when I could've finished an assignment or go over some of my work. Mentally it messes you up a little cause now you thinking hey, am I doing the right thing. That type of thing. I wanted to leave everything at some point. It really messes you up. You think to yourself, what am I doing here. Its playing on your mind. Psychologically, its playing on my		

144

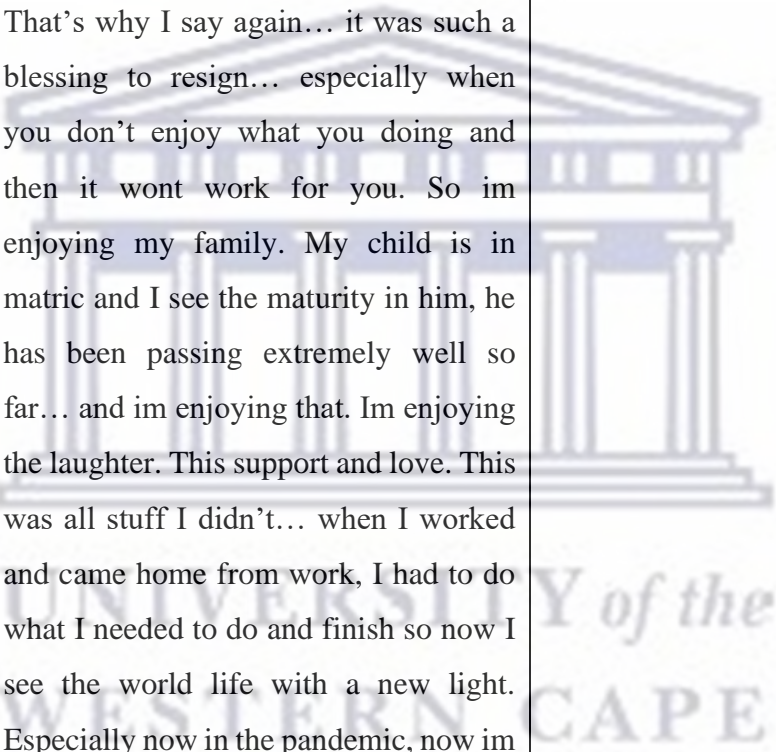|			
	mind. It takes a lot of thinking and a lot of stress. Am I doing this right. Why am I doing this. Is this the way its going to be for the rest of the five years im going to be here.		
R	So what helped you get out of that mindset? Besides the protesting stopping but also helped you get out of that mindset of wanting to stop your studies.		
P	Well, then you sit and you reflect and you tell yourself… that was the first year you got there and I mean… the portfolio alone and you put in a lot of work. Then im thinking and I met this lady the time I went for the interview and when she read my portfolio and she was like yor she never in her life uhm… when she marked it, I was like the first person ever marked.. she gave me a very very good mark and that was my motivation because she said uhm… im the first one ever that she rated so high in her marking. And I told myself yor.. that portfolio alone… if you can put in hard work like that surely you can put in the hard work for the rest of the five years and I mean, ive been through a lot. I just told myself like… this University work cant be that bad. But okay… reality is kicking in now but it isn't something		

145

	you cannot do. You can do it if you put your mind to it. So that was also one of my motivation when I went for that interview and what that lady told me. So that is always there at the back of my mind… okay so you did that portfolio, you can do much better with your other stuff.		
R	Oh wow… so you self-motivated basically.		
P	Yes I did. Nobody else is gonna do it for you. Yes you have people that motivates you here and there but that is fine. But at the end of the day, you gonna have to do it yourself man.	*Laughing*	
R	And who was the people that motivated you?		
P	When I was working and studying, nobody besides my two colleagues and my family. I don't have many friends, I actually don't have friends. So those were the only people. So for now, its still just my family and my two colleagues. And then my friends at University.		
R	And how are those people supporting you?		
P	My varsity friends… if we do assignments, we would help each other, we guide each other. Then you get colleagues who now became friends that would like motivate you and make you		

146

	laugh at the end. That type of thing. And my family is always there. I have a grandson now, so when I have to do assignments there is always someone that would look after him. Then my husband. Like financial wise, emotionally and every type of support you can think of, he is there.		
R	That is good. Cause not a lot of students have that support. Especially, when they have to leave their place of employment to go and study full-time. And have you received any support from the university or your department?		
P	For now, I didn't seen any of the counselling support that the university has to offer as im not at a point where I need that… for now im coping not in a sense where I submit two three days before the time but one day or on the day. But this far, ive been coping. So I don't need that. But there is… they've sent out emails that if you need counselling, there is that service provider yeah. Now with corona, to be totally honest… the only thing I don't miss is the travelling part. So uhm… staying at home works for me and allows me to do what I need to do. Just because I don't wanna travel. I have to take 3 taxis and		

	a train to get to university so that part I do not miss. But I feel that I do miss the… being on campus physically. Because im the type of person when I don't understand, I would go to the lecturer and I would make them know that I don't understand and I would ask you until I understand. You would explain it to me until I understand. So that is what I miss because I would… online is a real… its not a struggle, it is just confusing at times because now I need to zoom and I have a problem with zoom. Because I struggle most of the time to do it or attend class just because im a dwanky when it comes t technology but other than that.. I do miss being on campus physically.		
R	Okay… so now that everything is online and now the lecturers need to explain something. Do they explain in such a way that you understand?		
P	Yes they definitely do. That's one thing a person can say. They do. They really do take their time to explain.		
R	Well that's good to hear! Tell me, what other kind of support do you think you needed especially during your studies? Not just this year specifically? From anyone		

P	I cannot think of anything now… yoor they could've given a person uhm… lesser assignment. They don't worry if you 50yrs old and the other one is 20. Nooo… you all sit at the same table mybru. Its uhm… there is no leniency for age. I think they could've done something for us much beautiful older people. Like for example… I would say… when last have I attended school like seriously… and the terminology that they use is like out of this world. So they could've just… not make our work easier but… not so heavy on the mature students. Like they give you a lot of work and you've got a lot of responsibilities like a house and children… okay that is part of the package I get all of that… but okay… it is a motivation for me as well. So yeah… bring it on	*Laughing*	
R	Age appropriate assignments you say. But thank you for sharing and giving your insight. It is much appreciated. Before we end off, I just wanna know how do you take care of yourself during this time. During the pandemic and during your studies. How do you remain sain and clear minded?	*Laughing*	
P	So… what im doing now is like weekends… I try to do whatever I need		

149

	to do before weekends. Like assignments and stuff. And so when I have free time, I would now uhm… go to the beach, go sit in the park.. I would never do that before. Im not that type of person. I would always sit infront of the tv and just stay in the house. But this is what I started doing. I go sit in the park, I sit here on a field by me where theres benches now and tree. Then I just take a moment to breath and be still. This is what im starting to do because I know I need this because life is fast… there isn't time for pitty-parties and feeling sorry for yourself. So this is what im doing now. Im spending time with God also. It seriously works for me.		
R	That is amazing. Im so happy that you managed to find what works for you and that you sticking to it. How did this start? What made you decide to focus on you and your self-care?		
P	Because uhm.. speaking to the lecturers and the supervisors, some of them are like amazing and then when you have group sessions they would tell you… its almost like they would brainwash you that self-care is important. And then I also realised that im going 7 days a week for four weeks for months, like a clock. Like im never stopping man. And the		

150

	only time I rest is when I sleep at night and I don't sleep at times. But then, I told myself its either that… and that is one of the reasons why I resigned from my work because I told myself is either im going to loose myself or I can go find myself. So I had to choose and that was when I told myself ha ah… I chose myself. I realised my own self-worth. That's why I say again… it was such a blessing to resign… especially when you don't enjoy what you doing and then it wont work for you. So im enjoying my family. My child is in matric and I see the maturity in him, he has been passing extremely well so far… and im enjoying that. Im enjoying the laughter. This support and love. This was all stuff I didn't… when I worked and came home from work, I had to do what I needed to do and finish so now I see the world life with a new light. Especially now in the pandemic, now im seeing what is more important in life		
R	Wooow. That is amazing! I am so happy you found that. And thank you for sharing your story with me. I enjoyed this interview. I wish you all the best with your studies.		
P	Thank you so much. Thank you for the opportunity. All the best to you as well.		

151

APPENDIX G: Self-reflexivity report

To remain unbiased about the topic of the research study was difficult. The topic concerned an issue that became all too apparent while when the researcher was a social work student at the selected university; many students struggled with feeling of stress, frustration and lack of support. As the first in her family to attend university, the researcher, too, experienced these feelings. She expected more in the way of support from the university, but found this aspect quite lacking, a situation that prevails to this day. Now that the researcher is employed and practising as a social worker, it has become even more obvious that social work students – and social workers generally – need particular support, in view of the kind of work they do. Thus it was personal experience that prompted this research, coupled with the conviction that more could be done to support and boost the confidence and personal development of social work students.

At the time the researcher was an undergraduate student, she experienced emotional turmoil for personal reasons, and sought the assistance of the university CSSS. The CSSS informed the researcher that they were fully booked and could not accept walk-ins. They requested the researcher to provide them with her details and said they would put her name on the waiting list to see a counsellor. By the time they contacted the researcher with an appointment date, the researcher had spoken to peers and friends regarding her challenges, and these individuals became her support system. Thus although the help was there, its timing was all wrong, and therefore it was of little help. The researcher is appreciative of the fact that because of this, she managed to build life-long friendships with her peers; however, she still needed professional guidance for the future, as she knew that similar circumstances could arise again.

This is in fact what occurred when the researcher became a practitioner. The researcher did not receive the necessary support as a new graduate who required professional support and assistance. Little to no supportive measures were in place in the workplace, and reflecting now, the researcher recognises that this was a very similar situation to what had been experienced at the selected university.

152

Being a practitioner now and having to guide, assist and support family members with their life challenges, the researcher also requires debriefing. The feelings that this kind of work evokes are difficult to share with family and friends; they do not understand what one is going through or dealing with. However, speaking to colleagues in the workplace is also not necessarily a good thing, as most, if not all, are dealing with the same challenges and suffering the same feelings. Often our service users show no consideration for the fact that we are humans before we are social workers. Some service users expect the social worker to be there for them and support them through their difficulties, giving little consideration to the support that the social worker needs after assisting many people in similar situations.

The researcher felt that the topic was important for all students, researchers, the selected university, extended universities, and practitioners. The experiences, health, well-being and support of social work students and social workers are often overlooked because society views the profession as composed of competent, strong, resourceful 'all-rounders'. We have skills and training, but we still need to be supported. For social workers to render optimal services to society and their communities, they absolutely require supportive services themselves. Without these supportive services, many practitioners themselves engage in unhealthy coping mechanisms that are detrimental to their health, well-being and relationships.

With the input of the supervisor, the structured questions set the tone for the interviewing processes. The researcher and the participants established good rapport and were able to engage in open discussions about their personal experiences, health and well-being, and supportive systems. The researcher was genuinely interested in what the participants had to say, and asked probing questions that yielded a great deal of valuable input. The participants were easy to engage with and did not hold back on relating their experiences to the researcher. In fact the researcher could sense that the process was helpful to them, as it gave them the opportunity and the space in which to reflect on themselves and their studies. At the end of one interview, the participant thanked the researcher for conducting this research and stated that this had been good for her, because she had been able to speak to someone who understood her

153

challenges and could relate to what she was experiencing. In addition, all the participants felt comfortable engaging with the researcher as the researcher is a registered Social Worker (with the South African Council for Social Service Professions – SACSSP) and vowed to accountability and confidentiality, both as a researcher and a practitioner. The fact that the researcher had been a social work student at the same university and had experienced what they were experiencing also helped a great deal.

This literature review, along with her experiences, allowed the researcher to identify a gap in research, and to pursue this study. The researcher is now interested in researching the health, well-being, and support of social workers in different sectors of employment. This would add to the body of research on social workers, workplace conditions and motivation theory and might result in changes being made that would support social workers. This would be of value to the profession and help to ensure that social workers receive the necessary support to improve their health and well-being and thus the quality of service they offer.
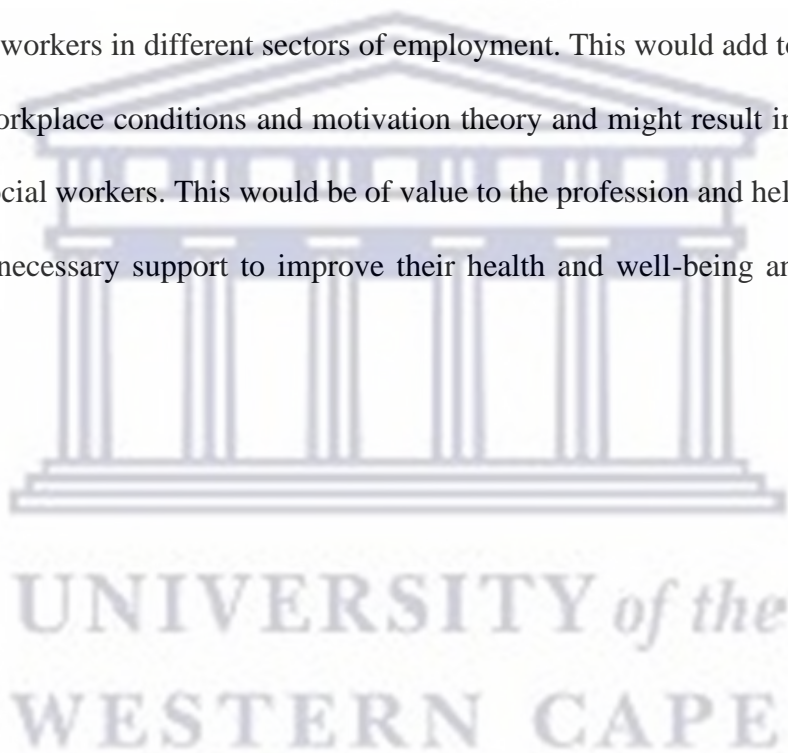
APPENDIX H: Editorial Certificate

ProsePerfect

54 Blakeway Road Mthatha 5100
Tel. number (047) 532 2303 or (071) 217 7489
e-mail Janemqamelo@gmail.com
http://janemqamelo.wixsite.com/proseperfect

24 November 2022

To Whom It May Concern

I, Jane Mqamelo, ID number 611120 0014 08 and a member of the Professional Editors' Guild, do herewith confirm that I have conducted an English proofreading and grammar edit on a dissertation by Adwina Brown, student no. **3460210** entitled

EXPLORING THE HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND SUPPORT OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS AT A SELECTED UNIVERSITY

In addition to editing, I recommended that certain changes be made, but did not see the document after the initial sending.

Professional
EDITORS
Guild

Jane Mqamelo
Associate Member

Membership number: MQA001
Membership year: March 2022 to February 2023

071 217 7489
janemqamelo@gmail.com
https://janemqamelo.wixsite.com/proseperfect

www.editors.org.za

155