SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CAPABILITY APPROACH

By

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Declaration

I, Precious Mseba, declare that the study hereby submitted for the Philosophiae Doctor in Development Studies at the University of the Free State is my own independent work, and that I have not previously submitted this work for a qualification at any other university or faculty. I also hereby cede copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.

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Abstract

Social work education is important in addressing questions of social and human development. As an academic field of study and a profession, social work is widely understood to be a discipline that promotes social change, development, empowerment and liberation of disadvantaged people. Consequently, social work education focuses on the attainment of knowledge and competencies to accomplish these goals. However, recent studies across various contexts have shown that social workers' wellbeing achievement or lack of it affects their ability to contribute towards sustainable social, economic and human development. This is even more marked in a context like South Africa where social workers often function with very few resources and in contexts of extreme poverty. Using the capability approach, this qualitative study critically examines how social work education can enhance the achievement of professional wellbeing. It draws from interviews with eight practising social workers, ten final-year social work students and seven lecturers from a university in South Africa. It investigates how they understand professional wellbeing, its connection to their ability to effectively perform their work, and how it can be promoted through social work education.

The findings suggest that professional wellbeing is plural and integral to effective public interventions. Social workers define professional wellbeing in terms of the following functionings: effective helping, professional growth, personal growth as well as material achievements. The findings also show that various structural, organisational and personal factors influence the extent to which social workers can achieve these functionings. Factors such as the country's extreme and persistent poverty and inequality levels, resource constraints and lack of supportive supervision, among others, limit the achievement of the above-mentioned functionings by social workers.

The study identified the following capabilities as key for sustainable professional livelihoods:

- affiliation;

- adaptation;

- self-care;

- work-life balance;

- reflexivity;

- knowledge and skills; and

- values and principles.

It discusses what is being done by one university's department of social work in advancing professional wellbeing, primarily focusing on the valued functionings. The thesis also stresses the need for an education which goes beyond addressing questions of employability and human capital to fostering human development. It highlights the importance of moving beyond viewing social workers as a means to social development, to seeing them as ends of development whose wellbeing ought to be advanced in and through education. The study recommends human development and social justice approaches to social work education. A socially just social work education, in this study, is one that seeks to advance the learners' valued functionings, capabilities and agency. This study suggests that in order to advance social workers' valued lives, social work education ought to, among other things, adopt interactive learning and teaching approaches. The findings of this study might help educationists and policymakers to formulate policies that are sensitive to professional wellbeing and can lead to sustainable benefits for both public service providers and users.

Key words: *Social work education, professional wellbeing, social work practice, public-good interventions, social justice, human development, capabilities approach*

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Acronyms

HIV/AIDS — Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

BSW — Bachelor of Social Work

CHE — Council on Higher Education

CPD — Continued Professional Development

DA — Democratic Alliance

DSD — Department of Social Development

ETQA — Education and Training Quality Assurance

GNP — Gross National Product

HWSETA — Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority

IFSW — International Federation of Social Workers

MSW — Master of Social Work

NGO — Non-Governmental Organisation

NQF — National Qualifications Framework

NSB — National Standards Bodies

NSDS — National Skills Development Strategy

NSFAS — National Student Financial Aid Scheme

PCF — Professional Capability Framework

PhD — Doctor of Philosophy

SACSSP — South African Council for Social Service Professions

SAQA — South African Qualifications Authority

SDM — Service Delivery Model for Developmental Welfare Services

Stats SA — Statistics South Africa

TUK — Transvaal University College

UNISA — University of South Africa

UNDP — United Nations Development Programme

LOCATING THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION AND EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The social work profession is important and has a great role to play in empowering all citizens to be self-reliant and economically active (Dlamini 2017).

1.1 Introduction

In August 2017, Nokuthula Dlamini, a determined young female social worker, chronicled the aspirations of social workers in an open letter to the then Minister of Social Development, Bathabile Dlamini. "As a young woman who lost her mother at the tender age of 12," Nokuthula said, *"*I always believed that I wanted to empower those who had the same childhood experience and those who had no support structure at all. With all the childhood challenges, I told myself that I would make a difference in life and I would ensure that I turn my life into a success story." She added that she "wanted to learn how to be a pillar of strength for all those who have no one."

Not long after she graduated, Nokuthula confronted a world that was different from the one she had imagined. First, she failed to get employment with the Department of Social Development, her employer of choice, and found herself working for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) earning "a mere R8000 a month before deductions. This," she points out, "was good enough for the day to day expenses but it was not enough to support the family of 14 that raised me to be the woman that I was." At the beginning of 2013, things improved slightly for Nokuthula, or so she thought. She and other social workers "got a call from the department [of Social Development] that they were ready to place social workers." She recounted,

We were excited as this meant no more poverty, or so we thought. R12 000 per month would have been enough to make anyone happy, especially if they had no responsibilities and no one waiting to be fed and clothed.

Fast forward four years and that salary has increased to R15 000. Half of social service professionals have more than 10 people to support on this salary; they have to pay school fees, pay home loans and still manage to invest and save for future generations.

The problem concerned not only poor remuneration. As Nokuthula told the Minister, social workers "are also subjected to depression and anxiety due to financial stress." She elaborated: "we are admitted day and night to hospitals for mental distress due to the inability to find balance and to afford basic day to day living."

Nokuthula not only chronicled the challenges that social workers encounter; she also reminded the Minister of the important work that they do as social service professionals (see also Qalinge 2015). "In our line of work Minister," she said,

we wake up every day to empower the most vulnerable and needy in our community. We care for the old, the young, the orphans, the families; the offenders, the women and the most vulnerable in our societies.

Minister Dlamini, we remove children from abusive homes and ensure that we heal the souls of these children and enable them to have courage to conquer the world.

We counsel our clients to assist them to identify their problems and explore strategies to help them deal effectively with problems.

Social workers take on the role of being mediators as they intervene in disputes and assist parties to find a compromise and to reach a mutually satisfying agreement. We educate our society about their rights and responsibilities and offer programs that assist families to link grants to socio-economic emancipation.

Social workers advocate for the rights of those disempowered by society. We are the voice of the voiceless when others won't listen to them. Social workers are brokers for the community by identifying the needs of clients, locating service providers and linking our clients with resources needed in a timely manner.

Social service professions stay with our grandmothers at old age homes and look after them with love and care. We come to work every day, go to court to defend our young who are in conflict with the law and offer diversion programs so that they do not reoffend. We remove the old from dire circumstances and offer places of safety for the abused across the country…

We are the first line of assistance for any national crisis and we are always ready to heal and help, but our families are suffering because of our passion and career path.

Nokuthula's letter outlines some of the reasons why individuals choose the social work profession. These include attempts to come to terms with their broken backgrounds as well as

a passion to help and make a difference in other people's lives.[1] Moreover, the letter highlights the challenges that social workers face. Although social workers work to improve the lives of the disadvantaged, they are poorly remunerated and many of them end up suffering from depression or from other mental health challenges. By highlighting these issues, Nokuthula articulates one of the central concerns of this thesis: the link between the wellbeing of social work professionals and their ability to offer effective interventions.

Taking cognisance of the experiences of individuals such as Nokuthula, the thesis asks a set of interrelated questions: 1) what sort of capabilities or opportunities can be promoted to ensure the wellbeing of social work professionals? 2) how can social work education promote these capabilities and prepare social workers to confront the myriad challenges that they encounter and enhance their interventions with the disadvantaged populations that they work with. Answering these questions is the task that I set out to perform in this thesis. However, doing so requires that we first understand the broader context in which South African social workers receive their education and operate. In the next section, I discuss this larger context before addressing the research problem of the thesis.

1.2 Context: Social issues and welfare in South Africa

Some of the challenges that Nokuthula and others like her face arise from the myriad social challenges confronting South Africa today. The country has an extended history of social problems. These include, but are not limited to, persistent poverty, inequality, racism, high unemployment rates, HIV/AIDS and violence (Earle-Malleson 2009). The most pressing amongst them are poverty and inequality. Poverty and inequality have a long history and there is evidence that these have increased over the past twenty years (Stats SA 2017a). As Hoogeveen and Özler (2006, p. 59) note, in 1995, at least 24.07 million (58%) out of a possible

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[1] An article written by Reyneke Roelf (No date) suggests that many social workers experience high poverty levels, loss and trauma at some point in their lives and that influences them to pursue social work.

population size of 41.5 million of all South Africans and 68% (31.54 million) of black Africans were living in poverty. By contrast, fewer whites lived in poverty. By 2015, over 30.4 million people (55.3%), out of a possible 55.01 million South Africans were living in poverty and the majority of them were black (Stats SA 2017a, 2017b; Merten 2017).

Similarly, the Gini coefficient which is the most commonly used measure of economic inequality (which ranges from 0 to 1, 0 being total equality and 1 being total inequality) indicated that in that year, the Gini based on income per capita was at 0.68 (Stats SA 2017b). In addition, the national consumption gap between the rich and the poor is too wide. In 2014, 20% of the richest population accounted for over 61% of consumption, whilst 20% of the poorest population accounted for less than 4.5% of national consumption (Stats SA 2014). The most recent figures by Oxfam show that 1% of the richest population in South Africa has 42% of the country's total wealth (Quintal 2017).The high and increasing levels of inequality hamper poverty reduction and are a clear sign of what Midgley (1995, p. 16) calls "distorted development". According to Midgley, "distorted development" takes place when a nation's economic development fails to end poverty or promote the welfare of all citizens. For him this is a common phenomenon in many developing countries such as South Africa. In such instances, "the distribution of income and wealth is highly skewed; ostentatious wealth and abject poverty coexist, investments in education and the social services are low, and the rate of unemployment and underemployment is often high" (Midgley 1995, p. 17).

In South Africa, poverty and inequality, or the state of distorted development, are mostly understood to be a result of institutionalised discrimination against black people during the colonial and apartheid periods. These two provided the bedrock of a colonial capitalist economy. That is, colonialism and apartheid facilitated the large-scale dispossession of African lands and the integration of Africans into the capitalist economy as poorly paid labourers (see Wilson 2011; Damons 2016; McKendrick 1987). These historical developments (colonialism

and apartheid) played a significant role in the evolution of the country's welfare policy (Wilson 2011). According to Patel (2005), before the advent of colonialism, the welfare needs of individuals were addressed through communalism, co-operation and mutual aid. In short, family members cared for individuals (McKendrick 1987).

Although remnants of these practices exist (as Nokuthula suggests above when she states that she is taking care of 14 other family members besides her child), by and large, colonialism disrupted the existing socio-economic arrangements leading to the introduction of social welfare services starting from within the Cape Colony (McKendrick 1987). In addition, churches, especially, the Dutch Reformed Church stepped up and began to cater for the needs of the vulnerable (Patel 2015). However, these welfare services mostly catered for whites. In fact, the origins of social work is deeply entangled with the country's past experiences of racial discrimination (Smith 2014; Damons 2016). Social work emerged in response to problems of poverty, particularly among whites. Concerns for poor whites led to the introduction of a diploma course in social work at the University of Cape Town, in 1924, and a degree course at the University of Stellenbosch in 1932. Scholars such as Smith (2014), Damons (2016) as well as Nicholas, Rautenbach and Maistry (2010) remind us that Hendrik F. Verwoerd was the founder of social work as a formal discipline in South Africa. Verwoerd advocated for a three-year university education aimed at equipping social workers with relevant professional knowledge.

Paradoxically, as Nicholas *et al.* (2010) put it, Verwoerd was also responsible for the institutionalisation of apartheid, which propelled the black majority into intense poverty. Citing Malherbe (1981), Nicholas indicated that, in 1934, whilst working as a sociology professor at Stellenbosch University, Verwoerd presented a conference paper in which he advocated for the discrimination and alienation of blacks in South Africa. According to Malherbe (1981), it is this man's ideas that were later put into practice under the policy of apartheid. Ironically, as

Nicholas *et al.* (2010) point out, Verwoerd's 1934 work on combating poverty and the re-organisation of welfare serves as the foundation of social work in South Africa.

In addition, Verwoerd recommended the formation of the professional association, which white social workers established in 1951 (the White Social Workers' Association). This 1951 association existed alongside the South African Black Social Workers' Association (SABSW) established by black social workers earlier in 1945. Graduates of the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg initiated the SABSW (Rautenbach & Chiba 2010). This association was established to represent black communities whilst ensuring that the black social workers were maintaining good professional conduct (Mazibuko & Gray 2004).[2]

Despite the existence of such associations, discriminatory and segregatory practices within welfare service provision persisted throughout the period of apartheid (1948-1994). Such practices favoured the white population. As highlighted by Seekings and Nattrass (2015, p. 168), "the [apartheid] South African state provided a measure of decommodification and defamilialization primarily for its relatively prosperous white citizenry, and to a much lesser extent for some of its black subjects."[3] Following the end of apartheid in 1994, democratic South Africa's policy makers sought to adopt social welfare and educational policies that address the legacies of inequality that I briefly highlighted above. The educational policies were, and continue to be, influenced by neoliberalism, where education is understood as a

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[2] Currently social work is regulated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) (Spolander, Pullen-Sansfacon, Brown & Engelbrecht 2011).
SACSSP was established following the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978 and the Social Work Amendment Act of 1998.
It is responsible for setting professional standards. It defines and enforces professional and ethical conduct. In addition to that, the board facilitates professional development and quality assurance (Patel 2005).
[3] Decommodification is when the state provides its citizens with services that the market would not provide, or provides the services at cost below the market price.
Defamilialization is when the state replaces the family in providing services (Seekings & Nattrass 2015)

means to economic growth (Wilson-Strydom & Walker 2017).[4] I discuss the social welfare policies in the next section.

1.2.1 Social development, policy and legislation in post-apartheid South Africa

In an attempt to address the above-mentioned persistent social and economic challenges, the country simultaneously embarked on a process of reforming some older legislation and formulating new policies. By the year 2001, more than twenty laws administered by the Department of Social Development were revised or repealed and the legislature passed new laws (Smith 2014). The relevant national legislation and policies include the Social Assistance Act of 1992, which the South African parliament amended with the Welfare Laws Amendment Act (1997), the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997, the Financing Policy of 1999 and the Service Delivery Model for Developmental Welfare Services of 2006, among others. Since these pieces of legislation, documents and policy frameworks provide the backdrop for the social work profession in the country, it is important to understand what they seek to achieve.

The Social Assistance Act of 1992 was meant to provide for the rendering of social assistance to persons, national councils and welfare organisations in the country (Social Assistance Act 1992). Among other things, the act sets out the provision of social grants to the aged and disabled. It also made provisions for financial awards to the national councils or welfare organisations which undertook or coordinated activities or social welfare programmes to do with family care, care of the aged, care for the disabled, alcohol and drug dependency, social security and care for the offender. The South African parliament amended this act with the Welfare Laws Amendment Act (1997). The amendment provided for "uniformity of,

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[4] "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey 2005, p. 2).

equality of access to, and effective regulation of, social assistance throughout the Republic; to introduce the child-support grant, to do away with capitation grants, to abolish maintenance grants subject to the phasing out of existing maintenance grants over a period not exceeding three years, to provide for the delegation of certain powers, and to extend the application of the provisions of the Act to all areas in the Republic" (Department of Welfare 1997b, p. 2).

Within the same year, 1997, the South African government introduced and adopted the White Paper for Social Welfare. This policy blueprints national development issues, particularly the welfare system (Patel & Selipsky 2010). Its vision is to have "a welfare system which facilitates the development of human capacity and self-reliance within a caring and enabling socio-economic environment" (Department of Welfare 1997a, p. 9; see also Department of Welfare 1999).[5] This policy paper sets out the vision, goals, principles, and guidelines for developmental social welfare (discussed below). The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) delineated broad policy guidelines with principles such as improved quality of life, quality services as well as sustainability (Smith 2014). Improved quality of life concerns the advancement of the welfare or wellbeing among the disadvantaged or vulnerable people through the equitable distribution of resources and services. In that regard then, all social welfare programmes have to strive for excellence and the provision of quality services. In addition, sustainability has to be maintained; the intervention strategies should therefore not only be effective but financially viable and cost efficient (Department of Welfare 1997a). Social welfare services target social development, which also includes advancing health services, nutrition programmes, education, and housing, among other goals.

All of these measures signalled the post-apartheid government's shift towards a social developmental approach to welfare. Social development, according to Midgley (1995, p. 7), is

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[5] Similarly, the capability approach emphasizes the importance of social arrangements in advancing human wellbeing (see chapter 3).

an approach aimed at promoting people's welfare that is well suited not only to enhancing the quality of life for all citizens, but to responding to the problems of distorted development. As South African scholars put it, a social developmental approach to welfare also speaks of transformation, liberation, and reconciliation or healing from the divisions which resulted from colonialism and apartheid. (Patel 2005; Gray & Lombard 2008). The transformation of the welfare system emerged as a response to deep inequalities in terms of resource distribution and access. It also came as an attempt to redress the high poverty levels which were, and still are a feature of South African society. Within the context of the social development model, citizens, government and service providers are together responsible for promoting quality life among citizens (Department of Welfare 1999). In this regard, the establishment of a social developmental welfare system sought to create a more caring, peaceful, suitable and just society which supports welfare rights, promotes the meeting of basic human needs, aspirations, as well as people's full socio-economic and political participation (Brown & Neku 2005; Patel 2005; Department of Welfare 1997a). Such traits might be very instrumental in bringing about sustainable developments in human wellbeing or welfare.

The social developmental approach to welfare also stresses the importance of promoting human rights, co-operation in service delivery and the incorporation of socio-economic programmes into both micro and macro services delivery (DSD 2013). This emphasis on partnership between individuals and other groups of people in both private and public sectors in promoting development was argued to be a better way of addressing the racial, social and economic divisions within the country. However, more important is the fact that the social developmental approach to welfare suggests that an investment in social services is crucial for both social and economic development (Patel 2005). In fact, the approach argues for the complementarity between social and economic development in promoting social

wellbeing (Midgley 1995), and in this way, this approach is aligned with the broader notion of human development.

An understanding of social and economic development as a means (and not only an end in development) toward the promotion of social or human wellbeing is crucial. It allows us to think about the centrality of people in the realm of development. In other words, it sensitises us to think about social welfare as an approach to human development. Human development is a people-centred process aimed at enlarging people's freedoms or capabilities to do and be what they value or have reason to value. According to Alkire (2010, p. 43), "at all levels of development, human development focuses on essential freedoms: enabling people to lead long and healthy lives, acquire knowledge, to be able to enjoy a decent standard of living and to shape their own lives. It empowers people to engage actively in development on our shared planet." Therefore, development for the South African citizens should go beyond economic achievements to include issues of freedoms (capabilities) which enable them to live valuable lives.

The *capabilities* or *freedoms* language is not new within social development discussions. As clearly put by Midgley (1995) in his theory on social development, people's lives or wellbeing do not merely depend on economic growth. Rather, such growth must be coupled with a social investment in the creation, as well as promotion of human capabilities. Examples of capabilities that ought to be available to all people in a given society include, for example, education, health care and the development of certain skills and capability for work (Patel & Selipsky 2010; Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011). Such pro-poor approaches improve people's welfare by enhancing citizens' active participation in boosting their own and others' human development.

With the aim of aiding transformation within the welfare system, as was spelt out in the White Paper, the Financing Policy was adopted in 1999. The aim of the policy was to rationalise welfare funding, to ensure for a fair distribution of benefits, efficient and effective use of resources, thereby correcting the injustices and imbalances that were brought about by the past skewed allocation of resources (Department of Welfare 1999). In addition to that, the policy highlighted the importance of effective and efficient welfare services delivery (see also Patel & Selipsky 2010). Perhaps with the intention of advancing that goal, the South African government adopted the Service Delivery Model for Developmental Welfare Services (SDM) (2006). This policy provides a broad national framework that clearly sets out the nature, scope, extent and level of social services that should be provided. The framework forms the basis for the development of appropriate norms and standards for service delivery (SDM 2006). All of these policy measures reflect the government's attempts to address questions of social and human development. They also inform the nature of education that social workers should attain. I now turn to the contextual details on social work education in South Africa.

1.3 Educating social workers in South Africa

As noted above, formal social work education in South Africa started in the 1920s (Smith 2014) and it was pioneered by three universities. These are the University of Cape Town, which started offering a diploma in 1924, the University of Pretoria which started offering social work training in 1929, at the then Transvaal University College (TUK) and the University of Stellenbosch which started offering a degree in 1932 (Rautenbach & Chiba 2010; Smith 2014). Since then, the number of universities or institutions offering social work qualifications has increased significantly. Currently, there are 18 universities offering social work degrees in South Africa (Department of Welfare 1997a).[6] They include the University of

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[6] South African universities offering social work: Retrieved at:
https://www.sacssp.co.za/Registrations/download/40

Zululand, University of Witwatersrand, University of the Western Cape, University of Venda, University of the Free State, University of Limpopo, University of South Africa (UNISA), Walter Sisulu University, University of Stellenbosch, University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria, North-West University, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, University of Kwazulu-Natal, University of Fort Hare, and University of Cape Town (see also SAQA n.d.*a*)[7].

In light of its unequal past, one of South Africa's post-1994 goals was to transform and advance quality education in a way that would enhance individual, social and economic development. The core players in advancing quality education are organisations such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)[8], the National Standards Bodies (NSB) as well as Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies (Lombard, Grobbelaar & Pruis 2003; SAQA 2000; Spolander *et al.* 2011). Whilst NSBs are responsible for making recommendations on qualifications and standards, the ETQAs are liable for the quality assurance of the standards and qualifications. These bodies work in partnership with the social work education training providers (SAQA 2000). In fact, it is a requirement that all institutions or providers be registered with the relevant Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies (see Lombard *et al.* 2003). The ETQA bodies for social work qualifications are the

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Additional information on universities offering social work BSW qualification
 Accessed at: http://reqqs.saqa.org.za/viewQualification.php?id=23994
See also https://www.sacssp.co.za/Registrations/download/69
[7]These online documents by SAQA do not have a date but are the latest on their website.

[8] "The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was established through the SAQA Act of 1995. SAQA oversees the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF is a means for transforming the education and training in South Africa and has been designed to:
- create a single, integrated, national education and training framework for the whole nation
- make it easier for learners to enter the education and training system and to move and progress within it ,
- improve the quality of education and training in South Africa,
- enable learners to develop to their full potential and thereby support the social and economic development of the country as a whole (SAQA, 2000).
Accessed at: http://saqa.org.za/docs/pol/2003/standard_setting.pdf

South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP)[9] and the Council on Higher Education (CHE).

Social work education in South Africa falls under the broad subject domain of Health Sciences and Social Services. Its subfields are preventive health, promotive health and development service, as well as curative health and rehabilitative services (see Lombard *et al.* 2003; SAQA 2000). The qualifications that can be attained in the field of social work are: Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), Master of Social Work (MSW) and Doctor of Social Work. As in other parts of the world, the learning time required to devote for each of these qualifications differs. The SAQA uses a credit system, which suggests that one credit is equal to ten notional hours. Notional hours refer to the learning time that an average learner should spend in order to meet the expected learning outcomes for each qualification.[10] In that regard, a four-year professional qualification such as the BSW should have 480 credits, the MSW (a two-year degree) should have between 120 and 240 credits, and lastly, the Doctoral degree ought to have between 240 and 360 credits (see Lombard *et al.* 2003; SAQA 2000). The doctoral degree generally takes no less than two years.

The entry requirements for these qualifications differ too. In order to enrol for the BSW, the applicants should have a NQF Level 4 qualification, equivalent to matriculation with full exemption or an appropriate access-route qualification approved by the service provider. For instance, someone with a TVET Certificate in Social Auxiliary Work can also enrol for the BSW (SAQA n.d.*a;* SAQA n.d.*d*).[11] In order to study for a MSW, the applicant must have a

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[9] The South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP/ Council) is a statutory body established in terms of section 2 of the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978 (the Act).
SACSSP guides and regulates social work profession and training. It fosters compliance with professional standards(see Qalinge 2015).
See also: https://www.sacssp.co.za/About
[10] The notional hours include contact time, time spent in structured learning in the workplace, individual learning and assessment (SAQA, 2000)
[11] Accessed at: http://regqs.saqa.org.za/viewQualification.php?id=23994

recognised qualification in Social Work and be registered with SACSSP as a social worker. According to SAQA (n.d.*b*), applicants who fall outside the above criteria, but can demonstrate (to the service provider) that they have an appropriate, related qualification, experiential or work-related learning, which has taken the candidate to the equivalent of a recognised Social Work qualification, may be considered for admission into the programme. Lastly, for the Doctor of Social Work, the applicant must have a Master of Social Work degree and be registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) as a social worker. One can also be admitted if he/she has an appropriate and related qualification, which can be equated to the MSW (SAQA n.d.*c*).[12] Nevertheless, for the purposes of advancing my argument, I will only focus on the BSW qualification.

In recent years, the South African government has prioritised the training of more social workers, with the aim of resolving the critical skills shortage in the field. The South African government introduced bursaries for studying social work through the Department of Social Development. However, as with other countries, the training of social workers in South Africa focuses on equipping them with a specific set of knowledge, skills and values needed for their profession – all of which are essential. However, as I argue in this thesis, this is not sufficient to adequately address the immense challenge of social worker wellbeing. The BSW qualification's goals capture this point. The goals include equipping social workers with:

a) The skills to challenge the structural sources of poverty, inequality, oppression and discrimination;

b) The knowledge and an appreciation of the link between human behaviour and the social environment, as well as fostering their ability to promote social wellbeing;

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[12] Accessed at: http://regqs.saqa.org.za/viewQualification.php?id=24154

c) The ability to empower service users by promoting their social functioning and problem-solving capabilities;

d) The capacity to promote and maintain the service users' functionings through helping them to complete tasks, alleviating their suffering and using resources efficiently;

e) An appreciation of social work values, principles of social justice, human rights and how they can be applied in social work practice with diverse populations;

f) The ability to protect at-risk populations;

g) An appreciation of both the South African and global welfare systems and the ability to implement the social development approach in social work practice;

h) An appreciation of the major social needs, challenges, policies and legislation in the South African social welfare context as well as the social workers' duties and contribution in relation to those factors; and

i) The skills to work in teams (social work teams or interdisciplinary or multi-sectorial teams) (SAQA n.d.*a*, p. 1; SACSSP n.d.*a*, pp. 7-8; Council on Higher Education, CHE 2015, p. 6).

The main feature of social work education and the regulatory frameworks then is a special emphasis on the graduates' attainment of knowledge, skills, values and the helping process to enable them to work as a social worker. Thus, the SACSSP describes social work education as "the process of training and obtaining knowledge, skills (competencies) and attributes" for the social work profession (SACSSP n.d.*a*, p. 15). This is mainly to prepare students to deal with vulnerable individuals and groups of people including children, families and communities. Social workers are therefore understood by many as professionals who try to minimise the negative effects of poverty on people's lives (Chikadzi & Pretorius 2014). They support vulnerable populations through equitable distribution of resources (where possible)

and social services (Department of Welfare 1997a). In doing this, social workers in South Africa are explicitly (according to policy) guided by the principles of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* speaks of

> caring for each other's well-being…, and a spirit of mutual support… Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being (Department of Welfare 1997a, p. 12).

In addition, social workers are guided by a set of professional values and a code of ethics (SACSSP n.d.*b*). The values include "social justice", "respect for people's worth, human rights and dignity", "integrity", "competence" and "professional responsibility." According to SACSSP (n.d.*b*), social workers should promote social justice and positive social change on behalf of disadvantaged individuals, families, groups and communities. They should also respect the value of people's human rights and dignity. That is, they should treat the notions of human rights, dignity and the worth of people respectfully. Respect entails observing service users' privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy as well as being attentive to the legal obligations that may conflict with the exercise of these rights. In this regard, social workers should also make every effort to maintain competence in their work, whilst acknowledging the limits and boundaries of their competencies and expertise. The code of conduct also states that, as professionals, social workers are expected to be honest, fair and respectful to others, whilst pursuing integrity in the science, teaching and practice of their profession. Finally, social workers ought to maintain professional standards of conduct, make clear their roles and obligations and strive to meet the needs of client systems (SACSSP n.d.*b*). Social workers should also show care and concern for people's wellbeing since their primary

goal is to help individuals, families, groups, and communities and address social needs and problems. Perhaps most importantly is the fact that social workers are called on to elevate service to others above their own self-interest (SACSSP n.d.*b*).

These very helpful professional guidelines stress the importance of competence in service provision as well as in the promotion of human wellbeing and development. The guiding principles of social work education provided by regulatory bodies such as the South African Qualifications Authority and the Council on Higher Education equally emphasise one of social workers' functionings, that is, of intervening with clients. Yet, neither educationists nor policy makers stress the significance of promoting professional wellbeing through education. In fact, they are particularly silent about the wellbeing of professionals and how it can be tied to the promotion of human development as well as social development in the country, especially considering the many challenges facing the profession, and the vast inequalities and high levels of poverty that are so persistent in South Africa. This thesis aims to address this issue.

1.4 Research problem

Recent research on higher education and development has shown how social arrangements such as education can go a long way in promoting social development. This research has demonstrated that although we live in a world dominated by neoliberal thinking, higher education should not only focus on improving individual and national economic performances, but also on addressing questions of human development, poverty alleviation and the development of a just and sustainable society (Walker & McLean 2013; Boni & Walker 2013, 2016). In addressing social problems, scholars point to the importance of moving beyond a neoliberal framework on higher education; a framework which emphasises that higher education should lead to increased economic output. Instead, scholars such as Walker and

McLean (2013) highlight the fact that higher education should *also* produce public-good professionals who can attend to social problems such as poverty and inequality (see Chapter 2; also Boni & Walker 2016; Walker 2012b). Social work education and practice fit within the framework of public-good professionalism. As a practice, social work addresses social problems by intervening with at-risk or vulnerable populations (Cooper 1977; see also the list of what social workers do provided by Dlamini above). Indeed, social work education potentially contributes towards the achievement of these goals. As a profession and an academic discipline, social work promotes social change, cohesion and development as well as the liberation and empowerment of diverse people. It also engages people and structures to address social needs and improve wellbeing (IFSW 2014). Thus, professionals in this field have the potential (and some might even argue the responsibility) to influence society's opinion on how social problems ought to be solved whilst they focus on providing the needed care for the marginalised (Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2000).

However, recent studies have shown that social workers may be failing to offer effective interventions due to threats to their own wellbeing (see Nhedzi & Makofane 2015). Scholars have particularly emphasised the point that because social workers work with traumatised populations they are exposed to secondary trauma, burnout, compassion fatigue and lack of self-care, all of which may hinder their ability to effectively perform their jobs (McGarrigle & Walsh 2011; Sprang, Clark & Whitt-Woosley 2007; Adams, Boscarino & Figley 2006). This underscores the importance of professional wellbeing in public-good social work practice.

The question then is: what can be done to prepare social workers to deal not only with challenges similar to those posed by secondary trauma, but also to broadly enhance their wellbeing, so that they can contribute to improved wellbeing more broadly? This study proposes that higher education should promote professional wellbeing, which is integral to

public-good professionalism. This is especially important in the case of social workers because, as highlighted above, professional wellbeing, or lack thereof, affects their ability to perform their duties effectively. This entails promoting social workers' wellbeing related capabilities through higher education. As highlighted by Boni and Walker (2013), a focus on capabilities implies more benefits from education than those that are economic, which would include the advancement of the wellbeing freedom of individuals, whilst promoting social justice (see Chapter 8). In this study, I build on these insights to argue that, for social workers to be effective in addressing the many problems generated by the long history of inequality, social work education should also foster professional wellbeing. It should provide opportunities for social workers to live and practice reflexively valued lives as professionals working in difficult situations so that they, in turn, can contribute to social wellbeing. The study stresses that the wellbeing of professionals is deeply intertwined with the collective wellbeing of society.

1.5 Rationale of the study

This study highlights the importance of professional wellbeing in effective practice on the part of social workers. It underscores the point that the social work profession should go beyond viewing social workers only as a means to social justice, to also viewing them as ends of development whose wellbeing also ought to be promoted. It is my argument that an education that promotes the wellbeing of professionals will go a long way in its quest to promote social justice as this will help social workers to more effectively fulfil their mandates as public-good professionals.

1.6 Research aim, objectives and questions

This is a qualitative study aimed at critically investigating how social work education can enhance professional wellbeing using the Capability Approach. Its objectives are to:

a) Examine what social workers and prospective social workers regard as constituting their wellbeing.

b) Explore and highlight social work students and practising social workers' aspirations.

c) Identify the contextual factors that enable or constrain the development of social workers' professional wellbeing and aspirations.

d) Review how social work education can create opportunities (capabilities) for social workers to make both personal and professional choices, and expand their aspirations and wellbeing.

Research questions:

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is wellbeing defined by social work students, practising social workers and selected university department of social work staff?

2. Which capabilities contribute to the wellbeing of social work professionals?

3. In what ways are social work students actively involved in the promotion of their wellbeing, as social workers, through education?

4. What are social work students and practising social workers' aspirations?

5. How is social work education promoting the development, expansion and realisation of professional wellbeing in ways that could culminate in effective public-good practices?

1.7 Research setting

This research was conducted at a South African university. For confidentiality purposes, I have named the university Mopane (pseudonym). Mopane University is situated in one of South Africa's relatively small cities. It is one of the 18 universities offering social work

degrees in South Africa. The institution was established in the nineteenth century. At Mopane University, social work education is offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Department of Social Work at Mopane University offers a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree. This is a four-year undergraduate programme when undertaken on a full-time basis. In addition to the BSW, the department also offers a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. The MSW is a one-year, full-time or two-year, part-time degree. It is a professional degree, which allows the students to specialise in any specific field of social work. Lastly, it also offers a PhD degree in Social Work, which is a two-year, full-time or four-year, part-time postgraduate programme.

1.8 Brief description of chapters

- A review of the literature (Chapter 2)

This chapter reviews what the existing literature says about social work and professional wellbeing. It discusses how different scholars and policy makers conceptualise the social work profession as well as its link to the question of wellbeing. The chapter highlights the different challenges that hamper effective interventions by social workers as well as the suggested solutions for overcoming those challenges. It also discusses what researchers suggest should be done in social work education in preparing students for the demanding nature of the profession. Lastly, the chapter introduces the concepts of capabilities and the public good.

- Conceptualising wellbeing and the role of education (Chapter 3)

Chapter 3 discusses the ways in which scholarship has approached the role of higher education in society. Issues to do with neoliberalism and employability are unpacked within the discussion on the role of higher education in society. The chapter also discusses how scholars have conceptualised wellbeing. It presents views from welfare economists, philosophers and social scientists. The chapter ends with the argument for utilising the

capability approach—highlighting that the approach opens up space for a nuanced understanding of the two issues under investigation.

- Research methodology (Chapter 4)

This chapter outlines the research design and methods I used in this study. It begins by restating my research aim and objectives. This is followed by the rationalisation of constructivism as the interpretive framework. The chapter also offers a justification for qualitative inquiry. It discusses sampling, research methods, data collection, and analysis procedures used in the thesis. The chapter ends with a discussion on ethics.

- Why social work? Understanding social workers' aspirations and valued functionings (Chapter 5)

Chapter 5 conceptualises professional wellbeing by highlighting social workers' (students and practicing) aspirations and valued functionings. It underlines the ideals to which social workers aspire, as opposed to their achieved functionings (which is the focus of Chapter 6). The chapter explores the possible tensions and synergies that exist between the achievement of social workers' personal and professional aspirations. In addition, the chapter discusses the various motivations that lead individuals into the social work profession. Lastly, the chapter maps out the different professional wellbeing capabilities.

- Professional wellbeing achievements and freedoms (Chapter 6)

Unlike Chapter 5, this chapter analyses the extent to which social workers are able to realise their valued capabilities and functionings. It respectively discusses and analyses the social workers' achieved functionings, and wellbeing freedoms. Tied to that discussion is an argument for a professional wellbeing resource threshold. The chapter ends with a discussion on the various conversion factors that can either constrain or enable professional wellbeing achievements.

- Social work education and professional wellbeing (Chapter 7)

This chapter reviews how social work education relates to social workers' different aspirations and valued functionings. It discusses how both curriculum and pedagogical practices are, or ought to be, attending to professional wellbeing. In addition to that, the chapter presents the lecturers' views on the identified professional wellbeing capabilities. It ends with a discussion on the possible implications of advancing professional wellbeing in and through social work education.

- A capability perspective on professional wellbeing through social work education (Chapter 8)

Chapter 8 theorises my empirical findings (presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7) using the capability approach. It revisits the subjects of wellbeing achievements, adaptive preferences and conversion factors. Lastly, the chapter re-examines the role of social work education in advancing professional wellbeing and makes some recommendations on how issues of human development, social justice and transformation can be addressed in and through social work education.

- Conclusion (Chapter 9)

This chapter ties together all the main points made throughout the study. It presents the key findings for each research question and makes suggestions on how policy makers and educationists can formulate policies that are sensitive to professional wellbeing and public-good interventions. The chapter also makes recommendations on how social service organisations can intervene with social workers and advance effective interventions. It ends with a discussion on the limitations of the research.

1.9 Terminology

This section clarifies some of the terms I used in this work. The terms include professional wellbeing, social workers, faculty, prospective social workers, practising social workers, organisations, service users, social justice, human development and capabilities.

- *Professional wellbeing* in this work refers to the wellbeing or welfare of social workers.

- *Social workers* are social service professionals who help people in times of crisis. Their clients may include families, students, hospital patients, the elderly, children and people living with disabilities, among others. In this work, the term refers to anyone registered with the SACSSP. The term is used when talking about both social work students and practising social workers.

- *Faculty / faculty members* in this study is used interchangeably with lecturers and/or staff members.

- *Prospective social workers* are registered student social workers who have not yet obtained the BSW.

- *Practising social workers* are registered social workers who have already obtained the BSW and are in permanent practicing positions.

- *Organisations* are various social service agencies. These can be non-governmental or governmental institutions.

- *Service users* refers to the recipients of social work services. The term is used interchangeably with clients.

- *Social justice* concerns confronting institutional practices as well as promoting human flourishing, agency and participation, the advancement of individuals' valued functionings as well as capabilities expansion.

- *Human development* in this work speaks of the process of enlarging individual freedoms and opportunities and improving people's well-being.

- *Capabilities* are the various opportunities the social workers value in order to lead their valued lives.

1.10 Positionality

Why is this study important to me? Why did I choose to work on the wellbeing of social workers? My interest in the promotion of the wellbeing of social workers can be traced back to 2008 when I went to Buhera, a rural community in eastern Zimbabwe, to conduct research on the social and ethical challenges in the provision of care to people living with HIV/AIDS for my honours degree in Philosophy. During this time, I learned that socio-economic and political challenges such as discrimination, lack of resources as well as health-care professional shortages prevented some people living with HIV/AIDS from receiving care. Upon completion of my undergraduate studies, I felt that I was not sufficiently equipped to intervene effectively with these people. Being passionate about intervening with people living under conditions similar to the ones I encountered during my research in Buhera, I enrolled for a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree at the University of Northern Iowa, in the USA, in 2013. My intention was to go back home and deliver effective interventions to these disadvantaged groups. The MSW programme requirements included completing 900 hours of social work internship. During my internship period, I learned that many social workers were failing to offer effective interventions because of threats to their own wellbeing. Despite the vastly different context, this reminded me of the challenges which I encountered during my undergraduate research. Looking back and thinking through these challenges, I was convinced that socio-political or economic challenges and professional wellbeing were linked. Indeed, one of my informants during the initial research in Zimbabwe, a health-care professional, explained to me that some health professionals were failing to effectively intervene with patients because their wellbeing was affected by the economic meltdown occurring in the country. "[A] hungry man is an angry man," he said to me (Chamangwiza, Zimbabwean nurse). I became convinced that, being a clinical social worker or a social administrator would have been only a small step towards my goal of helping disadvantaged people. I could only make a slight difference because only a

handful of professionals and accreditation boards would have heard my plea. Pursuing this issue at the level of doctoral research, I believe, is likely to be the best way of raising this complex issue for other scholars, educationists, professional accreditation boards and policy makers. Therefore, my social work background, together with a strong wish to raise awareness on the importance of professional wellbeing underpin my work. Of course, these starting assumptions might have an impact on this project and on how I present my ideas. Nonetheless, I have striven to be reflexive throughout the process. I was particularly vigilant in capturing the accounts of perspectives different from my own and debated and reasoned through these issues together with my supervisors, fellow doctoral students and other scholars working in related areas.

CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed (Webster & Watson 2002, p. xiii).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing knowledge on social work and professional wellbeing. The first section of the chapter is a review of how scholars and policy makers conceptualise the social work profession and its link to the question of wellbeing. This allows us to have an appreciation of social work as a human development oriented profession as well as its instrumental role in promoting social wellbeing. The section is followed by a discussion of the challenges that scholars identify to be key impediments to social workers' abilities to offer effective services, as well as their suggested solutions and recommendations in resolving such problems. This is followed by a discussion of what scholars suggest should be done in social work education to prepare students for this highly demanding profession. There are two main themes, namely the pedagogical practices that would best impart the skills and knowledge required by social workers to be effective professionals, as well as the actual skills they need to acquire.

As regards pedagogy, scholars tend to focus on whether social work education should privilege practicum or classroom-based learning. Practicum concerns imparting relevant practice skills, whilst classroom-based learning allows for the attainment of social work knowledge amongst learners. The debate over skills focuses on what works best in practice settings paying particular attention to three core concepts in social work: competence, reflection and reflexivity, whilst the discussion on knowledge highlights the significance of evidence-based and transformative knowledge in global and South African social work

practice, respectively. This discussion reveals that, for many scholars, what matters is the production of competent practitioners without paying much attention to the link between the wellbeing of social work professionals and their ability to effectively perform their duties. The chapter also discusses how scholars in South Africa approach the issue of public-good professionalism with the intention of showing the significance of professional wellbeing in pursuing social wellbeing.

The chapter ends with a review of scholarly work on social work practice and relevant capabilities. The ensuing discussion moves from global to South African understandings of the profession, the challenges associated with it and the role of social work education in human wellbeing because our understanding of the two are informed by developments in the international arena as well as the local histories and visions of the future.

2.2 The social work profession and human wellbeing

Professions have mostly been defined in terms of the possession and control of a body of expert knowledge, practicing under the guidance of certain ethical frameworks, fulfilment of some societal needs as well as a social mandate which allows for discretion in determining what is ideal for the education and performance of its affiliates (Pellegrino 2002). Professionals undergo training, which can be either entrepreneurial or vocational (see Walker & McLean 2013). The connection between one's occupation and educational experience or the attainment of certain knowledge has deep roots. This was highlighted by Cogan (1953) when he described a profession as a vocation whose practice is based upon an appreciation of the theoretical constructions within one's area of study (Jarvis 1983). The legitimacy of professionals depends on their ability to accomplish tasks and exercise professional judgement in ways that are consistent with a set of shared knowledge and established ways of practicing (Nerland 2016).

For many years, the social work profession has similarly been understood in terms of relevant knowledge and skills (Popple 1985).

However, in the last thirty or so years, some scholars have expressed scepticism about this construction of the social work profession, arguing that it excludes the mission of promoting wellbeing amongst the people social workers serve (Popple 1985). In this sense, then, social work is understood by many to be a 'helping' profession that aims at intervening with at-risk populations of different ages to promote their wellbeing, empowerment and protection (Schein & Kommers 1972; Nichols 2012; Walker & Crawford 2014; Qalinge 2015). The concept of 'care' is central to social work practice (Parton 2003). Care, as scholarship on the "ethics of care" points out, refers to both the mental predisposition of concern and to the actual practice that people undertake due to that concern (Tronto 1993). The term speaks of the "responsibility to respond or attend to the needs of the dependant" (Parton 2003; Held 2006, p. 10). Put in a slightly different way, the primary mission of social workers, then, is to help the disadvantaged meet their basic human needs and contribute to human development, understood here to mean the removal of obstacles to human wellbeing and the "improvement of human lives by expanding the range of things that a person can be and do" (Fukuda-Parr 2003 p. 303).

Some researchers have reminded us that views on the social work profession and its relevant knowledge are always evolving because the two are grounded in the idea of service or commitment to serve the interests, needs and welfare of society (Schein & Kommers 1972; Colby & Sullivan 2008). In this regard, our understanding of the social work profession is also informed by changes and interactions which exist amongst societal, students' and professional needs (Jarvis 1983). One important view which concerns the interaction between societal and professional needs is advanced by Walker and McLean (2013). Concerned with the limitations of an education grounded in a neoliberal framework in a society with a long history of growing inequality, such as South Africa, these authors stress the point that professional education

should seek to produce public-good professionals who possess the capabilities to promote social justice. Considering that social work is amongst the public-good professions, my study expands on this point by highlighting how the promotion of professional wellbeing through social work education can contribute towards effective public-good actions. Making this point requires that we understand what researchers say about the challenges associated with public-good professions such as social work and how those challenges impact social workers' wellbeing, as well as their work. I discuss this in the next subsection.

2.3 Challenges associated with social work as a caring profession

Quite a number of studies highlight the challenges faced by social workers and how they adversely affect practice. These studies point to the nexus between the health of individual professionals and their ability to care for their clients. Some of these works make the point that secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, burnout and vicarious trauma affect helping professionals' abilities to effectively perform their duties. Compassion fatigue or secondary trauma refers to the caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathetic towards clients and to the emotional disruption that results from one's awareness of the client's traumatic experience (Sprang *et al.* 2007; Adams *et al.* 2006). Closely related to the concept of secondary traumatic stress is vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma is a countertransference reaction to traumatic stories told by clients (McCann & Pearlman 1990). It disrupts the professionals' sense of meaning, connection and reality. Continuous exposure to traumatic material, traumatic memories together with life disturbances intensifies stress reactions among clinicians and possibly compassion fatigue (Sprang *et al.* 2007). Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma can be mistaken for burnout.

Unlike secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma, which results from constant interaction with traumatised clients, burnout results from working under stressful conditions,

heavy caseloads and low employment rewards (Sprang *et al.* 2007; Simon *et al.* 2006). It is "an extreme expression of work stress - the end stage of a chronic process of deterioration and frustration in the individual worker" (Miller 2000, p. 29). Causes of burnout for social workers typically include working with limited resources, being geographically isolated and heavy caseloads (Sprang *et al.* 2007).

Scholarship on the experiences of social workers in South Africa highlights that, as in many other places, these problems are significantly socially embedded due to the high levels of poverty and inequality in the country. According to Nhedzi and Makofane (2015), South African social workers' efforts at providing family preservation[13] services were sometimes frustrated by parents' reluctance to participate in such services, non-adherence to intervention plans, lack of resources and low salaries, among other challenges. These challenges, Nhedzi and Makofane (2015) point out, have adverse effects on both the morale and wellbeing of social workers. A study by De Jager (2014) further noted that some social work graduates failed to practice effectively due to inadequate social work training and preparation for practice. Moreover, De Jager notes, students' failure to render services effectively might have been compounded by high caseloads and lack of supervision (De Jager 2014). In addition, Schenck (2014) points out that social workers who work in rural areas face a number of challenges, such as lack of resources, lack of understanding of their role by community members, travelling long distances to provide services to their clients, inadequate support from their supervisors and organisations, the interference of traditional customs with effective service delivery and absence of confidentiality (Alpaslan & Schenck 2014). Social workers also face multiple role responsibilities as a result of staff shortages (Alpaslan & Schenck 2014). A combination of all

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[13] Family preservation services entail the provision of preventative and therapeutic services by social workers at family welfare organisations with the intention of preserving the family and preventing the removal of children through improving the family's coping skills, strengthening family relationships and promoting the family's use of formal and informal resources (Strydom 2014).

these challenges coupled with poor salaries, as well as dealing with heavy caseloads makes social work particularly challenging, even stressful, and this has driven several social workers out of South Africa (Kusambiza, as cited in Chibba 2011).

2.3.1. Solutions and recommendations in addressing professional challenges

Studies on social work challenges have been complemented by research which seeks to find solutions to these professional problems. A good example concerns addressing the psychological impacts associated with emotional labour or other extremely demanding jobs. Research on work-related stress was first conducted in business and industrial professions. Such studies were later undertaken in human service professions such as nursing, counselling and social work (Sprang *et al.* 2007). This body of research focused on identifying the symptoms of the psychological outcomes associated with the professionals' daily encounters with their often traumatised clients. Some of the symptoms that were identified as common among stressed-out staff include: physical indications of exhaustion such as headaches, back pain as well as gastrointestinal disturbances (Miller 2000); behavioural indicators such as irritation, anger, increased alcohol and drug use and withdrawal from non-colleagues as well as cognitive symptoms such as emotionlessness, emotional hypersensitivity, indecisiveness, inattentiveness and depression, among other factors (Miller 2000). The idea behind this enquiry (highlighted above) is to identify solutions to these problems and help sustain professionals' effectiveness in their duties.

Some studies identified personal and organisational strategies for dealing with stress. Personal strategies include exercising, walking, taking a break from the office, spending some time with families and engaging in hobbies, whilst organisational solutions include reducing workloads among workers and offering incentives (Van Hook & Rothenberg 2009). These

studies established that self-care as well as being attentive to the main domains of "life satisfaction" can reduce the effects of stressful work (McGarrigle & Walsh 2011; Fouché & Martindale 2013). For Fouché and Martindale (2013), this can be fostered through social work education.

The connection between stress and effective professional functioning points to the significance of mind-body connection in social work practice. According to Mensinga (2013), an understanding of this connection should be fostered in social work education. Mindfulness practices such as meditating and yoga can also culminate in professional wellness as well as effective interventions (McGarrigle & Walsh 2011; Napoli & Bonifas 2013). That is, they could help professionals to establish a sense of wellbeing, which includes one's ability to strike a balance between the personal, professional, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual aspects of life (Mensinga 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh 2011).

Researchers such as Grant (2014) have suggested that social work students ought to develop accurate empathy and reflective skills. Other scholars suggest that training in trauma awareness can promote compassion satisfaction among professionals, arguing that this could also reduce the intensity of compassion fatigue, burnout or trauma (Sprang *et al.* 2007). Another group of scholars has gone further to show how this awareness can be cultivated. Considering the strong chance that prospective social workers could, in one way or another, be exposed to secondary trauma because they work with traumatised clients, these scholars argue that topics on trauma-related stress and professional burnout should be covered in social work curricula (Newell & MacNeil 2010). This could either be done in practice classes or during field practicums, or both.

Some of these researchers stress that social work education or a curriculum that accommodates people's emotions and fosters mindfulness and critical thinking can prepare

social work students for work-related emotional challenges that pose threats to professional wellbeing (Grant 2014; Napoli & Bonifas 2013). For others, the social work curriculum should place an emphasis on the significance of resilience (Grant & Kinman 2012). Here, scholars call for the adoption of an educational approach that draws from trauma and resilience theories arguing that this can help social work students address work-related challenges in a way that might lead to effective interventions and professional wellbeing[14] (Horwitz 1998). Related to this work is Crisp and Beddoe's idea that social work educators should ensure that the promotion of health and wellbeing is central for service users, students and educators. That is, students should be taught how to promote the health and wellbeing of both service users and themselves (Crisp & Beddoe 2013). However, it is important to note that the study by Crisp and Beddoe in the United Kingdom speaks of wellbeing in terms of physical or emotional health. My study suggests that context defines what can be regarded as the truth when it comes to wellbeing. There are different ways of conceptualising wellbeing or a good life (see Chapter 3, section 3.3). The way wellbeing is understood in the UK might not be the same as how social workers conceptualise wellbeing in South Africa. My study proposes the use of the capability approach to identify a range of plural professional wellbeing capabilities that can be enhanced through social work education. In doing so, the study contributes to discussions about how social work education can help professionals to effectively perform their jobs, hence advance social wellbeing more broadly.

Besides pointing to the ways in which social workers may overcome health-related challenges and improve their effectiveness, scholars and policymakers have advanced a number of propositions to address the social and structural problems that may undermine social workers' efforts to contribute to human development. As highlighted earlier, social workers

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[14] A focus on the promotion of resilience among social workers individualises the problem rather than considering structural factors. It then becomes the responsibility of the social worker to be resilient no matter the injustices of the structural conditions.

work under unfavourable conditions with very high caseloads and limited resources. This takes a toll on their wellbeing and adversely affects how they practice. In this regard, scholarship on wellness calls for individual responses to the difficult work environment. They encourage individual social workers or other helping professionals to learn how to respond differently, through mindfulness or career sustaining behaviours, for instance. One study on wellness in professional counselling done by Lawson and Myers in 2011, claimed that professionals who engage in career sustaining behaviours can have high wellness scores as compared to those who do not. Career sustaining behaviours refer to the personal and professional activities that professionals participate in, in order to enjoy their work (Lawson & Myers 2011). The behaviours include spending time with family and maintaining a sense of humour, among others. However, this approach to wellness places responsibility on individuals for things that are wrong in society (see Wilson-Strydom 2017). In addition, and very important to note, is the fact that wellness for social workers is not only about learning how to manage their stress in difficult environments, but also about confronting those conditions and working towards broader change.

In South Africa, the efforts to address social and structural problems have been tied to government's attempts at achieving transformation and economic development after years of discrimination under the former apartheid regime. From 1 April 2005 to 1 March 2010, responding to the challenge of skills shortage, the government adopted a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) with a target of developing skills for sustainable growth, development and equity (Department of Labour 2005, as cited in Erasmus & Breier 2009). Social work was one of those skills. In his 2007 state of the nation speech, then President, Thabo Mbeki, pointed out that if government's social and economic programmes were to be effectively implemented, there was a need to increase the training of family social workers at professional and auxiliary levels (quoted by Earle-Malleson 2009). An updated version of the

NSDS policy paper stresses the preparation of students for work purposes (NSDS 2016). As recently as 2011, the Minister of Social Development, Bathabile Dlamini, was reported to have encouraged the recruitment of retired social workers as a way of dealing with employee shortage and the high caseloads of social work. For its part, South Africa's largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), recommended that the Department of Social Development should improve the social work career path by making it more attractive and lucrative, by creating better support networks for students pursuing a social work degree and for qualified social workers, by increasing the amount allocated for bursaries, by maximising government outsourcing of services to good NGOs working in the field, and by contract-managing the funded NGOs effectively to ensure accountability (Waters 2013).

Perhaps in response to the pleas for an increase in social workers, the South African government introduced a bursary for social work students in the late 2000s. This was intended to encourage more students to enter the social work profession. Unfortunately, recent developments suggest that skills shortages, particularly in the field of social work, cannot be solved by simply training more social workers. The employee shortage also has to do with lack of funding to appoint social workers. Since 2015, the Department of Social Development across the different provinces has been struggling to place the many social work graduates who received scholarships from them and who completed their degrees (Nkosi 2018).

Also, as Schmidt and Rautenbach (2016) note, the introduction of the bursary led to the rapid increase of social work students which also ended up presenting a huge challenge to social work education, particularly field practice. This has led to the deterioration in quality of social work field experience, especially considering that universities were not able to accommodate the additional numbers without increasing the student-lecturer ratio. Both the rapid increase of social work students and the deterioration of qualification standards can be attributed to the major challenge of funding in the higher education sector, across all

disciplines[15]. According to one online report on higher education in South Africa, despite the fact that funding for higher education had increased from R11bn in 2006 to R26bn in 2013, there has been a significant decline in terms of the real student per capita funding. This has affected the tuition fee income, research grants, contracts as well as donations in higher education. As a result, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) allocations became inadequate for meeting the needs of eligible students (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2017). This possibly explains why there is an increase of enrolment in some bursary-sponsored programmes such as the Bachelor of Social Work. Nevertheless, this also means that some students may choose social work because of the bursary rather than because they value being a social worker.

From this discussion one can discern that policy makers and scholars, specifically in South Africa, are focusing on resolving the challenge of worker shortage by producing more social workers. This is a noble idea, but it still overlooks the issues on the ground, for instance, issues of lack of resources and funds for the maintenance of quality services as well as professional wellbeing. The fact that the goodness or quality of social work services also depends on professional wellbeing as well as the social conditions within which social workers do their work, is not trivial. However, it is important to note that both South African and international literature point to the instrumental role of social work education in either producing or preparing students for social work practice. Equally, it is essential to know how the preparation is done and whether the issue of professional wellbeing is taken into consideration. I discuss this in the next section.

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[15] The deterioration of qualification standards can also be attributed to poor workplace environments, which is mostly characterised by lack of supervision and lack of resources.

2.4 Social work education: Preparing social work students for practice

Social work education, like the education of other professionals, aims to produce competent practitioners by ensuring the attainment of knowledge and skills necessary for the profession. It also fosters positive attitudes towards good practice and critical awareness of the profession among students (Jarvis 1983). Furthermore, social work education teaches students to understand the profession's history, values, mission and ethics. In fact, education is the basis of social workers' professional identity (Nichols 2012). This education, both internationally and in the South African context, consists of two components, namely classroom learning (theory) and field practicums (practice) (Bogo 2015; Sewpaul & Lombard 2004).

For many social workers, field education is the most important segment of the social work curriculum. It is the "signature" of social work education which connects the theoretical ideas which students learn from the class and the world of practice (Bogo 2015; Maynard, Mertz & Fortune 2015). Social workers believe that field education is the basic instrument in producing proficient, effective and principled clinical social workers (Bogo & Power 1992). In short, field practicums are central in preparing graduates for effective interventions (Wayne, Bogo & Raskin 2006). In the USA, for example, field education is both a compulsory and essential component of the curriculum in all undergraduate and Master's programmes in accredited social work schools (Bogo 2015). Through field practicums, students develop capabilities in executing social work functions through educationally-focused advice on their direct practice with clients, groups, communities, as well as in their administrative learning (Bogo 2015). Agency-based social workers provide this (Bogo 2015). The idea is that students will develop essential skills for the profession as they learn from an experienced practitioner. Similarly, in the South African context, field practicums are a compulsory component of social

work education[16]. A qualitative study which was done in the Eastern Cape with the intention of evaluating social work field instruction revealed that field practica are seen as the heart of social work education, which is aimed at granting students an opportunity to put into practise the skills, knowledge and values they learn in class (Schmidt & Rautenbach 2016).

Beyond the importance of field practicums, a number of scholars have advanced improved classroom-based models of instruction in order to improve the outcomes of social work education. Some of these scholars called for the adoption of problem-based learning, arguing that this is one of the most effective approaches to education.[17] Its proponents argue that it leads to increased motivation among students (Wong & Bing Lam 2007). Other scholars have stressed the importance of fostering ethical judgements among social work students (Sanders & Hoffman 2010). Finally, some scholars emphasise the need to impart critical thinking skills among social work students (Plath *et al.* 1999). One of those scholars is Nerland (2016, p. 132), who highlights the need to educate deliberate professionals (not specifically referring to social workers). She stresses that "…there is a need to move beyond education as a matter of introducing students to factual knowledge, to facilitate exploration and deliberate choices that lead to justified actions." Making deliberate choices has to do with one's ability to critically reflect in a given situation. Reflecting on her journey on learning in social work practice, Hickson (2011) emphasises that it is crucial for social work students to engage in reflective journal writing. For her, this academic exercise can be helpful in fostering critical reflection, including in practice settings.

The idea of imparting critical reflection among students through social work education was also highlighted by Gray (2002) in her discussion on developmental social work in South

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[16] Neither the professional board (SACSSP) nor the Council on Higher Education (CHE) can accredit a curriculum that does not have a good mix of theory and practice.

[17] Problem based learning is when real life situations that are encountered in the profession are used as stimulants for students' learning (Wong & Bing Lam 2007).

Africa. In order to prepare students for current and future practice, Gray posits, social work curricula should aim to produce critically reflective practitioners who can respond to an ever-changing environment, think critically and make ethical decisions. Social work educators are also encouraged to impart clinical and psychotherapeutic skills to students, considering the prevalence of trauma resulting from violent crime, such as rape, murder, child abuse and sexual assault (Gray & Mazibuko 2002). In addition to these skills, Gray and Mazibuko (2002) note that educational institutions should also foster community development and policy analysis expertise among students. These are very important abilities for social workers, especially considering that in South Africa social workers are highly involved in community work as well as policy making. Participating in such practice areas involves dealing with, as well as questioning social and structural arrangements or foundations of wellbeing, yet one's ability to work effectively hinges on his/her wellbeing. A common component of the above-mentioned strands of scholarship on social work education is its focus on the best way to impart skills or knowledge desirable for the profession. However, the significance of fostering professional wellbeing through both field practica and classroom experience remains a neglected discourse. This study highlights how the issue of professional wellbeing can be advanced or approached in both settings - thereby positioning professional wellbeing within the profession's core knowledge. The next section discusses the generally agreed on core professional skills and knowledge.

2.5 Core skills and knowledge for social work practice

Tied to the debates over the best way of preparing students for practice is the debate over the kind of skills and knowledge that social workers ought to acquire so that they can render effective interventions to their clients. The debate is mostly between scholarship that argues for the importance of certain social work skills and knowledge for effective interventions and another, which is sceptical about the evidence of the use of such knowledge

in practice settings (Sheppard *et al.* 2000). According to Sheppard (1995), the debate on social work knowledge is characterised by a shared, but implicit supposition of what is meant by knowledge. The ensuing section is a discussion on the presumed core social work skills, namely competence, reflection and reflexivity. This will be followed by a section on essential social work knowledge, capturing both the global and local contexts.

2.5.1. Essential skills in social work: Competence, reflection and reflexivity

The increasing complexity and fluidity of social challenges has led to the shift of emphasis from competence-based social work practice to reflective practice and education (Chow *et al.* 2011). Competence-based education stresses the importance of fostering "technical, procedural and managerial aspects of practice", whilst reflective social work practice and education highlights the importance of thoughtfulness and deliberation in practice settings (Chow *et al.* 2011, p. 142; Schön 1991). One aspect of reflective social work is cultural competence. Cultural competence speaks of the practitioners' ability to be aware of how their own worldviews, beliefs, values and culture might lead to structural disadvantage (Abram & Moio 2013). For scholars such as Blunt (2008), cultural competence is meant to promote positive social change through minimising prejudice, racism, social inequalities and discrimination of cultural minorities.[18] Recent studies have shown that social workers are encouraged to gain competence in working with a variety of minority groups (such as the racial and sexual minorities), beyond cultural ones. An understanding of the complexities associated with achieving this milestone led scholars such as Krentzman and Townsend (2008) to argue for the development of a more comprehensive cultural competence model which considers an

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[18] The notion of cultural competence has also been under severe criticism by some scholars. As noted by Carpenter-Song et al (2007), there are some anthropological critiques of the notion. These include the fact that the notion assumes that culture is static, and that culture is conflated with race and ethnicity.

array of individual differences such as race, gender, nationality and sexuality or sexual orientations.

The central aspects that can be discerned from the cultural competence model include self-awareness and skills development (Abrams & Moio 2009). Self-awareness speaks of one's ability to reflect on how his/her own values impact the helping process, whilst skills development speaks of the importance of the professionals' attainment of valuable skills and knowledge about minorities and how to effectively intervene with them (Abrams & Moio 2009). The significance of self-awareness was also emphasised in a different way by Heydt and Sherman (2005, p. 25), who stressed that the issue of cultural competence should be integrated within social work students' understanding of *conscious use of self*. Conscious use of self, for them, refers to the purposeful instrumental use of the social worker in promoting positive life changes within client systems. Hence, reflective practice continues to be essential for effective social work practice.

The concept of reflective practice can be traced back to Dewey's 1933 philosophy of education, in which he talked about reflection as a process of learning from experience (Askeland & Fook 2009). The idea was later developed by scholars such as Schön (1991), whose work distinguished *reflection in action* from *reflection on action*. *Reflection in action* refers to the thoughts that one might have when he/she is in a certain situation, whilst *reflection on action* takes place after the incident and involves the recalling of one's thoughts, feelings and actions (Hickson 2011). As I mentioned in the above paragraph, effective social work practitioners ought to reflect on their personal worldviews, beliefs and assumptions and how all those impact how they intervene with the people they serve (Gilgun 2005). In reflective practice, practitioners come up with exemplary themes deriving from their case experiences and create meanings for both interpretation and action (Schön 1991). According to Hickson (2011), there is a close link between reflective practice and reflexivity. For her, reflexivity is a

component of critical reflection in social work practice. Critical reflection, she notes, "involves analysis in the context of knowledge, power and reflexivity to understand how assumptions are influenced in the context of social and structural assumptions" (Hickson 2011, p. 832). This implies the need for social workers to critically question the socio-structural assumptions or foundations of social wellbeing.

Proponents of reflexivity point out that although as professionals, social workers are expected to be non-judgemental when intervening with clients, in most cases social work practice is inescapably shaped by the professionals' life experiences, belief systems, cultural values and how they were nurtured (Chow *et al.* 2011). These factors can impair or enhance professional competence (Chow *et al.* 2011). It is out of this concern that some scholars began to pay attention to the significance of self-awareness and an appreciation of one's own reactions to other people or social problems (reflexivity) within social work practice (Ross, cited in Chow *et al.* 2011).

Scholars have conceptualised the idea of reflexivity in a variety of ways. For counsellors and psychotherapists such as Rennie (2004), reflexivity refers to self-awareness and one's ability to make sense of his/her own feelings and how the two flow into action. In social work practice, reflexivity is a process that includes not only self-awareness, but also how practitioners thoroughly analyse the information they get through referrals into situational understanding and execution of the action plan (Sheppard *et al.* 2000). Sheppard (1998) captures a more comprehensive definition of reflexivity in social work practice when he says:

> The notion of reflexivity emphasises the social worker (i) as an active thinker able to assess, respond and initiate action and (ii) as a social actor, one who actually participates in the situation with which they are concerned in the conduct of their practice. Thus the reflexive practitioner, in practical terms, is one who is aware of the socially situated relationship with their client(s) i.e., with a clear understanding of their role and purpose; who understands themselves as a participant whose actions and interactions are part of the social work process; who is capable of analysing situations and evidence, with an awareness of the way their own participation effects this process; who is able to identify the intellectual and practice processes involved in assessment and intervention; who is aware of the assumptions underlying the ways

they 'make sense' of practice situations; and who is able to do so in relation to the nature and purpose of their practice (Sheppard 1998 as cited in Sheppard *et al.* 2000, p. 471).

According to Lee and Greene (1999), reflexivity has been emphasised in clinical social work practice with multicultural communities that consist of conflicting values and norms. Its proponents argue that reflexivity promotes effective interventions or professional competence whilst protecting both the practitioner and the client. They stress that, in social work practice, knowledge, competence and reflexivity are fundamental to effective interventions. However, by making this point, they focus on social work functionings and overlook the fact that social workers are also ends of development whose wellbeing ought to be promoted. Whilst some researchers debate about competence, reflection and reflexivity, other scholars explore the relationship between knowledge and social work practice (profession), and how that relates to effective social work services.

2.5.2. Critical knowledge in social work practice

Knowledge in the field of applied science, including in social work, is sometimes construed as a set of written evidence which can be used in practice. This interpretation of knowledge is grounded in a positivist epistemology (Sheppard *et al.* 2000). Positivism asserts that knowledge is scientific and objective. Adherence to this model calls for evidence-based (scientifically proven) practice in the field of social work. The idea of evidence-based practice evolved and continues to develop in response to the need for effective and accountable social work practice (Rosen 2003). Proponents of evidence-based practice argue for the use of a scientific knowledge base in social work practice (Mullen, Bledsoe & Bellamy 2007). They are of the position that social work interventions ought to be grounded in scientifically established effectiveness or empirical research (Otto, Polutta & Ziegler 2009). However,

amongst this body of work are some researchers who argue that evidence-based practice goes beyond the mere application of scientific evidence or knowledge in practice, to include the use of the practitioners' know-how and clients' views of the situation (Gilgun 2005). This understanding has led some researchers such as McNeece and Thyer (2004, p. 9) to describe evidence-based practice as an "integration of the best research evidence with clinical expertise and client values in making practice decisions." Therefore, from an evidence-based practice perspective, effective interventions should depend on practitioners' use of the best evidence on what works well for the clients as well as scientific wisdom (Otto *et al.* 2009).

The assumption that evidence-based practice leads to quality social work practice led some scholars to argue for the adoption of evidence-based approaches in both social work education and practice. For them the adoption of this approach will be helpful in promoting not only effective, but ethically justifiable social work services (McNeece & Thyer 2004). For some researchers, the use of empirical evidence in social work helps in eliminating opinion-based decision-making in practice settings. Opinion-based decision-making concerns making professional choices that are based on political pressure, limited resources or personal values (Everitt & Hardiker 1996). The assumption is that best professional decisions or judgements are guided by scientifically driven rationality or logical thinking (Rosen 2003). However, social workers do not solely make decisions that are scientifically driven. They sometimes make decisions that are based on heuristics, other social factors or common sense (Everitt & Hardiker 1996). Hence, social work interventions are sometimes drawn from non-scientific proof.

However, Otto and colleagues remind us that not all empirical research provides a basis for evidence-based social work interventions (Otto *et al.* 2009). According to them, some empirical studies are barely reliable in estimating the effect of social work interventions. These scholars highlight the need for research that explains and enhances our understanding of the causal mechanisms within the realm of social work. In addition, Nerland (2016) highlights that

professional knowledge and established practice arrangements are mostly contested. For her, sustainable professional practices entail constant development and re-interpretations and this, in one way or another, allows for multiple dimensions of knowledge. Consequently, scholars such as Rosen (2003) stress that for effective social work practices, the aptness of a scientifically proven intervention to particular clients should be scrutinised, modified before use and aided with the practitioners' wisdom as well as indigenous knowledge.

Related, or perhaps in agreement with the above points raised by Nerland (2016) and Rosen (2003), some scholars and policymakers on the social work profession from both the global north and south have emphasised the point that social work students should attain relevant knowledge about human development from the perspective of how the human body functions (the neurochemical and neurophysiological developments and how they relate to human behaviour) as well as how the macro environment may affect people's wellbeing[19]. In the global north, the idea of equipping social work students with human development knowledge is captured by the kind of curriculum offered to social work students. Amongst the key courses that universities offer to their students is, for example, the module on *Human Behaviour and the Social Environment* (Council of Social Work Education 1997; Van Wormer 2010). The rationale behind this course is to equip students with basic knowledge on human development and how this might be affected by biological, psychological and sociocultural factors.

Similarly, in South Africa, social work accreditation boards emphasise the idea of equipping students with human development knowledge. For instance, the South African Council on Higher Education's Bachelor of Social Work standard document states that, for a

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[19] This is not the same concept of human development as put forward by Ul Haq (1995) and Sen (2000). From Ul Haq and Sen's perspective, human development is an illuminating concept that integrates various concerns about human lives, their wellbeing and freedoms (see Sen 2000).

student to be awarded the degree s/he should have an understanding of "life span development and the interaction among biological, psychological, socio-structural, economic, political, cultural and spiritual factors in shaping human development…" (CHE 2015, p. 6). By emphasising this, South African policymakers underscore the point that the social work profession should help address challenges emanating from the country's historical experiences of colonialism and apartheid. These experiences especially led to gross inequalities and violations of human rights in the country (Spolander *et al.* 2011). According to Mamphiswana and Noyoo (2000), during apartheid social workers failed to acquire the basic competence and knowledge required for dealing with some of the vulnerable populations with whom they must work. This was because social work education was tied to the discriminatory practices of the time and this negatively affected the discipline's ideology (Letsebe & Grobbelaar 1996).

These historical realities led some scholars to call for the transformation of social work, and professional knowledge after the end of apartheid in 1994. For example, Bozalek (2004) and Mwansa (2011) argued that social work educators should make use of students' family stories in designing social work curricula and embrace frameworks which draw from indigenous knowledge, values and practices, respectively. Others stressed that social work education should address issues pertaining to mass poverty, women, development, nutrition, housing and rural development (Chikadzi & Pretorius 2014; Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2000). Perhaps influenced by these pleas by different scholars and by these historical experiences, the South African National Qualification Framework for the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) stresses the point that all BSW graduates should have an appreciation of how colonialism and apartheid impacted social service needs and delivery in South Africa historically as well as in present (CHE 2015).

In addition, and further reflecting the need to sustain the gains brought by the political transformations that accompanied the end of apartheid in 1994, other scholars stress the point

that universities should play an active role in the development of active citizens or social workers who can contribute towards positive social transformation (Keet 2015). For example, Keet (2015) argues that social work education should produce critical thinkers who possess the necessary knowledge for dealing with, and confronting, certain practices that fail to empower social service beneficiaries. Keet indicates that the development of such professional abilities can be managed through investing in a set of educational capabilities. Drawing from Nussbaum (2006), she highlights the importance of three capabilities, namely critical examination of oneself and one's traditions, the ability of citizens to not only see themselves as a part of a local region or group, but as human beings bound to others by ties of recognition and concern, as well as narrative imagination (see Keet 2015). This is undoubtedly rich knowledge for social service providers. However, the emphasis in these formulations lies in the need to understand the social service recipients and their environment, and not in finding a connection between professional wellbeing and human development. What is missing in these debates is how the wellbeing of the professionals might affect their abilities to perform their jobs, and how the environment in which professionals work affects their wellbeing and ability to do their jobs. This raises questions that are at the core of this study. Are professional skills and knowledge as currently reflected in social work education sufficient for effective social work interventions? Can someone with all these skills and knowledge be effective, even with ill-being? What is professional wellbeing? What professional capabilities can social work education promote amongst professionals to enhance their abilities to effectively perform their jobs, so as to promote social justice more broadly? As I have already noted, recent studies in higher education and development in South Africa provide a partial answer to these questions. These studies demonstrate that universities should move beyond meeting just the skills desired for the purposes of employability to address broader questions such as the public good (Walker & McLean 2013). I discuss this point in the next section.

The public-good as core knowledge

Public goods, as defined by Samuelson, are goods that are non-rivalrous (those that can be consumed by several people but cannot be depleted) and non-excludable (the benefits are not only confined to the consumers of the goods) (Samuelson cited in Marginson 2011). The subject of public good has been and continues to be central in scholarly debates concerning the transformation of higher education. In South Africa, the transformation of higher education targets democracy, social justice as well as addressing social demands. This, according to Singh (2012), underscores higher education's social responsiveness or accountability to the issue of public good.

For many scholars, the promotion of the public good should be both the end and purpose of higher education (Nixon 2010). For them, higher education for the public good encompasses the predisposition of educational institutions towards social justice and care for others (Hartley and London cited by Leibowitz 2012; Walker & McLean 2013). For example, Hall (2012) argues that higher education policies that fail to attend to social challenges such as high inequality levels and its aftermath, whilst merely focusing on responding to the global market, forces are damaging. For him, higher education should also promote individual, private benefits. These would include people's valued capabilities and functionings.

Higher education for the public good, as argued by Bozalek and Leibowitz (2012), should pay attention to both learning (educational) processes and outcomes. Whilst arguing for a socially just type of education, these scholars came up with a set of questions that might be valuable for institutions that are targeting the public good. The questions were drawn from three lines of thought, namely *Tronto's political ethics of care*, *Fraser's trivalent view of social justice* and the *Capability Approach.* For the purpose of this work, I will paraphrase only the ones that speak to this study. Drawing from Tronto's work, Bozalek and Leibowitz (2012)

argued that institutions should be caring and attend to questions concerning their attendance to the needs of the students, their responsibility for meeting the needs of students and whether they are competent in meeting the needs of the students (Bozalek & Leibowitz 2012). It is my argument that if social work education is to be viewed as just and has to produce competent professionals who are capable of promoting social wellbeing, it should be attentive to those important points raised by Bozalek and Leibowitz (2012). That is, social work education should consider the opportunities which should be opened or expanded for students to achieve their valued lives as students and as professionals (wellbeing).

From the capability approach, institutions should also consider implementing some conversion or institutional arrangements that enable students to achieve their valued functionings (Bozalek & Leibowitz 2012). Walker (2012a) forcefully made this point when she called for educational goals and curricula which pay attention to human development and the formation of graduate capabilities and functionings. For her, a curriculum which draws from the capability approach goes beyond fostering the attainment of knowledge and skills among graduates for their own personal benefits to promoting commitment to use that knowledge for the good of the public (society) (Walker 2012a). Related to this view is Walker and McLean's (2013) assertion that education for the public good ought to yield four meta-functionings among professionals. These include the maximisation of human dignity, working towards social transformation in a way that promotes social justice, making critical and worthwhile professional judgements, as well as working towards the expansion of clients' capabilities. However, what is missing within this discussion on higher education and the public good is the connection between effective public-good interventions and professional wellbeing or how the lack of professional wellbeing can hamper efforts at public-good interventions. My thesis expands on these views by arguing that, if public good or social wellbeing is to be promoted effectively, social work education should equally foster the

attainment of knowledge and skills for graduates' own wellbeing and human development. The capability approach's emphasis on the expansion of individual capabilities and freedoms to live their valued lives offers promising ground upon which social workers' wellbeing can be enhanced through education. The capability approach allows us to ask how [social] workers' freedom to achieve wellbeing can be enhanced beyond questions of resource distribution or satisfaction/happiness (Miles 2014). In subsequent sections, I discuss what scholars say about social work and capabilities.

2.6 Social work and capabilities

The language of capabilities is growing within the field of social work education in both the global north and south. In the United Kingdom the Social Work Reform Board advocated for the formation of a Professional Capability Framework (PCF), which can be applicable to both social work education and practice. The intention behind the formation of this framework was to clarify how social work practice and education (especially practica) could be holistically understood and assessed. A holistic assessment of social work practice, for Keville (2012), should involve the assessor's appreciation of the various behavioural competencies that constitute good practice and how time, space and contextual features affect practice. This understanding, together with the appreciation of the relevant professional capabilities, assists social work students, practitioners, managers, educators, as well as employers to maintain services of a high quality (College of Social Work 2011). **Fig 1** below shows the nine professional capabilities or domains, and levels which are expected at any stage of a social work career according to the PCF. These are:

▪ *Professionalism*: Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development.

- *Values and ethics:* Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice.

- *Diversity:* Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice.

- *Rights, justice and economic wellbeing:* Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing.

- *Knowledge:* Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.

- *Critical reflection and analysis:* Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making.

- *Intervention and skills:* Use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse.

- *Contexts and organisations:* Engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within own organisational frameworks and contribute to the development of services and organisations. Operate effectively within multi-agency and inter-professional partnerships and settings.

- *Professional leadership:* Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management (College of Social Work 2011).

Figure 1: Proposed professional capabilities framework for social workers

Proposed Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers
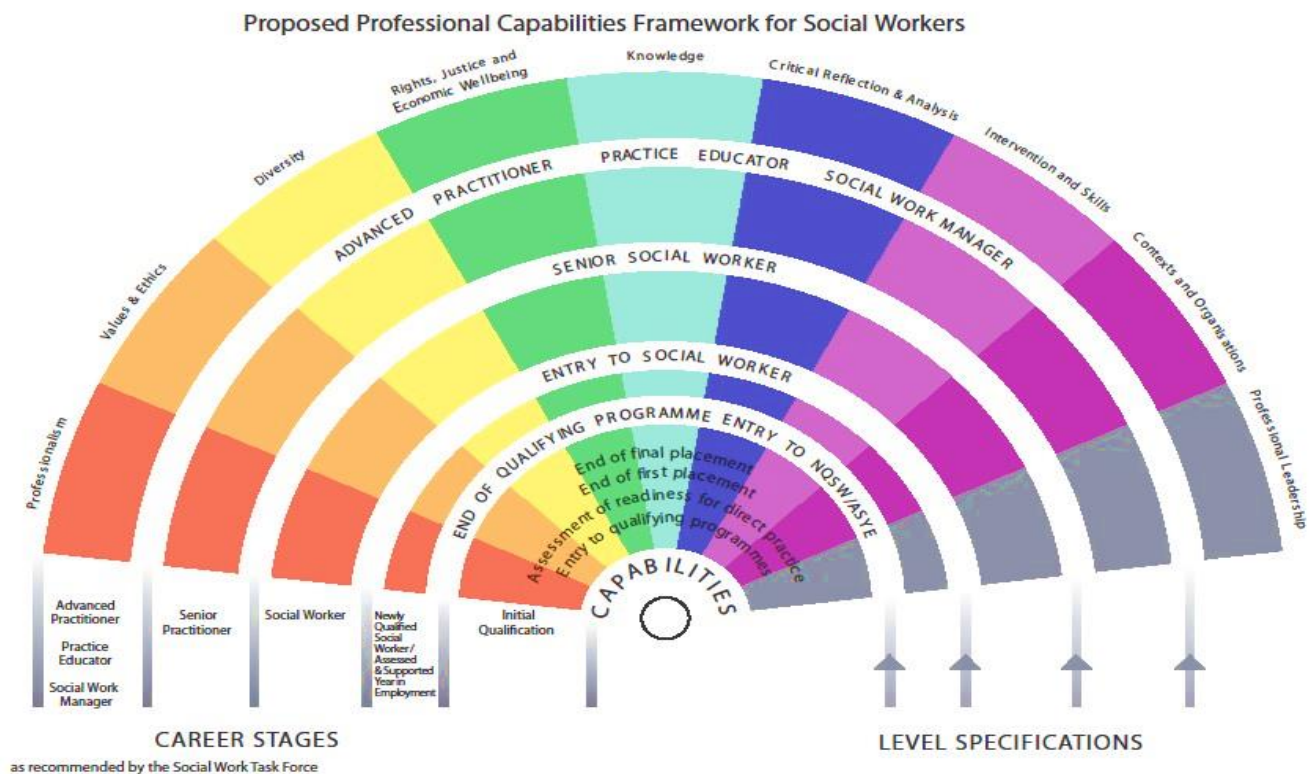
(Sources: College of Social Work 2011; see also North Lincolnshire Council 2014, p. 4)

These are crucial social work domains or capabilities for both the upkeep and assessment of social work practice and education. However, the maintenance and upkeep of good practice also hinges on the practitioners' overall wellbeing. What the College of Social Work did is to highlight the important capabilities social workers ought to have in order to deliver quality services. Yet, it does not mention how crucial professional wellbeing is in advancing social work goals. I stress the point that this might be a partial use of the capability approach (see Chapter 3) in our understanding of both the social work profession and education, as well as their importance in human wellbeing. The capability approach can clarify and contribute towards a better conceptualisation of how social work education can enhance the professional wellbeing of its graduates in ways that could culminate in effective public-good interventions. It allows us to have an understanding of the instrumental and intrinsic value

of professional wellbeing on social wellbeing as well as the social work practitioners, respectively.

In South Africa, the works of Walker and McLean (2013) as well as Keet (2015) give us a sense of which professional capabilities are crucial among social workers. Walker and McLean (2013), in their discussion of education for public-good professionals, identified capabilities such as knowledge and skills, informed vision, affiliation, resilience, social and collective struggle, emotional reflexivity, integrity, assurance and confidence, to be crucial amongst public-good professionals. As highlighted earlier, Keet (2015) points to the importance of critical examination of oneself and one's traditions, the ability of citizens to not only see themselves as a part of a local region or group, but as human beings bound to others by ties of recognition and concern, as well as narrative imagination as important social work capabilities. All these are key qualities among social workers, but again the significance of professional wellbeing in effective social work functioning remains unattended.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined five main bodies of literature which are intended to collectively show the instrumental as well as the intrinsic value of professional wellbeing in social work practice. These include views on social work as a profession and how it relates to human wellbeing or development, challenges associated with social work, social work education and works on the core knowledge and skills in social work practice, as well as some insights on social work practice and the relevant capabilities. Both global and local views have been presented. I did this for two reasons; our understanding of social work education and its link to social or human wellbeing is informed by global developments as well as local histories or cultures; what is seen as correct or true varies across cultures or nations.

In the first section of this chapter, I reviewed literature on the social work profession and its link to human wellbeing and development. This was helpful in highlighting the instrumental value of social work in promoting social wellbeing. However, insights on the intrinsic value of social work remain outstanding in both global and South African works. Of importance is the point that, for social workers to be efficient in rendering social services, particular attention should be paid to their own wellbeing, especially considering how demanding and challenging the profession is.

Global literature has shown that social workers encounter numerous work-related challenges. These include secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout among others. In addition to this, South African research has revealed some slightly different, though related sets of challenges. The challenges I identified from the South African literature include heavy workloads, lack of resources, lack of supervision, poor salaries, inadequate training, shortage of social workers and multiple responsibilities. These challenges can be attributed to working in extremely poor conditions as well as operating in a resource-poor public sector, as well as the high levels of poverty in South African society.

Of interest is the fact that both global challenges and South African challenges are discussed in relation to how they adversely affect effective service provision. The differences in terms of how scholars approach and elaborate on social work challenges say a lot in terms of the variance of the level of professional development between the developed world and South Africa. This might be because social work in South Africa is still at an early stage as compared to the developed nations – or because the social contexts are very different. I would term the challenges I identified and stressed in South Africa 'first order challenges' and the global ones 'second order challenges.' The reason for this is: from my interpretation, the ones which are identified in the global literature are subsequent to the ones identified in South African works. Scholars from the global north have already started looking at some aspects of

professional wellbeing such as the emotional or health part of the profession and how social work curricula can foster their improvement. However, this is a very narrow conceptualisation of wellbeing. In this study I go beyond the personal to consider institutional and structural foundations of wellbeing as well as identifying an array of professional capabilities that can be promoted through social work education. I also show how the capabilities-based understanding of professional wellbeing can contribute to social wellbeing (see Chapter 3).

Solutions and recommendations on how to resolve social work related challenges have been made in both global and local contexts. Personal, organisational and educational solutions have been raised. The South African literature has also included some recommendations that have been made to the Department of Social Development. These are clearly meant to ensure that social workers render their services efficiently and effectively. However, as I indicated earlier, effective social services also depend on the wellbeing of social workers and social work education has a role to play since for every social worker, social work education and training is a prerequisite for practice. This will ensure that everyone completes training with an appreciation of how crucial professional wellbeing is in advancing social wellbeing.

Literature on social work education and what I assumed to be core knowledge and skills have been discussed both globally and locally. Global studies stress the importance of evidence-based practice, reflection, competence and reflexivity, in enhancing effective services, whilst South African literature highlights the importance of both transformative social work education and practice. South African studies speak of competence in terms of social workers' ability to redress mass poverty and the previously racially biased social service provision. Hence, some scholars talk about the importance of public-good education in addressing those issues. However, my argument remains that without professional wellbeing, social workers might not be able to work effectively on mass poverty and inequality, and are unlikely to be in a position to contribute to the broader public good.

Lastly, I reviewed scholarly work on social work practice and the relevant capabilities. This literature highlights the professional capabilities which have been identified as crucial for effective social work practices, but once again do not take professional wellbeing into account. This study strives to show that the capability approach framework is not only useful in identifying professional capabilities, but can also be helpful in enriching our understanding of professional wellbeing and its constituencies. The capability approach can elevate our conceptualisation of the role of social work education, in human development. This is discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUALISING WELLBEING AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

The conceptual framework offers many benefits to a research… it assists the researcher in identifying and constructing his/her worldview on the phenomenon to be investigated (Adom, Hussein & Agyem 2018, p. 439).

3.1 Introduction

As indicated in the introductory chapter, South Africa has a long history of social problems such as high poverty levels and persistent inequality. These issues are mostly understood to be a result of colonialism and apartheid, as well as the racial discriminatory practices of that time. But, as Walker and McLean (2013) also highlight, these problems can persist if social arrangements such as education and heath are conceived in neoliberal terms and are, thus, tailored to respond to market forces, rather than social needs. Together with others, their work has sensitised us to think about how higher education can contribute not only to improving national economic performance, but also to address questions of human development, poverty alleviation and the development of a just and sustainable society (Boni & Walker 2013). Social work education potentially fits this bill. As some scholars have noted, the professionals in this field can positively influence society's opinion on how social problems ought to be solved (Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2000). The social workers make a direct contribution to societal wellbeing through the work that they do.[20] My study builds on these insights to argue that, for social workers to be effective in addressing the many problems coming out of the long history of inequality, social work education should enhance professionals' wellbeing. This raises two key questions: how can we understand the role of higher education in development and what is it that we call wellbeing?

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[20] However, some scholars would want to contest this idea arguing that social work is part of social control on indigenous people. For instance, in discussing Parental experience of child protection intervention, Dumbrill (2006) notes that parents perceived power being used over them as a form of control or support.

In this chapter, I discuss the many ways in which scholarship has conceptualised responses to these two questions. I begin by discussing how, until recently, scholars and policy makers have conceptualised the role of education in society through a framework influenced by neoliberalism. I follow this up with a discussion of the various ways in which scholarship has conceptualised wellbeing. In subsequent sections, I discuss the capability approach. I stress the point that the capability approach clarifies and contributes towards a better conceptualisation of how social work education can enhance the wellbeing of its graduates in a way that is more likely to culminate in effective public-good interventions.

3.2 The role and purpose of higher education

Until fairly recently, our understanding of the role of higher education in the society we live has been influenced by policy makers and scholars' framing of this issue in neoliberal or human capital terms (Walker & McLean 2013). A neoliberal approach emphasises the point that higher education should contribute to increased economic output. The logic of this argument is that a nation with highly skilled citizens can be in a position to catch up with the constant changes in international markets (Robertson 2000, as cited in Hursh & Martina 2003). Ultimately, neoliberal policies seek to transform educational systems into markets and private services (Apple 2006, as cited in Lakes & Carter 2011) and to integrate higher education into the broader economic system as producers of highly skilled and innovative graduates who will raise society's economic value. Education is also expected to produce 'responsibilized individuals' who can take over responsibility for areas of care that the government was previously in charge of (Davies & Bansel 2007pg.251). In this regard, the neoliberal agenda impinges on social work practice and other aspects of social care (Garrett 2010). As noted by Davies and Bansel (2007), in this thinking, the state can no longer be responsible for providing all society's needs, hence individuals and organizations must take on responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Also, and closely related to the above point, is the idea that higher education should contribute towards economic growth through the development of human capital (Knight & Yorke 2003). Employability becomes the gauge for students' performance (Bozalek 2013). Framed in this way, higher education focuses on the employability of its graduates, seeking, in the process, to enhance certain skills, knowledge and abilities for employment purposes (see Walker & Fongwa 2017). Whilst employability is of course important, it ought not to be the main focus of higher education. Considerations of employability and the economic contribution of graduates partially form the basis of social work education in South Africa. For example, the stated aim of the Bachelor of Social Science Honours in Social Work qualification is to equip graduates with knowledge, skills and competence in the area of study which offers opportunities for progressive personal growth, rewarding economic doings and contributions to society (SAQA n.d.*e*). Although this aim highlights the importance of skills and knowledge for personal growth, in practice, the issue of personal growth is subordinated to the preparation of students as prospective human service professionals. This is possibly because social work is a service-oriented profession functioning in a neoliberal world.

Beyond the questions of employability, social work education in South Africa also seeks to promote social justice. Thus, the Bachelor of Social Work is tailored "to provide a well-grounded, generic, professional education that prepares reflexive graduates who are able to engage with people from micro- to macro- levels of social work, within a dynamic socio-political and economic context." The qualification is designed to equip graduates with the capacity to engage people in problem solving, promote social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people (CHE 2015, p. 5). This quest for social justice is, for example, reflected by the courses offered by the Department of Social Work at Mopane University. Table 1 below shows these courses.

Table 1: Compulsory social work courses

First year courses	Second year courses	Third year courses	Fourth-year courses
-Introduction to social service professions -Social work with the individual -Social work with communities -Social work service rendering context	-Casework intervention models -Social work with groups -Welfare law -Diversity in social work context -Social issues	-Social work with the child -Social work with families -Group work practicum -Community work practicum -Statutory interventions -Social work research -Casework practicum	-Advanced social work theory: Section A -Advanced social work theory: Section B -Research -Clinical social work -Clinical work (year course) -Research

(Department of Social Work, Mopane University 2018).

A key feature of these courses is to prepare social work students for dealing with various groups of people such as children, families and communities. The Master of Social Work qualification aims at providing advanced knowledge and research skills in these areas.

In pursuing the goal of social justice, social work education in South Africa has been influenced by the international conception of the profession. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), referring to the global definition, summarises this conception in the following words:

> *The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. [International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work 2000]* (SAQA n.d.*b*; SACCSP 2008, p. 3).

The latest global definition of the profession by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) reinforces the emphasis towards social justice. "Social Work," the IFSW reiterates,

> *is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing* (IFSW 2014, p. 1).

These themes, which function as guiding principles in social work education in South Africa, are undoubtedly aligned with human development values (see section 3.4.2.1 on values). However, they, as well as SAQA and the CHE say nothing to reinforce the importance of promoting professional wellbeing through social work education. Thus, the rationale and purpose of the above mentioned degrees places greater emphasis on one of the social workers' functionings of intervening with clients or advancing professional goals—that is, the provision of social services.

However, by so doing, social work education pays little attention to the importance of the professionals' wellbeing in providing effective interventions. Hence, whilst professionals' contribution to economic growth, and the attainment of knowledge and skills for employment purposes are important, social work education should also aim towards the enhancement of professional wellbeing. This is especially important because social workers' wellbeing or lack of it affects their abilities to perform effective interventions. Directing higher education's main focus to employability distorts and transforms the quality of intellectuals, whilst turning graduates into technicians (Morley 2001).

Focusing on employability does not give much room for the consideration of the students or graduates' wellbeing as professionals. That approach leaves us with questions such as:

a)   Are students the means or ends of development?

b)   In what ways is higher education promoting the wellbeing of the students and/or future social work professionals?

c)   In what ways and to what extent are the students' opportunities or choices to achieve valuable lives enhanced through their education?

As indicated by Boni and Walker, "an educational focus on employability and jobs tells us nothing about the quality of work, or whether or not people are treated fairly and with dignity at work" (Boni & Walker 2013, p. 5). However, Boni and Walker point out that if we view the role of higher education through human development and capabilities lenses, concepts of human development values, capabilities and agency become crucial in re-imagining a different vision of the university, beyond the goal of preparing people as a workforce (Boni & Walker 2013; see also Walker & Fongwa 2017). For them, a focus on capabilities implies more benefits from education, which would include the advancement of wellbeing, freedom of individuals and people, whilst improving economic production and promoting social change (Boni & Walker 2013). This is a much richer conceptualisation of the role of education, which in my view would go a long way in shedding light on how the wellbeing of social workers can be advanced or expanded. I discuss the different approaches to wellbeing in the next section.

3.3 Approaches to wellbeing

This section addresses the concept of wellbeing. Scholars and policy makers debate how wellbeing ought to be defined and measured. Philosophers have come up with two main ways of understanding this concept. These are the hedonic (utility) and the eudaimonic views. The hedonic view suggests that wellbeing can be understood in terms of happiness or life

satisfaction. The eudaimonic view, on the other hand, maintains that happiness goes beyond pleasure to incorporate positive psychological functioning of people, or leading a virtuous life (Straume & Vittersø 2012). Another body of literature on wellbeing comes from social scientists, who advocate for subjective views in defining wellbeing (Gasper 2004). Lastly, economists conceptualise the notion differently, focusing on resources and income as quintessential indicators of wellbeing. I briefly discuss these approaches in the coming sections. Whilst acknowledging that these are all important slants in our understanding of wellbeing, I end this chapter with my argument for the adoption of the capability approach.

3.3.1 Hedonic and eudaimonic views

The hedonic approach conceives wellbeing in terms of pleasure, happiness, avoidance of pain and life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci 2001; Dodge *et al.* 2012). These are measured subjectively, mostly through an assessment of positive mood, absence of negative mood and life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci 2001).Where hedonism parallels happiness with pleasure or enjoyment, eudaimonia defines wellbeing in terms of meaning or the degree to which one is functioning well (Straume & Vittersø 2012). Although both talk about happiness, the eudaimonic perspective goes beyond pleasure, to include one's state of mind. The bottom line, the variations notwithstanding, is that both approaches suggest that happiness in one way or another denotes wellbeing.

The hedonic ways of thinking about wellbeing were adopted by utilitarian and welfare economists**.** Utilitarians such as Bentham and Edgeworth, among others, view individual welfare in terms of utility (total happiness) (Sen 2009). Although there is an overlap between wellbeing and happiness, what the hedonic, eudaimonic and utilitarian views do is to articulate the importance of one aspect of wellbeing: happiness (Clark 2005). Such a narrow and

restricted conceptualisation of wellbeing, as Gasper (2004) suggests, does not consider Aristotle's view that wellbeing goes beyond the mere sensation of happiness. It overlooks the fact that humans "have more faculties than just feeling happy... notably that they are creatures of reasoning and of meaning making, of imagination and of intra- and inter-societal links and identities" (Gasper 2004, p. 1).

In addition, the proponents of the capability approach, such as Amartya Sen, offer a cogent critique of the idea of wellbeing as happiness. For Sen, the idea of equating wellbeing to happiness does not allow interpersonal comparisons. He also stresses the point that happiness is not an end in itself. Rather, it is evidence of an accomplishment. Sen further asserts that sometimes people normalise their challenging situations (adaptive preference) and so might report being happy, despite living in deprived conditions (Sen 2009). For him, wellbeing is a broader concept which include several aspects of human functionings and capabilities, happiness or satisfaction constituting only one of those (Sen 1999).

Equally important is the point that Martha Nussbaum makes with regard to the limitations of conceptualising wellbeing as happiness. Nussbaum highlighted that welfare evaluations based on happiness do not take into consideration the fact that, over time, happiness or satisfaction can be impacted by social and environmental changes (Nussbaum 2011). She also points to the weaknesses of the utilitarian approach. By coming up with a metric figure (for total happiness), Nussbaum notes that the utilitarian approach fails to account for the poor at the bottom of the wealth pyramid (Nussbaum 2011). According to Nussbaum, the approach justifies the infliction of the poor, as long as aggregate happiness is improving. For both Nussbaum and Sen, happiness and wellbeing do not mean the same thing. Happiness is not a sufficient definition of wellbeing, but just one of its features. Hence, although the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches highlight the importance of happiness in assessing one's wellbeing,

they both offer a very narrow conceptualisation of wellbeing, especially for this study. They do not sufficiently provide answers to some of the questions I am pursuing, such as:

a)   In what ways can social work education promote well-being among its graduates?

b)   What can be done in social work education to prepare social workers to deal with work-related challenges which impact their wellbeing?

Very closely related to these approaches to wellbeing are subjective or preference-based approaches to quality of life. Under such approaches, self-reports and non-self-report judgements are equated to wellbeing (Gasper 2004). I discuss the subjective and preference-based approaches below.

3.3.2 Subjective or preference-based approaches to wellbeing

For many other scholars and policy makers, the terms wellbeing and quality of life can be used interchangeably. Here, scholars seek to identify preferred life qualities or states of human life, which should be met by people in order to lead a worthwhile life. These include being healthy and knowledgeable, among others. Failure to have basic qualities of life implies that one is living an impoverished life (Deneulin 2006). However, as indicated by Biswas-Diener and Diener (2006), sometimes we tend to judge other people's quality of life or life satisfaction based on a few attributes such as deficits in material wealth. For them, common sense and the stereotypes we have for poverty make us believe that some people are not satisfied by their life, which might not be the case. In their study on subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction in Calcutta, the two authors found out that, although slum dwellers in that city experienced a lower sense of life satisfaction as compared to the affluent groups, they were

more satisfied with their lives than what people would expect (Biswas-Diener & Diener 2006). From an objective point of view, the wellbeing of these slum dwellers was not in good shape. However, their satisfaction with life possibly implies that they were adapting to their situations (Sen 1999); they were probably normalising their situations. Nevertheless, we cannot define their wellbeing on the basis of their subjective preferences or objective views only, but instead should try to find ways to match the two.

Similarly, according to Ruut (2004), in defining wellbeing, some people suggest that quality of life assumes being able to cope with life, being worthy of the world, enjoying life and living in a good environment among other things. However, being able to cope with life challenges or enjoying life does not necessarily mean one is doing well or living the type of life he/she values, especially considering that sometimes people tend to normalise their challenges and become content with their lives, as discussed above. In addition, living in a good environment does not necessarily mean one is also doing well. These, in my view can be mere subjective preferences. The same applies to living in a good environment; one can live in a safe and clean environment, whilst his/her health is at stake or one might have food shortages. The definition of a good environment is highly subjective and sometimes depends on one's preferences. We cannot solely define wellbeing on the basis of individuals' subjective views or preferences and still do justice to the concept, especially considering that some dispositions are adaptive and are "formed without one's control or awareness, [but] by a causal mechanism that is not of one's own choosing" (Nussbaum 2000, p. 137). Hence, the issue of adaptive preference, which is addressed in the capabilities approach, is crucial (Sen 1999, 2009; Nussbaum 2000).[21] The conceptualisation of wellbeing needs more scrutiny. It should not

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[21] Adaptive preference is also called response shift. It refers to adjustment of one's preferences or perceptions to his/her situation, whether good or bad, to interpret it as normal (Gasper 2004).
It is also when people adjust their desires to the way of life they know (Nussbaum 2000).

depend exclusively on the individuals' deformed preferences (Nussbaum 2000; Gasper 2004).
I further discuss the issue of adaptive preferences in section 3.4.2.

The discussion above highlights the narrowness of conceiving wellbeing in terms of happiness, desire fulfilment or preferences. Nevertheless, some scholars have proffered other ways of conceptualising wellbeing beyond these approaches. These include the resource and income-based approaches.

3.3.3 Resource and income-based approaches to wellbeing

For a long time human wellbeing has been assessed in terms of income and resources. Income and commodity-based assessments are grounded on the understanding that economic growth enhances human wellbeing. Economic growth is mostly measured in terms of the Gross National Product (GNP), a single figure that shows the country's estimated living standard or welfare (Gasper 2004; Dasgupta 2001). Another recent and more nuanced resource-based approach to wellbeing is John Rawls' theory on primary goods. Rawls identified primary goods such as rights, liberties, income and wealth as both signs of wellbeing and basis for social respect (Forgeard *et al.* 2011). These approaches to wellbeing have their own limitations. For instance, income and wealth do not necessarily mean one's welfare is in good shape. As Sen (1985a) puts it, the resource and income-based approaches to wellbeing reduce the concept to being well off, financially or materially (Sen 1985a; Gasper 2004). He distinguishes wellbeing from being well off by pointing out that wellbeing has to do with how an individual functions or achieves various beings and doings he/she values, whilst being well off has to do with opulence or what a person possesses (Deneulin 2014).

Similarly, Nussbaum (2011) points out that GNP, just like the utilitarian use of a single metric in judging wellbeing, is misleading. The use of a single metric misses how people pursue

and find value in their lives (Nussbaum 2011). She also points out that income and wealth do not tell us how people are actually doing. For her, a resource-based approach does not take into consideration the fact that people convert resources differently, due to environmental, social and personal factors (Nussbaum 2011). Moreover, as Sen highlights, we cannot judge wellbeing in economic terms only because commodities and resources are not ends but means to human wellbeing (Sen 1999). Pressman and Summerfield (2000) made it very clear that it is important to desist from viewing resources and commodities as signs of wellbeing to consider what they do to human wellbeing.

These income and commodity-based approaches are insufficient when it comes to the assessment of professional wellbeing, particularly because they do not account for the non-material aspects of wellbeing. They do not account for individual freedoms and choices. Yet, these are crucial aspects of wellbeing. Sen puts the argument very well when he states that:

> *Development can be seen…as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise of personal incomes, or with industrialisation, or with technological advance, or with social modernization* (Sen 1999, p. 3).

The next section shows how the capability approach offers a much broader conceptualisation of the role of education and wellbeing.

3.4 The Capability Approach

The capability approach is a normative framework that allows for a deeper understanding of human development, whilst focusing on individual freedoms. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum advanced this theory by arguing that development should involve the expansion of human capabilities (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011). That is, the main goal of social

arrangements, such as education, should be to expand what people are able to do and be (Alkire & Deneulin 2009). The approach highlights that development is the expansion of people's capabilities, so that they can be in a position to make choices and lead the lives they have reason to value. Development for both Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) entails the promotion of valuable freedoms (Crocker 1995). According to Amartya Sen, a developed society enables its people to be and do (live) and act in certain valuable ways (Sen 1985b).

The central concepts in the capability approach are capabilities, functionings and agency. These notions are used to delineate individual wellbeing. In their account of wellbeing, Sen and Nussbaum made a distinction between capabilities and functionings, and it is that distinction which makes an analysis of wellbeing from the capability perspective unique (Sen 1999). I discuss the distinction below.

3.4.1 The distinction between capabilities and functionings

Capabilities and functionings are distinct but interrelated concepts in the capability approach. Capabilities are the actual freedoms and opportunities that people have to achieve functionings (beings and doings) (Nussbaum 2000; Robeyns 2016). They speak of one's ability, opportunities or possibilities to do or be something, while functionings refer to the corresponding achievements (Robeyns 2005a). As Sen notes, capabilities are the real opportunities available to a person and should not be "conceived as concrete skills, [such as the social worker's ability to type in case notes], but as more general personal abilities [or opportunities], such as the capacity or power of a [social worker] to move about, imagine, or reason" (Crocker 1995, p. 161). Sen's concept of capabilities as opportunities, speaks of options concerning actions (Robeyns 2016; Sen 1999).

On the other hand, functionings (wellbeing achievements) can be interpreted in terms of an individual's state of existence, or one's mental state, for example being happy, and one's physical or psychological being (Sen 1999). Sen gives other examples of functionings, such as being in good health, being adequately nourished, avoiding escapable morbidity and having self-respect, among others (see Sen 1985c, p. 197; Sen 1999, p. 75). For him, there is no definitive list of functionings because they apply differently to diverse individuals and settings (Comim, Qizilbash & Alkire 2008). Nussbaum's conceptualisation of functioning is much narrower than Sen's. She endorsed a specific list of the Central Human Capabilities as a focus for comparative quality-of-life measurement. The central human capabilities are: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment (Nussbaum 2003, pp. 41-42; Nussbaum 2006, pp. 76-78). Nussbaum allows for agency in deciding what to put into action as a functioning. For her, "choosing [agency] is a component of human functioning, and is made possible by distinct personal capabilities that one can develop or exercise and one's readiness to choose an actual functioning depends on one's general powers that can be fostered, learned, developed, maintained and exercised, among other factors" (Crocker 1995, p. 161). Although Sen and Nussbaum's views on functionings seem to differ, their differences do not affect the essence of functionings as valued states of being and doing.

The distinction between capabilities and functionings enriches our conceptualisation of professional wellbeing. It allows for interpersonal and intrapersonal comparisons of social workers' wellbeing achievements. Equally important is the fact that the distinction permits an analysis of the social workers' real opportunities (options) and freedoms to be and do what they find valuable in life –going beyond a mere focus on achieved states of being and doing.

In addition, this distinction between capabilities and functionings can be made clearly through differentiating wellbeing freedom (capability) from wellbeing achievement

(functioning), as well as through differentiating agency freedom (capability) from agency achievement (functioning) (Sen 1999). Wellbeing freedom is the opportunity to pursue one's own wellbeing whilst wellbeing achievement refers to the achieved wellbeing. Agency freedom is the freedom to achieve what one wants to achieve. It can be about making a choice to act in a way that benefits others even when it negatively influences one's own wellbeing. Yet, agency achievement is the realisation of the goals one has reason to value. Paying attention to these nuanced distinctions deepens my analysis of the social workers' wellbeing achievements, and allows me to go beyond the language of capabilities and achievements *per se*, to equally consider issues of decision-making, choice and freedom.

3.4.2 A capabilities lens on wellbeing

The capability approach conceives wellbeing more broadly than is done by any of the approaches discussed earlier. Sen talks of human wellbeing in terms of human flourishing, or life going well, advantage, personal welfare and the good human life (Nussbaum 2011; Crocker 1995). Sen and Nussbaum argue that wellbeing can be understood in terms of the real freedoms individuals possess to attain a life they have reason to value, that is, the choices they have to achieve their capabilities and/or functionings (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011; Crocker & Robeyns 2009). These two notions (capabilities and functionings) denote the means and ends of human wellbeing. The primary feature of an individual's wellbeing is the functioning one achieves, that is, one's ability to realise 'valuable' functionings (Nussbaum 2011). What this means is that wellbeing can be derived from one's sense of achievement or the ability to achieve what one finds worthwhile. For instance, some social workers might find value in effectively intervening with disadvantaged people, even if this means that their own wellbeing (say in terms of earning power) is diminished. Nevertheless, also important for this study is the

capability approach's emphasis on people's 'valued' states of being or doing. By considering what people (in this case social workers) value in terms of achievements, we are already moving beyond the language of preference to embrace the concept of choice (agency). A focus on one's opportunity to choose valuable functionings is central when assessing individual wellbeing; hence, the capabilities approach's emphasis on agency is crucial. As Sen asserts, "good human life is among other things a life of freedom" (Sen 1999, p. 70).

In emphasising the importance of freedom in human life, Sen made a distinction between two sets of freedoms:

a)   negative freedom versus positive freedom

b)   wellbeing freedom versus agency freedom

Negative freedom implies that one is living without interference by others or public institutions. **Positive freedom** marks how someone is in a position to act, live and achieve (Crocker 1995).

For Sen, to be positively free means that one is able to live as he/she opts to and to have effective power over the achieved life or outcome. The degree of freedom should not be judged on the basis of their quantity, but rather on the goodness of the options (Sen 1985b).

Wellbeing freedom means that one has the opportunity to choose and attain wellbeing. A focus on wellbeing freedoms is important in this study because it allows me to interrogate how social workers attain various functionings –whether they have effective power over the achievement of their valued functionings. **Agency freedom** is the freedom to achieve whatever one wants or decides to achieve, as an agent (I discuss this in the next section). As I noted above, this can be in line with one's own wellbeing or other people's wellbeing. The issue of agency is important in this study. Next, I discuss how the notion enriches this study.

Agency

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, agency is one of the central concepts of the capability approach. It refers to one's capacity to act in accordance with the goals or values one has reason to value. The goals might be directed towards the agent's wellbeing or other people's welfare (this distinction is very important in the context of caring professions such as social work). For Sen, if one is an agent, he/she is able to act and make things happen (Sen 1999). With agency, one is able to do the things he/she values (Alkire & Deneulin 2009). He also points out that "aspects of one's agency cannot be understood without taking note of his/her [the individual] aims, objectives, obligations, allegiances as well as one's conception of the good" (Sen 1985c, p. 203). Agency is crucial when it comes to the attainment of social workers' wellbeing. Sen's freedom and agent oriented view of development also asserts that, if people are offered opportunities, they can be active in defining their own lives rather than being passive beneficiaries of developmental initiatives (East, Stokes & Walker 2014). This concept of agency allows us to question whether social workers are able to decide, act and achieve whatever goals they value as individuals and as helping professionals. As Deneulin puts it, a focus on agency allows us an appreciation that wellbeing (in this case for social workers) does not depend on what one is and does only, but also includes how that person's functionings were attained, whether one was involved in the process or not (Deneulin 2006, 2014).

It is also worth noting that the capability approach has gone beyond being a language of assessing individual wellbeing and agency to include an assessment of how institutions can best expand individual wellbeing and agency (Deneulin 2014), which is exactly what this study seeks to examine. Social arrangements are of great importance in enabling the development and expansion of individual agency (Deneulin 2014). Hence, in this work I advance the argument that social work education, as a social arrangement, should offer opportunities for

the development and expansion of individual freedoms and choices to achieve valued goals. The notion of agency permits a review of the opportunities that can be offered through social work education, to enhance active participation of students in defining and articulating the goals and values they have reason to value. I agree with Wood and Deprez (2012), who asserted that if agency is central for students' learning and to the choice of the lives they value, then education should promote that agency. The promotion of agency might lead to education for valued reasons, in pursuit of meaningful goals and ultimately to individual wellbeing.

Also of importance is the fact that agency involves not only a reflection of the actions to be undertaken by an individual, but also includes responsibility towards others (Sen 2009). Responsibility towards others can be explained in terms of agency freedom. According to Sen, "a person's agency freedom refers to what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he/she regards as important" (Sen 1985c, p. 203). The goals might be directed at others as opposed to being aimed towards the agent's own wellbeing. What this means is that there can be a conflict between wellbeing achievement and agency freedom or responsibility towards others. The same conflict is seen among social workers in their pursuance of two valuable functionings - professional wellbeing and the promotion of their clients' wellbeing / professional goals (see Chapter 5). Tensions between wellbeing achievement and agency freedom can be a result of structural or work-related challenges such as heavy caseloads and the poor salaries social workers receive. This is set out in detail in Chapter 5. Nussbaum highlighted the issue of conflicting functionings when she stated that "concern for other species may or may not fit well with our efforts to feed ourselves, to be mobile, to be healthy" (Nussbaum 1990, p. 226). This, as Crocker (1995) notes, can be resolved by identifying the source of the tension and determining how it can be eliminated or mitigated.

In social work education, thinking about such conflicts may help educators to reflect on the source of the conflicts and whether this can be mitigated. This can also be a helpful starting

point in reflecting on the necessary capabilities that professionals should have to reconcile their wellbeing with their expected duties as public-good professionals. An elaboration of the conflict between wellbeing achievement and agency freedom also allows for a discussion of the factors which constrain or allow social workers to convert different capabilities or resources into their own wellbeing. Below are examples of some of the social arrangements or factors that may cause a conflict between one's advancement of personal wellbeing and agency freedom (valued professional goals).

Example 1

An article titled "Children Betrayed", written by Aarti J. Narsee, in *The Times* of 03 June 2013, indicated that South Africa is in dire need for social workers. The article highlighted that as many as 66000 practising social workers were needed to intervene with children, yet there were only 8913 social workers in South Africa. According to the article, social workers in South Africa have high caseloads reaching up to 150 families at a time. From this example, there might be a conflict between the social workers' capacity to act in accordance with the professional goals or values they have reason to value and the promotion of their wellbeing. For instance, if one opts to stick to the professional goal of providing social service and intervening with clients, he/she will have to overwork him/herself and that has negative impacts on one's biopsychosocial life. Another option would be to prioritise one's wellbeing and leave other clients unattended.

Furthermore, since wellbeing can be derived from one's sense of achievement, for example through effective helping, with such huge caseloads there is a risk that social workers might feel dissatisfied because they cannot provide the level of service that would make them value their input. Therefore, social work education should equip prospective social workers

with the ability (capability) to confront the conflict between wellbeing achievement and agency freedom.

Example 2

The Sowetan of 28 October 2005 reported that 63% of child welfare social workers had caseloads of more than 60, whilst 36% had caseloads of more than 100 clients. In some non-governmental organisations, social workers had caseloads of over 300 (Earle-Malleson 2009). In this situation, incidences of negligence were almost inevitable. Again, as explained in the previous example, these social workers might be confronted with a conflict of whether they should seek to meet their professional obligations (intervening with 100 clients) and forego their own wellbeing, or vice versa. They find themselves in a dilemma. There is conflict between their pursuit of two things they might have reason to value, that is their own wellbeing and their clients' wellbeing. By intervening with 300 clients, one will be emotionally, physically and socially straining him/herself. This should not come as a surprise for these professionals when they enter into practice. My argument in this thesis is that social work education should prepare prospective students to deal with such conflicts. It should advance or expand certain capabilities which would make *both* wellbeing achievement and agency freedoms possible.

Example 3

Of the estimated 1.2 million HIV/AIDS orphaned and vulnerable children in South Africa, the non-governmental organisations and the government services can only intervene with 200 000, leaving the other 1 million unassisted (Earle-Malleson 2009). In this case, considering that social work values clients' wellbeing, the promotion of the other one million clients implies overworking professionals and this implies a reduction in professional wellbeing.

These cases show how the nature and demands of social work put professionals' wellbeing at risk. The conflict is exacerbated by the fact that the mission of the profession is to enhance human wellbeing and assist the clients to meet their needs, paying particular attention to vulnerable, impoverished and disadvantaged people (SACSSP n.d.*a*). Other challenges that social workers face include poor wages, lack of resources, lack of self-care and social involvement (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). The achievement of these professional values and goals can compromise their own wellbeing achievement. Therefore, an exploration of the professional capabilities that can be enhanced through social work education to resolve the above-mentioned conflicts is crucial. I discuss the concept of values next.

Values

Values are also important in our understanding of human wellbeing, particularly individuals' valued opportunities. As Alkire (2002) clearly puts it, values are what allows people to prioritise their capabilities. Adding to that assertion, Deneulin (2011, p. 130) reminds us that in fact values are "what enables people to judge what is important in their lives and what dimension of human wellbeing is more worthwhile to pursue in given contexts." Hence, answers to the following questions are important in this study:

1. What values matter for social workers?

2. What place do those values occupy in social workers' valued lives?

3. How do these values develop and change over time?

To a certain extent, Deneulin (2011) helps us to answer the last question by pointing out that, other than the influences of family or religion, education can influence what one values (see also Vaughan & Walker 2012). Taking this position allows me to question again which

values are advanced in and through social work education, and the way in which those values speak to wellbeing achievement by social workers. Part of that question is interrogating whether the advanced values are in alignment with the human development values which promote societal wellbeing.

The inclusion of human development core values or dimensions within education is crucial (Boni & Arias 2013). The main dimensions of human development, according to the UNDP, include empowerment, expansion of capabilities (opportunity to achieve valued ends), development of the doings and beings one values (achievement of valued ends), participation, equal distribution of main capabilities, security and maintenance of people's valued functionings and capabilities (Boni & Gasper, as cited in Boni & Arias 2013). Human development, as Alkire points out, should also aim to sustain positive outcomes steadily over time. For her, "special effort should be made to create positive states of affairs that endure across time at an individual, group and national level" (Alkire 2010, p. 12). Therefore, knowing that social work is a helping profession, it is important to point out that if social work education is concerned about the sustainability of clients' valued functionings and capabilities, attention should be paid to professional wellbeing, especially considering that the former has a bearing on the latter. Next, I discuss the concept of aspirations.

Aspirations

This work will also use the capabilities concept of aspirations. According to Conradie, the term aspirations evokes the idea of a person's life dreams; how one could have a 'good life' with the resources of health, material benefits, creativity and agency one has available. It speaks to ideals, ambitions, preferences, choices, calculations and longings - achievements which would make life worthwhile (Conradie 2013; Appadurai 2004; Copestake & Camfield 2010).

In other words, aspirations are targets that one wishes to achieve (see Bernard, Taffesse & Dercon 2008). Such targets can safely fall under one's valued life capabilities or functionings (Hart 2012). In this work, an appreciation of what social workers aspire towards helps us understand the types of functionings they value for their wellbeing achievements. They also allow us an appreciation of the freedoms social workers need to develop and choose from in order to lead the type of lives they have reason to value (wellbeing). I discuss these in Chapter 5.

Drawing from Sen's argument that social arrangements such as education should enable the development and expansion of individual capabilities (Alkire & Deneulin 2009), it is worth exploring how social work education is granting students the opportunity to develop, expand and realise their aspirations. Notions of aspiration and agency are intertwined. As clearly noted by Conradie and Robeyns (2013), the voicing of aspirations can "unlock agency" (Conradie & Robeyns 2013, p. 565). In explaining how this happens, the two scholars stated that thinking about, talking about and reflecting on aspirations motivates people to make change in their lives. The two notions (agency and aspirations) will therefore help me in reviewing and explaining how social work education can facilitate the realisation of social workers' wellbeing. I discuss the concept of adaptive preference next.

Adaptive preference

Other than issues of agency, values, aspirations, the fourth concept I draw from is that of adaptive preference. An "adaptive preference," according to Khader (2011, p. 51), "is a preference that (1) is inconsistent with a person's basic flourishing, (2) was formed under conditions non-conducive to her basic flourishing, and (3) that we do not think a person would have formed under conditions conducive to basic flourishing." Proponents of the capability

approach (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2000) give us a response to the issue of adaptive preference, by pointing out that wellbeing evaluations based on satisfaction or preferences only, can be distorted. They are of the position that an assessment based on the individuals' valued functionings and capabilities guarantees a more nuanced picture of wellbeing (see Teschl & Comim 2005). In addition to that, the capability approach stresses the importance of agency in determining or assessing one's wellbeing. This allows for a richer understanding of what informs the social workers' valued functionings - whether they are induced out of choice or adverse experience. This is particularly important, especially considering Khader's (2011) observation that adaptive preferences are formed under conditions that are not conducive to human flourishing or wellbeing, which is the case for the majority of social workers in South Africa (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). This then gives us room to question whether the social workers' working conditions allow them the space to define their valued functionings in ways that they truly desire.

Also important is the point that adaptive preferences can be viewed in a more positive way. For instance, one can adjust his/her aspirations to more realistic achievements, which might have a positive impact on the wellbeing of an individual (see Teschl & Comim 2005; Nussbaum 2000; Khader 2011). In that instance then the capacity to adapt can be understood as an instrumental ability for the social workers' wellbeing achievement (see Chapter 5). I discuss the concept of conversion factors next.

Conversion factors

Another central concept of the capability approach is that of the conversion factors (Sen 1999). These are the factors which allow or constrain one's capacity to convert resources into capabilities, and capabilities into functionings (Alkire 2005a). Conversion factors can be personal factors such as disability, age, or sex; environmental factors such as climate; or social

factors such as one's religion or culture. Taking for instance disability, two social workers might be working for a certain organisation earning the same amount of money. One of them has a chronic health problem and is disabled; another does not have these challenges. These two social workers have different life needs and utilise their salaries (resources) differently for their own upkeep (wellbeing). A focus on conversion factors offers much in the assessment and interpretation of the social workers' wellbeing achievements. It brings to the fore issues of interpersonal diversity. In fact, by focusing on conversion factors, I can more deeply examine the degree of freedom that social workers have in achieving their valued functionings, whilst considering the different conditions which shape their capability sets (Onkera 2017). For example, I can ask questions about how the work environment and structural factors such as high poverty levels affect the social workers' wellbeing freedoms and achievements. Lastly, an analysis of conversion factors allows me to scrutinise the connection between wellbeing achievements and the existence of social arrangements such as education.

3.5 Argument for the Capability Approach

The capability approach views humans as ends of development. This conceptualisation is important in that, if social work educators embrace it, they can offer their students an education that potentially enhances both professional competencies and individual wellbeing. Above all, the capability approach allows for an understanding of the multidimensional nature of wellbeing. It accommodates subjective and objective views of wellbeing through its emphasis on individual freedoms and choices. Applied to social work education, the approach facilitates and takes cognizance of students' diverse needs and views of wellbeing. For the subjects of this study (social workers and social work students), the advancement of individuals' freedoms or real opportunities to be and do what they value as professionals is crucial.

Social work education that considers individuals' choices and freedoms in relation to one's wellbeing goes beyond viewing these individuals as a means to some ends –mere cogs in the struggle for social justice –to viewing them as agents who can shape and define their course of life and wellbeing. This can facilitate students' input and choices concerning what they learn, as well as enabling the realisation of students' aspirations. The question of how social work education can enhance wellbeing can then be answered with reference to the students' opportunities, freedoms and achievements they have reason to value. Since, one's wellbeing increases with the number of capabilities he/she might have; it is my argument that an increase in opportunities (capabilities) tailored towards the wellbeing of students in social work education potentially enhances the wellbeing of social work graduates as professionals. It is also my argument that this will help social workers to effectively fulfil their mandate as public-good professionals.

The capability approach makes a distinction between means and ends of human wellbeing by differentiating capabilities from functionings, as explained above. The approach considers the achieved beings and doings (functionings) as well the opportunities to achieve beings and doings (capabilities) to be crucial in the evaluation of wellbeing. In thinking about how social work education is or can enhance professional wellbeing, this distinction is crucial. For instance, one might have the functioning of working within a certain agency, yet he/she might not have the opportunity to choose the exact type of job he/she wants or the capability to meet clients' needs due to resource constraints.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the inadequate understanding of how instrumental social work education can be in enhancing professional wellbeing, which is for the benefit of not only

practitioners but society as well. In closing this gap, it proposed the conceptualisation of the role of social work education as well as professional wellbeing using the capability approach. The capability approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing, which goes beyond the concepts of happiness, flourishing or other subjective views of wellbeing such as living in a good environment. The approach proposes that wellbeing is more complex than just focusing on only one aspect of it, and that issues of freedom [agency], capability formation or advancement, as well as the actual achievement of valued lives or beings should be considered when assessing wellbeing. This understanding is very important for this study in unpacking how social work education is or can promote professional wellbeing in a way that will contribute towards social wellbeing. I present the research design and methodology in the next chapter.

Research provides the foundation for reports about and representation of the other (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 1).

Qualitative research is conducted not to confirm or disconfirm earlier findings, but rather to contribute to a process of continuous revision and enrichment of understanding of the experiences…under study (Denzin & Lincoln 2002, p. 331).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter defines the research design and methods I used in conducting the study. It begins with an outline of the research aim and objectives. I follow this with a discussion of the research paradigm. In that discussion, I provide the argument as well as justification for constructivism as the interpretive framework and for the qualitative enquiry. The second half of the chapter discusses the research design and strategy –the case study and cross-sectional approaches, the units of analysis, sampling technique as well as the recruitment of the participants. I follow this up with a discussion of the research methods and data collection procedures. In this section, I also give a narrative account of how I collected, analysed and presented my findings. Lastly, I discuss ethical issues relating to the study. This whole chapter draws from my overall research aim, objectives and theoretical position. It is therefore useful to restate the aim and the objectives.

4.2 Aim and objectives

As I already noted in my introductory chapter, this is a qualitative study aimed at critically reviewing how social work education can enhance professional wellbeing using the capability approach. Its objectives are to:

a)   Examine what social workers and prospective social workers regard as constituting their wellbeing.

b) Explore and highlight the aspirations of social work students and practising social workers.

c) Identify the contextual factors that enable or constrain the realisation of social work professional wellbeing and aspirations.

d) Review how social work education can create opportunities (capabilities) for social workers to make both personal and professional choices, and expand their aspirations and wellbeing.

4.3 Interpretive framework: Identifying the research paradigm

An interpretive framework seeks to understand the problem from all angles. It focuses on the how and why part of the research problem (Creswell 2003). This study assumes the existence of a number of interpretive frameworks or "set [s] of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provide a philosophical and conceptual framework for the study of that world" (Filstead 1979, p. 34). These frameworks give guidance to researchers on the selection of research tools, instruments, methods and participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). They include positivist, transformativist, pragmatist and constructivist worldviews (Ponterotto 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). Positivism is a "scientific method" grounded on rationalistic and empiricist philosophy. Empiricist philosophy suggests that scientific enquiry should be centred on observations and measurements (Mertens 2005, p. 8; Mackenzie & Knipe 2006; Krauss 2005). Transformativism aims at the transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, and ethnic and gender structures that coerce individuals (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Pragmatism is not grounded in one form of reality. Finally, there is the constructivist-interpretive approach, which seeks to understand human experience, socially constructed reality and meanings (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). Of all these interpretive frameworks, the

most appealing to this study is constructivism. In the ensuing section, I discuss how constructivism informs my enquiry.

4.3.1 Constructivism

This study is informed by constructivism because it seeks to understand the world of human experience. The aim of my enquiry is to understand and reconstruct the worldview that people primarily have (including myself) on what constitutes professional wellbeing and how it can be advanced through social work education. A constructivist approach to this study essentially opens up opportunities for new interpretations of the reality surrounding the issues under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). From a constructivist viewpoint, the participants socially and cognitively construct reality. Constructivism relies upon the participants' views on the issues being studied (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). In addition, constructivism backs the hermeneutical approach which suggests that a deeper meaning is concealed and should be revealed through comprehensive reflection (Schwandt 2000; Hansen 2004, cited in Ponterotto 2005). That reflection was facilitated by an interaction between the participants and myself. This approach to research is based on the constructivist ontology that in carrying out qualitative research, the researcher ought to understand that reality is manifold, subjective and is constructed by the people who experience the phenomenon under study (see Krauss 2005).

Constructivism appeals to this study because my research seeks to come up with a deeper meaning and understanding of professional wellbeing. The objective is to deepen our understanding of the content and meaning of the participants' different constructions [of wellbeing] (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). The study also seeks to make an in-depth enquiry of how social work education is enhancing or can enhance professional wellbeing (as a functioning), as well as how the promotion of professional wellbeing through education might lead to

effective public-good interventions. The fact that constructivism strives for the imperceptible, mental constructions, socially and experientially based realities (Denzin & Lincoln 2000), allowed me to capture participants' subjective worldviews on professional wellbeing and the embedded value assumptions of social work education. I captured this by interacting with the participants who were in social work education and who were practicing as social workers. My starting assumption was that knowledge is not neutral and uniform, but it is multiple and can be influenced by different human experiences.

The constructivist approach allows for a hermeneutic (in-depth and interpretive) understanding of all the issues this study seeks to capture, including the capabilities that constitute professional wellbeing, how social work students can be actively involved in shaping their own wellbeing through education, and how reflexivity and aspirations can be enhanced through social work education. The hermeneutical understanding of these issues was made possible by the fact that constructivism permits for interviewer-participant dialogue, as well as reflection of the information obtained through that dialogue. Drawing from this paradigm, I interviewed ten social work students, eight practising social workers as well as seven lecturers with the intention of learning what they took as the basic wellbeing-related capabilities to be enhanced through social work education. The paradigm also accommodated my dialogue with practising social workers, on professional wellbeing-related challenges and how they think social work education should prepare professionals dealing with these challenges. Conversations with social workers (both students and practising social workers) on their aspirations and how they are linked to their own wellbeing and public-good interventions were also substantiated under the constructivist lens. The subjective and manifold nature of the information I sought to capture in this study was elicited and refined through my extensive interaction with the participants and that situated my research under qualitative inquiry. In the subsequent section, I make an argument for how and why a

qualitative approach to research allowed for significant ways of attaining knowledge for this study.

4.3.1.1 Qualitative epistemology

The word epistemology is derived from the Greek word epistêmê, which refers to knowledge. Epistemology is the study of knowledge or how we come to know (Trochim 2000, cited in Krauss 2005). Epistemology is closely related to ontology and methodology. Ontology involves the knowledge of reality or worldview, whilst methodology has to do with the identification of certain ways of attaining knowledge (Krauss 2005). In the ensuing section, I will make an argument for how and why qualitative research enquiry allowed for significant ways of attaining knowledge for this study.

4.3.2.1 Argument for using the qualitative approach

Qualitative research is a field of enquiry which involves an interpretive approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). As Fontana and Frey (2005) point out, the term qualitative implies an emphasis on the quality of things and processes as well as meanings that are not scientifically examined or measured in quantity or amount. A number of research techniques fall under qualitative enquiry. These include case studies, interviews, participant observations and interpretive analyses (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), among others. I used the case study and interview approaches to conduct my research. I will give the rationale for their use in the following section. For now, it is important to point out that this research is qualitative in nature for various reasons. As I mentioned in the section above, my study seeks to review how wellbeing is perceived by social work students and practising social workers, as well as how

social work education at Mopane University can enhance it. It is not concerned with the scientific measurement or examination of wellbeing[22].

The research purposes of this study are exploratory and descriptive and are concerned with the how and why type of inquiry. The realisation of those purposes hinged upon the participants' narratives and personal insights. As Denzin and Lincoln point out, a qualitative study allows for a valuable inquiry which gives answers to the how and why questions on social experiences and interactions (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). By paying attention to the how and why part of human experiences and interactions, this qualitative research permitted for a comprehensive clarification and understanding of the issues under study. An exhaustive review or exploration of the intersections between social work education, professional wellbeing and effective public-good interventions could only be achieved by enquiring the how and why questions on participants' views. Qualitative enquiry was deemed suitable for this study because I anticipated and managed to get in-depth views and exhaustive responses from a limited number of participants.

A qualitative form of research allowed me to learn how social experiences or interactions are understood by individuals. In this sense, the enquiry enabled me to identify educational and work-related contextual factors and how they relate to professional wellbeing. For example, informants' views on their professional or educational experiences were crucial and aided my exploration and description of the challenges associated with the social work

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[22] Other than the qualitative approaches to wellbeing, there are some quantitative measures of wellbeing. These include:
-Human Development Index **(HDI)-** it operationalises wellbeing using three dimensions' longevity and health, access to knowledge and decent standard of living (see Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern & Seligman 2011).
-The International Wellbeing Index **(IWI)** -comprises of two subscales namely the personal wellbeing Index and the National Wellbeing Index (see Tiliouine, Commins & Davern 2006).
-Gross Domestic Product **(GDP**) measures income as a predictor of life satisfaction (see Schimmack 2009).
-Ecological Momentary Assessment**(EMA)** based on reports of wellbeing at specific points in time
EMA can be calculated by finding the difference between average positive feeling and average negative feeling (see Dolan, Layard & Metcalfe 2011)

profession and how they relate to professional wellbeing, or the person-in-environment issues. I discuss the research design below.

4.4 Research design

As section 4.3 of this chapter sets out, my research draws on a constructivist epistemology. The research is both exploratory and descriptive in nature. It is a once-off or cross-sectional study. Data on all research questions was collected at one point in time. The cross-sectional design was ideal for this study because some of the research participants were fourth (final) year social work students and that did not allow for an extended period of research. Part of my intention was to understand how participants such as the fourth-year students (who had practical experience) construct the meaning of wellbeing and relevant capabilities at a given stage in their educational career. Besides, a longitudinal study, which demands follow-ups, was also not feasible in the confines of a full-time PhD study.

I used a case study approach in this research. According to Stake (2005), a case is dependent on the interpretive paradigm and can be interpreted from different worldviews. Case studies can be intrinsic, instrumental or collective (see also Creswell 2013). Intrinsic case studies are not intended to represent other cases or illustrate a situation. Rather, they are of particular interest to the researcher. Instrumental case studies facilitate an insight into certain issues. In collective case studies, the researcher selects an issue of concern, but then uses multiple cases to illustrate the issue (Stake 2005; Creswell 2013). In this study, I used the case of Mopane University's Department of Social Work in an instrumental sense. I used the case to get an insight on how social work education can or should enhance professional wellbeing and lead to effective public-good interventions more generally (I explain this in the next subsection).

The case study approach allowed for a substantial level of exploration and collection of personal views and data from my research participants. Some of the factors that I considered in choosing this case include the opportunity to have extended time on the site and having personal contact with the activities and operations of the case (Stake 2005). The fact that I had good access opportunities at Mopane University allowed me to spend an extended time on the site. It also gave me the opportunity to reflect on and revise the findings of my research on site. In short, the case study approach opened up opportunities for an intensive study, a point eloquently made by Stake when he stated that, "in selecting a case, we choose the case from which we feel we learn the most…the one most accessible or the one we can spend the most time [on]" (Stake 2005, p. 451). I discuss the unit of analysis next.

4.4.1 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of this case study is social work education at Mopane University. The study seeks to initially give an account of the Mopane University Social Work Department, with the intention of aggregating, generalising and transferring its characteristics and findings to other social work departments at different institutions. Although the issue of generalisability of qualitative findings might be questioned, Flyvbjerg (2006) makes a convincing argument when he states that "one of the most serious misunderstandings in social science is the belief that a case study is not useful in making generalisations about how the world works" (Flyvbjerg 2006, cited in Stake 2010, p. 197). I agree with Flyvbjerg and suggest that generalisations will be made by social workers, and possibly to other social work departments. The findings from this case study will also serve as an information base for some people from other professional disciplines outside social work.

4.4.2 Sampling

As stated by Williams (2012, p. 132), once the research questions have been identified, "a decision must be made in respect of who, or what, will be the focus of that investigation." Informed by my theoretical position, my research questions show that this study is both exploratory and descriptive. The goal of my study is to get as much relevant information as possible through accessing participants' stories and experiences (constructionism) (see section 4.3.1). In trying to meet that objective, I opted for the non-probability, purposive sampling technique. This was in line with Silverman's (2005) observation that purposive sampling can be theory informed. In my case then, the selection of my informants was based on their qualities (see Tongco 2007). In fact, I selected my participants on the basis of their significance to the research questions as well as my theoretical position (see Mason 1996). As a researcher, I had to deliberate on what needs to be known and had to recruit participants who could provide the relevant information by virtue of their knowledge or experience (Bernard 2002; Lewis & Sheppard 2006; Tongco 2007). Purposive sampling was the ideal selection technique for this study because the recruitment of my participants depended on their significance to the topic under study. Under this technique are selection methods such as quota, snowball and conducive or convenience sampling.

I used snowball and convenience sampling procedures to recruit and select participants. A sampling procedure, as Noy (2008, p. 330) puts it, *"...can be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants. This process is, by necessity, repetitive: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on."* I used the snowball sampling technique when recruiting practising social workers because they were difficult to locate and I had to be directed by fellow social workers. I also performed convenience sampling in recruiting and selecting social work

lecturers and fourth-year social work students because their selection was based on their availability and who volunteered to participate (see Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad 2012; Kothari 2004). This allowed me to identify the participants, but since the technique relies on those who volunteered to participate in the study, one may not recruit the best sample.

In recruiting the lecturers, I wrote an email which was circulated within the Department of Social Work. Unfortunately, I did not get as many responses as I had anticipated, so I had to visit each one of them and establish their availability as well as a convenient time for them to do the interviews. The approach was a bit different with the students because I had to approach some students outside their learning venues and ask them if they saw my invitation on Blackboard, and indeed if they were willing to participate. I discuss more about my research participants: the sample size, criteria of inclusion and demographics in the coming subsections.

4.4.3 Research participants

The target population of this study included fourth/final year social work students and staff members (lecturers) from the department of social work at Mopane University, as well as practising social workers. Amongst the practising social workers were Mopane University graduates, although others had gone to school elsewhere. The staff members included the head of department, fieldwork coordinator and other lecturers. The sample comprised of 10 students, 8 practising social workers and 7 lecturers (N=25). Initially (at the proposal stage), I had pegged my sample size at 20. The sample size later increased to 25 when I was conducting the interviews, at which stage there was a repetition of themes and no new information was emerging from the participants (the point of saturation). Having a sample size of 25 allowed for an in-depth understanding of the issues under study, especially considering that I was

interviewing three different groups of people. Table 2 below shows the groups of participants who took part in my study, their numbers as well as the criteria for inclusion.

Table 2: Participants and inclusion criteria

Participant groups	*Inclusion criteria*
Social work students (*N=10*)	All student participants were supposed to: ▪ Be above the age of 18 years (for ethical reasons) ▪ Be studying social work (Bachelor of Social Work) at the case institution ▪ Be in their final year of study (i.e. 4th year) ▪ Have completed their final year field practicum
Practising social workers (*N=8*)	All practising social workers were supposed to: ▪ Be above the age of 18 years ▪ Have graduated with a BSW from a South African university (some had to be Mopane University graduates) ▪ Have been practicing as a social worker for not less than a year ▪ Should have been practicing at the time of the interviews
Lectures / Faculty members (*N=7*)	All lecturers were supposed to: ▪ Have practiced for more than a year as social workers ▪ Have more than a year of lecturing experience in the Department of Social Work at Mopane university

In recruiting participants, I followed the criteria shown in table 2. In order to participate, all respondents were expected to be above the age of 18. Eighteen (18) years is the age of majority in South Africa, hence at any age above that the participants could offer legal consent. All students were expected to be social work majors at the case institution. This was meant to ensure the collection of relevant, well-informed information on the issues under investigation. In further ensuring this, I recruited only final-year students who had completed the field practicum. Drawing from their practicum experience, the fourth years could give well-informed subjective views on professional wellbeing and the related capabilities to be promoted through social work education. The (eight) practising social workers were similarly expected to be

above the age of 18 for the reason provided above. Since the case of Mopane was used in an instrumental way, some of the practising social workers had to be its own graduates. Hence, of the eight practicing social workers, four were trained at Mopane.

All these standards were meant to ensure the collection of relevant information about professional wellbeing (the valued functionings and capabilities). Practising social workers were expected to not only shed light on how their practicing contexts either constrain or allow for wellbeing achievements, but to also share views on how social work education can advance their wellbeing. Hence, only those people with more than a year of practice could provide well-informed views. In addition, both practising and student social workers were anticipated to give valuable information on how one's aspirations are related to his/her own wellbeing as a social worker.

Lastly, the (seven) participants from the department of social work (lecturers) were expected to have: practiced as social workers for more than a year, and lectured for more than a year in the department of social work at Mopane University. Their practice and lectureship experience was vital in this case because I expected them to be helpful in scrutinising all the information from students and practising social workers, particularly the identified functionings and valued capabilities. I also expected them to provide relevant information on how professional wellbeing is or can be advanced through social work education.

4.4.3.1 Participants' demographics

In this study, I collected participants' demographic information such as age, gender, race, year of study, year of graduation, number of years in practice as well as the practicing context. Such information was deemed to be potentially helpful with the transferability of findings. It can also help the anticipated readers to understand how and why the participants defined professional wellbeing and its constituencies in certain ways, as well as the nature of

their aspirations. My hunch was that participants' perceptions of wellbeing (the valued functionings and opportunities) are to some extent informed by their background and significant features (see Simons 2009). In addition, the participants' demographic information can also be helpful in articulating some of the personal conversion factors, which allow or constrain the conversion of resources or capabilities into professional wellbeing by social workers. Table 3 shows the student social workers' demographics, such as age, gender, and race. It also shows the students' year of study and internship practice field.

Table 3: Social work students' demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Year of study	Internship practice area
Doreen	20	Female	Black	4th	Foster care
Nyakallo	26	Female	Black	4th	Foster care
Khauhelo	25	Female	Black	4th	Foster care
Mpho	24	Female	Black	4th	Foster care
Bongi	22	Female	Black	4th	Foster care
Naleli	24	Female	Black	4th	Special school
Buang	24	Female	Black	4th	Special school
Tsepiso	21	Female	Black	4th	Special school
Lineo	22	Female	Black	4th	Military
Mantso	23	Female	Black	4th	Psychiatric complex

The table above shows that all students were still in their twenties during the time of the interviews. They are all black, female and final-year students. These factors are worth highlighting, as I mentioned earlier, in that they aid our understanding of how and why they defined professional wellbeing in particular ways. They also allow us an appreciation of the nature of their aspirations (see Chapter 5). Table 4 below shows the practising social workers' demographics.

Table 4: Practising social workers' demographics

Participant pseudonym	Age	Race	Gender	Year of BSW graduation	Years in practice	Current practicing context
Pamela	42	Black	Female	1998	19	DSD
Zanele	28	White	Female	2014	3	NGO
Mary	39	Black	Female	2014	3	Private Hospital
Talent	46	White	Female	1994	17	NGO
Erina	41	White	Female	1998	18	NGO
Kuseka	28	White	Female	2015	2	NGO
Nxobile	29	Black	Female	2012	5	NGO
Georgina	61	White	Female	1974	20	NGO

Just like Table 3, Table 4 shows the practising social workers' age, race, gender, year of graduation, years in practice as well as their practicing contexts. Similarly, these factors allow us to appreciate how and why practising social workers conceptualise professional wellbeing in certain ways. For instance, there might be a difference between a 22 year old (single) woman and a 46 year old married woman with children's definition of wellbeing or valuable achievements. Similarly, the nature of their aspirations can differ (see Chapter 5). Likewise, the work experience matters. The way an experienced social worker adapts to the environment differs significantly from that of a new social worker and this of course has a bearing on one's sense of wellbeing achievement (see Chapter 6). Table 5 presents the faculty members' (lecturers) demographics.

Table 5: Faculty members' demographics

Interviewee pseudonym	Gender
Frank	Male
Steven	Male
Daniel	Male
Lisa	Female
Manyewu	Female
Theresa	Female
Elisma	Female

Table 5 shows the participants' (lecturers) gender only. Other demographic information such as their age, race, work experience and year of graduation were concealed for the protection of the participants' identity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the lecturers came from different racial backgrounds. For instance, two of them were black, whilst five of them were white. As will be shown in the findings chapters, the participants' racial background did not emerge as an important factor when it comes to the definition of professional wellbeing.[23] However, it is important to note that all of them had more than a year of lecturing experience. In addition, the lecturers had all practiced as social workers at some time in their lives and some are still involved in certain social work activities. Lastly and equally important is that the three tables above show that my research participants included both whites and blacks, men and women. Having a sample of both men and women countered potential gender biases regarding wellbeing. However, the fact that the overall sample had only three men (lecturers) attest to the idea that social work is a female dominated profession, a view that has been noted by some scholars since the 1980s (see Chambers 1986;Meyer 1982). I discuss my research methods and procedures next.

4.5 Research methods and procedures

The methods of data collection I used included face-to-face interviews and documents review. The documents I reviewed included the SAQA and CHE Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) national standards, as well as the Mopane University's Department of Social Work (BSW) curriculum and syllabi. I conducted one-on-one interviews with all of my research participants. However, prior to the actual interviews I conducted a pilot interview with one participant from each group of my informants. This helped me to ensure that my interview questions would be understood by all participants. The exercise also helped in ensuring that

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[23] The challenges social workers face are systematic and structural.

the questions captured what I wanted to learn through my study. As Creswell points out, to gain support from the participants, the researcher ought to inform the participants of the research intentions (Creswell 2013). I was transparent enough to my participants concerning my research intentions. The invitation that was posted on Blackboard, together with the invitation emails, stated my research intentions. The same applies to the hard copy invitation that I gave to each participant. However, this might have had the limitation of leading to interviewer bias or social desirability, whereby participants provide information that they think the interviewer wants to hear or capture (see Fisher 1993). In trying to avoid this, I told my participants that there were no right or wrong answers. My intention was to assure them that any response was acceptable for this particular study and that there was no need for them to think about an acceptable response. This was particularly important for my study because what I wanted to hear were their honest responses about their experiences as social workers, their definition of wellbeing, as well as the relevant opportunities for its achievement.

In carrying out my research, I used semi-structured interviews. This ensured intensive data collection from all the respondents. In fact, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for a consistent process of data collection across all of my interviews. Another advantage of using such interviews, which I realised at a later stage of my research, was that semi-structured interviews actually make data analysis and organisation much easier as compared to unstructured ones. However, the use of semi-structured interviews had its own limitations as well. When I did my first interview, I had a feeling that this was prohibiting the natural flow of my interview. As a solution to that, I ended up using an interview guide (see Appendix A). With the interview guide, I followed a list of topics I wanted to cover. This allowed me to make some changes to the sequencing and wording of the questions.

Although I used an interview guide, I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with all research participants. I opted for in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions because, as Simons (2009, p. 43) notes, they allow the following:

I.   documenting participants' views or opinions on the topic or to find out what is in and on someone's mind,

II. having an active engagement between the interviewer and interviewee, which leads to the specification and scrutiny of the issues under study,

III. having the opportunity to pursue evolving issues and probe or deepen participants' responses, and

IV. having the potential to unearth or learn other unobservable, participant feelings (Simons 2009, p. 43).

The questions I asked in my interviews address how social workers and social work students define wellbeing, which capabilities would lead to the attainment of that wellbeing, and how social work education can or would have promote(d) the development and expansion of those capabilities. I also asked the social workers (student and practicing) about their different motivations for getting into social work, their aspirations and how all those are related to their own wellbeing as professionals. In addition to that, I also asked the social workers to talk about their work experiences, both negative and positive, and how these impacted their sense of wellbeing. I also asked all participants how social work education could have (or did) prepare[d] them for dealing with work-related challenges. Department of Social Work lecturers were asked how social work education is advancing professional wellbeing and how curriculum and pedagogical practices can lead to the expansion of professional wellbeing-related capabilities. For the full list of questions, see Appendix A.

As noted in the section above, in conducting my research, I performed both interviews and documents review. I did these concurrently. My data collection phase spanned nine months (November 2016-July 2017). I deliberately conducted my interviews in three batches. The first batch consisted of interviews with the students. This was followed by interviews with the practising social workers and lastly faculty (lecturers) members. I opted for this arrangement because it allowed for deliberations on, and scrutiny of the issues under study. This was particularly important in capturing the social workers' valued wellbeing functionings and capabilities. Nevertheless, before getting into the field, I had to take heed of Tessier's (2012, p. 447) suggestion that "when conducting interviews choices on how to record the data have to be made." In capturing my interviews, I used a voice/audio recorder. I complemented this with some field notes. For transparency, I informed my participants about the use of a voice recorder and note-taking prior to the interviews. The use of a voice recorder had many advantages. For instance, it was an easier and much more effective way of capturing participants' voices, as compared to mere reliance on field notes. The voice recorder kept the original information throughout the analysis process (see Silverman 2005). Critical information such as emotions, intonation, laughter and silences were also captured by the voice recorder. Due to the audio's unlimited replayability, I could go back to the actual recordings, even during the writing phase and immerse myself in the original event (see Tessier 2012). All the same, the use of field notes was also advantageous in the sense that I could also capture my own observations and interpretations of events during the interviews (see section 4.7). The field notes were also on standby in case of audio data loss.

As I noted above, other than interviews, I also performed documentary review. The process provided me with an opportunity to systematically identify useful information on professional wellbeing from the existing documents. One of the exercises I did was the word

count of the word "professional wellbeing" in the documents (see Chapter 7). The documents I reviewed included the Mopane University's Department of Social Work's BSW curriculum, syllabi, the practicum learning outcomes, SAQA BSW qualification document and the CHE BSW review document. This data collection method was also advantageous in its own way. For instance, the documents contained more information than I could obtain through interviews, such as the purpose and rationale of the qualifications, expected learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The method was also less time consuming and cheap. I discuss my data analysis strategy below.

4.6 Data analysis

Throughout my research, I treated data collection and analysis as two distinct, yet overlapping exercises.[24] I therefore maintained Silverman's (2005, p. 152) suggestion that "data analysis should not only happen after all your data has been safely gathered." In my case, data analysis started when I was in the field, collecting my data. I started making sense of my data when I was making field notes, listening to, and transcribing some of my interviews. Transcription, as Tessier (2012) notes, speaks of the translation of recordings into searchable and analysable documents. Some scholars call this process data transformation (see Silverman 2005). In my study, this process of data transformation produced 25 transcripts or analysable documents which I kept in the form of hard and electronic copies. I kept the documents in those two formats because I was going to do both manual and computerised data coding.

Manual coding involved having the hard copies of my transcribed interviews, highlighting and writing emerging codes in pencil. I transferred these codes into the electronic file. I used NVivo software to organise, manage and reconfigure my data. As Saldaña (2009, p. 22) notes, the software "enabled human analytic reflection." Part of this 'analytical

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[24]Data analysis was constructivist and theoretically informed.

reflection' (on both hard copy and electronic transcripts) was open coding. Open coding, as Khandkar (2009) notes, is one way of analysing textual content. It involves labelling concepts or assigning summative or essence-capturing words, nouns or short phrases on some portions of the documents, be it sentences or passages. The categories or labels were attached to the sentences or passages on the basis of their properties and dimensions. Some of the codes that emerged from open coding were: motivating factors, significant others, family, employment/work, practicing context, emotions, values and beliefs, great quotes, social work educational experience, social work education in university/theory, social work education content and focus, and teaching approaches, among others (for detailed code books, see appendices B1, B2 and B3). Below are some examples of open coding.

> I chose social work because I thought it is something I wanted to do. I wanted helping people… and the bursary opportunity [***motivating factor/ getting into social work]***
>
> There are challenges involved, but I think there are challenges in every job…There are challenges, we work with very difficult clients and the emotional aspects of the job are also sometimes quite challenging [***challenges***]
>
> I work after hours sometimes…it is emotionally draining [***emotions***]
>
> I was working at the military base [***field practicum***]
>
> You should have access to resources [***access to resources***]

Data analysis is a recursive process (Wilson-Strydom 2012). Consequently, I did several rounds of coding. After the descriptive coding, I performed thematic coding. Thematic coding involved establishing some data patterns, making comparisons across all data sets, whilst looking for some similarities and differences across all interviews. I followed this by attaching some headings that suited the divisions and similarities across interviews. Some examples of the themes that emerged are:

1.   Students' different motivations into social work education/practice
2.   Helping as a valuable achievement for professionals
3.   Quality of life
4.   The complexity of wellbeing
5.   The purpose/focus of social work education

6.   Thoughts, feelings and responses towards social work educational experience
7.   Practice/work challenges and their impacts on the wellbeing of professionals
8.   The relationship between professionals' quality of life and effective helping / social wellbeing
9.   The relationship between future plans and professionals' quality of life
10.   The role of social work education in promoting professionals' quality of life

The third round of coding was conceptual coding. In this round, I further drew some themes from the descriptively coded data, now drawing from the capability approach. From this exercise, conceptual themes such as wellbeing, aspirations, capabilities, agency, and conversion factors emerged. Other than descriptive and conceptual coding, I also did attributive analysis and open coding (in vivo) technique because I intended to capture some of the participants' demographic information and the exact words or constructions concerning the issues under study by the participants, respectively. Conclusions were then drawn from the evidence and views given by research participants, as already set up by my theoretical position. I discuss the ethical issues below.

4.7 Ethical issues

Ethical concerns, as Guillemin and Gillam (2004) explain, are part of the everyday practice of doing research. In doing qualitative research, two elements of ethics ought to be observed. These are procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics concerns seeking approval from the relevant ethics committee to undertake research that involves human participants. The committee ensures the observance of three moral standards: respect for persons, beneficence and justice (see Christians 2005). With regards to respect for persons, as a researcher I had to complete an online form convincing the committee that the participants were going to participate voluntarily and that I was going to provide them with all the necessary

information about the research procedure and consequences. Importantly, I was ensuring the protection of the participants.

Concerning the principle of beneficence, I also had to ensure the wellbeing of the participants. I had to abide with the principle of no harm. I had to ensure them of more benefits for the participants than harm or risk. In essence, I had to prove that the benefits were going to outweigh the risks. Lastly, on the issue of justice, I had to prove that I was going to safeguard the fair distribution of benefits and the burdens of the research and also, that I was going to treat participants with fairness (Christians 2005). I got my ethical clearance (number-UFS-HSD2016/1282) in November 2016 (see Appendix E). After obtaining ethical clearance, I went on to seek a research permit from the Department of Social Work at Mopane University as well as different organisations. In order to get authorisation from them, I had to produce the ethical clearance letter from the reviewing committee. With their permission, I started recruiting and selecting participants.

4.7.1 Ethics in practice

4.7.1.1 Voluntary participation

Other than following the necessary procedures, it is also important to highlight how I observed some of the ethical issues during the research. In trying to advance the three moral principles I highlighted above, I ensured voluntary participation of the social workers. My invitation clearly stated that participation in my study was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from the study without any repercussions. All respondents had to sign a *consent* form. I used the consent forms written in English, since it is one of the country's official languages and the most commonly used language in practice as a means of communication.

The signing of the consent form was done after a careful communication of the research purpose and the expected audiences.

4.7.1.2 Privacy and confidentiality

With regards to the safety and protection of human participants, all participant information was kept safe and private. For instance, I used a password-protected computer and kept all hard copies in a lock-secured drawer. In addition to that, participants' identities were also kept confidential throughout my research. As noted earlier, participants' demographic information, such as gender, age, year of study, work experience and academic qualifications, were collected. Whilst such information is important in helping audiences understand the background and significant features of the participants and how they might have influenced the participants' views on how social work education can enhance professional wellbeing, such information could have posed certain risks to the informants and had to be kept confidential. For example, an informant could have lost his/her job after criticising an agency or organisational practices, in relation to his/her own wellbeing achievement. In avoiding such incidences, I used pseudonyms for the university, social work agencies and the informants. Lastly, the use and presentation of participants' information was agreed upon at the outset of data collection. As an ethical procedure, I also checked with the interviewees if there was anything covered in the interview that they wanted to exclude (Simons 2009). Such measures were meant to ensure the wellbeing of the participants as well as to minimise harm.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design and methods I used for this study. It provided the justification for adopting a constructivist research stance. Constructivism, as the chapter sets out, allowed for a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation. For instance, it

allowed for the social workers' various mental constructions as well as experientially based views in defining professional wellbeing, their valued capabilities, as well the role that social work education should play in advancing their welfare as professionals. The social workers' views were captured through in-depth interviews (dialogue). This chapter also included a discussion of the research design and methods. For instance, it provided the explanation for conducting a cross-sectional study. The chapter also provided the justification for a case study approach. It presented an account of the research methods that is, interviews and documentary review. The last part of the chapter discussed data collection and analysis processes, as well as ethical issues. I present my findings in the ensuing chapters.

WHY SOCIAL WORK?
UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WORKERS' ASPIRATIONS AND VALUED FUNCTIONINGS

Goals [aspirations] are essential components of a person's experience of his or her life as meaningful and contribute to the process by which people construe their lives as meaningful or worthwhile (Emmons 2003, p. 107).

Goals [aspirations] are signals that orient a person to what is valuable, meaningful and purposeful (Emmons 2003, p. 107).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter conceptualises professional wellbeing by paying attention to student and practising social workers' aspirations and valued functionings. The focus is on the ideal to which social workers aspire, the functionings that they have reason to value, rather than their achieved functionings (which is the focus of Chapter 6). The first section discusses the factors that influenced the informants to pursue the social work profession. These factors serve as pointers to the social workers' different aspirations or valued functionings. The section shows that the majority of the social workers chose to study social work out of their own desire to help. A few were influenced by some external factors such as family. In each case, the social workers had some degree of agency freedom. I follow this with a discussion on the social workers' aspirations (valued functionings). I divide these into professional and personal aspirations. Professional aspirations speak to the social workers' various career goals, and personal aspirations are the different ambitions social workers have as private individuals. I end this section by exploring the possible tensions and synergies between professional and personal aspirations and their implications for professional wellbeing achievement. Finally, I map out some of the capabilities that need to be promoted for social workers to achieve their aspirations (valued functionings). As such, this chapter addresses the following research objectives:

a) Examine what social workers and prospective social workers regard as constituting their wellbeing.

b) Explore and highlight social work students' and practising social workers' aspirations.

5.2 Reasons for, decision-making influences and the processes of deciding on social work

Social work is a challenging and underpaid job in South Africa. However, people still enter the profession due to various motivations or decision-making influences. Social workers' career motivations are indicators of their aspirations. Aspirations speak of the manner in which both prospective and practising social workers envision their future and engage in forward looking activities (see Appadurai 2004). There is a close connection between the interviewed social workers' career inspirations, more general aspirations and their resultant valued states of functioning. Different forces of influence or motivating factors led these individuals into the social work profession. These factors were both internal (when one's individual motivation was the drive), or external (when the motive or reason originated from someone or something outside the individual's satisfaction). Nineteen (19) out of 25 participants acknowledged the passion to help (an internal motive) as their main impetus for studying social work, whilst the other six participants mentioned external motivations related to their past personal experiences or circumstances as their career decision-making influences. The external factors highlighted include being raised in a particular environment (for example, where social work activities took place), the influence of significant people, such as family members, friends and other professionals, as well as the accessibility of the social work programme and related employment opportunities (see Blustein 2006; Daniel 2011; Wilson & McCrystal 2007; Rompf & Royse 1994; Corey & Corey 1993). Other than being pointers to the social workers' aspirations, these motivations inform us of the degree of agency freedom participants had in becoming social workers. I discuss these reasons in the ensuing sections. Table 6 below gives

a summary of the different motivations which emerged from the data, according to participant group. I follow this up with a discussion of external factors.

Table 6: Internal and external reasons or decision-making influences for entering social work

Social work students	Practising social workers	Social work lecturers
The passion to help and making a difference in people's lives	The passion (calling) to help and making a difference in people's lives	The passion to help and making a difference in people's lives
The convenience of and opportunities associated with studying social work. • the bursary opportunity • considering employment opportunities after graduating	Not getting the anticipated type of jobs Employment prospects associated with studying social work The influence of significant people such as family members and other professionals	Spiritual calling Personality (the feeling that social work profession suits one's personality)
The influence of significant people such as family members Circumstance and previous life experiences	Personality (the feeling that social work profession suits one's personality)	Limited employment opportunities in desired professions

5.2.1 External factors

As Nussbaum (2000, p. 31) puts it, external circumstances "affect the inner lives of people: what they hope for, what they love, what they fear, as well as what they are able to do." In this regard, various different external factors influenced some participants' career trajectories and level of volition (agency). Life circumstances or experiences, for example, shaped how they made career choices (see Burchardt 2009; Duffy & Dick 2009). Naleli, one of the students, testifies to this. Her own life experiences altered her career preference and decision-making. According to Naleli, pursuing social work as a career was 'never' her first choice or preference; rather, her life experiences led her into social work. Coming from a single headed family, Naleli narrated,

> First I wanted to do financial management and said nope then psychiatry and said nope, circumstances influenced me, like why I went on to study social work. I wanted to help my mother sometimes because she was a childcare worker. I would help her with looking at the children and I then kind of enjoyed that. I would see the social worker who came in to work with her. I think that is how I decided to get into social work. *(Naleli, student)*

Two important facts concerning career choice and decision-making come out of this student's experiences. First, one's physical and social environment can shape his/her career choice and decision-making (see Bernard *et al.* 2008). It can either shrink or expand one's option freedom.[25] Nurtured in an environment where social work activities took place, Naleli followed the social work path. This experience ignited her passion in pursuing social work as a career. Second, is the influence of significant people such as family members in shaping or influencing one's career choice. Such influence can be direct or indirect, meaning the effect can be with or without a direct exercise of command. In Naleli's case, it was the latter. Her mother and the social worker served as her role models. Her exposure to them kindled her interest in social work. The same can be said of Erina (social worker), who got into social work through the influence of her aunt and cousin, who were both social workers. She said:

> Just looking at them as a child, it was just a very interesting job. There was an influence from them; otherwise, I would not have known what social work is…so it is a bit of influence from the family that influenced my decision to become a social worker. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

In these two cases, although both Naleli and Erina's career choices were influenced by those around them (social environment); they still pursued social work out of choice.

In contrast, Buang (student) entered the social work profession because her mother asked her to do so. She stated that:

> Honestly speaking I did not want to study social work. I chose to study social work because my mom wanted me to study it. She used to study it and then she did not like it and now I don't know how her passion for social work grew again, so she wanted me to do it. *(Buang, student)*

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[25] Option freedom speaks of one's opportunity to choose an alternative that he/she is in a position to pursue or realise (Pettit 2003).

In a comparable case, Bongi (student) enrolled in social work because her family disapproved of her preferred career in business. She explained that she wanted to do Marketing. "My auntie," she elaborated,

> studied marketing. She was working, but then she got retrenched. So, my family already was not pleased with anything business related. That means no business at all. Even I tried public relations; it was like where can you get a job, human resources, where are you going to get a job? So, social work was just there, so I applied for social work. *(Bongi, student)*

Bongi's family perceived marketing, her first choice of study, as a programme with limited employment opportunities. This perception gained credence with the retrenchment of her aunt from her job. Her family members were concerned about her chances of getting a job after graduation and dissuaded Bongi from studying marketing. Despite them not giving Bongi a direct command to go for social work, their guidance altered her choice and decision-making. In fact, both Buang, and Bongi's agency freedom, which speaks of the freedom to pursue what one values, was constrained (see Chapter 3, also Sen 1999).

On the other hand, Bongi's case points to one of the reasons behind some people's enrolment for social work; the issue of opportunities associated with studying social work. Whilst talking about her family members' concern about employment prospects, Bongi said, "…social work was just there." Why was social work an alternative, when employment was an issue? This advances the supposition that social work has higher employment prospects than those of business related fields. Views from other participants suggest the same idea. For instance, Frank (social work lecturer) wanted to be a lawyer but could not get into it because of perceived limited chances of employment. He said, "Honestly, my first option was law. I realised that it was difficult for me to make it in life if I study law because of employment challenges… then I decided to take social work." Similarly, Mary wanted to be a psychologist.

'Someone' advised her to go for social work, on the basis that psychology had limited employment opportunities. Recounting her story, Mary stated:

> …he [the advisor] said it would take me years before I could get a psychologist job. He spent some time lecturing to me saying, you know what, you can do social work and also major in psychology, that's how I got into social work. *(Mary, practising social worker)*

In both cases, the pursuit of social work had to do with limited freedoms in pursuing desired employment options. However, although social work came up as an alternative for the desired professions, both Frank and Mary made a choice (though limited) in becoming social workers.

In an effort to bridge the scarce skills gap in the field of social work, the South African government, through the Department of Social Development (DSD), introduced a bursary for social work students in the late 2000s (see Chapter 2; also Schmidt & Rautenbach 2016). Such opportunities have attracted certain people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, into studying social work. Of the ten students I interviewed, six confirmed having been recipients of the bursary. One of them, Lineo (student), mentioned that besides her passion to help people, she enrolled for social work education because of the bursary opportunity.

In short, then, people's career choices can be influenced by their past experiences or anticipated life goals, such as getting a job. Career choices are also relational. My findings confirm Sen's (1999) observation that individuals are quintessentially social creatures whose choices and actions cannot be separated from people around them or from the social environment. The participants' career options and agency freedoms were inevitably linked to the existence of those individuals around them or to their social environment. In fact, their agency freedom was there, but constrained. However, this does not mean that they did not exercise any discretion in defining their professional lives. They eventually had the opportunity to attain their valued goals (agency achievement). The next section is a presentation of 'the passion to help' as an internal motive.

5.2.2 The passion to help as an internal factor

As I noted in the previous section, 19 of the 25 interviewees identified the passion to help as their impetus for getting into social work. Helping speaks of working with or empowering disadvantaged individuals, families, groups and communities in a way that promotes their positive functioning (Butler 1990; Limb & Organista 2006). It has to do with assisting people in confronting their challenges, as well as accessing and obtaining resources (see DuBois & Miley 2014). It is this sense of selflessness together with the desire to help, which leads some people into social work (see DuBois & Miley 2014). Some of them attribute this passion to either spiritual calling or personal interest. In a way this supports the assertion by some scholars that social workers are sometimes drawn into the profession by their idealist personality that places value on helping others as opposed to personal gains (see Waterman 2002; Wilson & McCrystal 2007; Csikai & Rozensky 1997; Warde 2009). Doreen, one of the prospective social workers, alluded to this point in stating that, "A lot of people think it's about getting more money. I don't think it's like that …when I am doing something for another person it in turn fills me up."

Consider, for example what the following participants said about why they chose to be social workers:

> I got into social work because my passion is in helping people cope and function during their circumstances. *(Mpho, student)*
>
> I wanted to do something that is purposeful and I felt that social work provides the opportunity to do something that carries purpose and meaning and to make a difference in people's lives. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*
>
> I wanted to make a difference in the world out there. That is why I decided to study social work. When I was in Grade 12, it was the time of going over to the new dispensation and I thought to myself that, we need people that can be out there, who can make a difference in the lives of people. I thought that in this way I could change the lives of people and make our society a better place. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

In a similar vein, Nyakallo, a 26 year old student, indicated that she registered for social work because of her desire to be helpful, by assisting people with challenges. She wanted to be involved in the system that supports people in overcoming different life challenges. Similarly, Khauhelo and Mantso (students), as well as Georgina and Tavengwa (practising social workers) pointed to their urge to help as the major drive in their enrolment into social work.

Some of these participants explained that they had the passion to help even when they were young. Recalling their past, Khauhelo and Tavengwa stated:

> When I was doing grade 5, we would be asked, what do you want to be and I will be like social worker. By then I did not even know what social work was actually about. All I understood was that, social workers help others. So what motivated me was that I wanted to help people, for them to have better lives. *(Khauhelo, student)*
>
> I always wanted to help everyone at home when I was still small. My whole personality was one of wanting to assist people. I did not know in the beginning that that is what I wanted to do but in general, I wanted to help people. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Just like Khauhelo and Tavengwa, Mantso's passion to help developed when she was still in primary school. She stated that, although she did not know the specifics of what is involved in social work practice, she just wanted to help people. According to Mantso (student), all that she knew back then was that social work is about helping people. Although she considers herself shy, she enrolled into the social work programme in order to work with people.

A few of my participants suggested that they regarded being a social worker as a spiritual calling. One of them, Lisa (social work lecturer), explained,

> … perhaps you understand that it is a spiritual path…It is not my choosing *per se*. I dreamt about my own death and dying since I was a very small child, so I eventually lined it up in social work and I did want to do religious field focusing on views of death and dying. They [dreams of death and dying] started visiting me very often and I ended up doing social work working in a trauma setting, working with loss, grieving adults, children…so it's not so much that it was a neat grown decision, it was a calling because social work is a calling. You do not do it for the money; you do not do it for prestige. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Pamela (practising social worker) thought of her professional pathway and identity as a calling. She stated:

> ... I think I was 6 or 7 years when I would tell my mother that I want to be a social worker. No one in the family was a social worker, but I wanted to be a social worker. As I grew there were challenges, financial challenges at home, you know and by that time after having completed my matric, there was nothing to do and there was a bursary, education was giving a bursary then I went and studied for teaching, for three years. When I came back, still I did not find anything to do not anything related. Later on, I remember after a year my mother then find some money to pay for me, to go to the university. That is when I realized that this is really my calling. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

While some social workers explained their decision to become social workers in spiritual terms, the fact that they identified this passion at a tender age suggests that helping is an intrinsic agency goal. It is a functioning of choice and discretion (agency).

Overall, this section advances the point that, in becoming social workers, my participants had both agency freedom and achievement. Other than pointing to the participants' agency freedom in becoming social workers, the findings also suggest a close connection between career motivations and aspirations. In fact, the participants' career motivations mirror their aspirations and valued functionings (as will be shown in the next sections). Part of my research goal was to understand what valued functionings social workers aspire towards in order to lead valued lives. The next section is a presentation of the social workers' different professional aspirations, drawing from both prospective and practising social workers. I follow this with a subsection on personal aspirations.

5.3 Understanding professional wellbeing: Views from prospective and practising social workers

My findings attest to the idea that wellbeing is multidimensional. The phenomenon can hardly be defined or understood in terms of a single aspect (see Chapter 3; see also Cummins *et al.* 2003; Lent 2004; Pollard & Lee 2003; Clark 2005; Dodge *et al.* 2012; Jongbloed & Andres 2015; Forgeard *et al.* 2011; Ryan & Deci 2001; La Placa, McNaught & Knight 2013).

In response to the various questions which sought to probe the participants' understanding of their professional wellbeing, the social workers described the phenomenon in terms of the achievement of various valued functionings and/or aspirations. They also highlighted the importance of having certain opportunities or freedoms (capabilities) in leading their valued lives. In the following section, I present the social workers' professional aspirations (valued functionings).

5.3.1 Professional aspirations (valued functionings) of social workers

The capacity to aspire is essential for wellbeing achievement (see Appadurai 2004; Ibrahim 2011; Veenhoven 2000, Ray 2003). Confirming Ray's (2006) assertion that aspirations are multidimensional, social workers envision themselves in various valued states of being and doing. These aspirations can be grouped into two broad categories: professional and personal aspirations. It should however be pointed out that some of these aspirations or valued functionings complement each other. This section discusses the professional aspirations that prospective and practising social workers articulated. Table 7 below shows these aspirations.

Table 7: Professional aspirations

Social work students	Practising social workers
Helping people • Making a difference in people's lives or being influential • Empowering people • Working in a conducive environment (with access to resources and necessary support) • Being healthy (in order to help other people) • Job fulfilment and effective helping	Helping people • Making a difference in people's lives or being influential • Empowering people • Working in a conducive environment (with adequate support, resources and proper supervision) • Being healthy (in order to help other people) • Job fulfilment and effective helping
Professional growth • Finding a social work job after graduation (direct practice, research or administration) • Owning non-governmental organisations or private practice • Further education	Professional growth • Further education • Having own private practice • Being promoted and occupying an administrative post or becoming a supervisor • Working for bigger welfare organisations and being influential to large numbers of people

As table 7 shows, professional aspirations encompass two major valued functionings. These are helping and professional growth. I begin by discussing the first of these, helping.

5.3.1.1 Helping

Helping emerged as the chief-valued functioning for both prospective and practising social workers (14 out of 18 participants indicated its importance). For the majority of my informants, helping is about making a difference in people's lives or being influential. For instance, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that what could make her happy as a professional is "making a positive change in a person's life and just knowing that somebody is smiling because of [her]." Similarly, Georgina (practising social worker) mentioned that, "one way or another I should make a difference even if it's in only one person's life, for the better. I can't help everybody and everybody won't be happy with me, but if only I can reach out to

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one or two people and make a difference in their lives." Khauhelo, one of the students, also stated that:

> I want to see myself being an influential person to the community. I want to be remembered with what I have done…to leave people with the things that they can see. To just make a difference in people's lives …to say that now I am happy because I have been influential to others. What makes me happy is that I know that others are also happy from what I have done."
> *(Khauhelo, student)*

Khauhelo noted that one of her goals is to be involved in the prevention of social challenges, as well as in early intervention. "I want to see myself protecting the youths, specifically those in school," she mentioned. Khauhelo asserts that, by intervening with the youth, she will be giving them the opportunity to improve their own lives. Likewise, Nyakallo (student) aspires to assist diverse people in confronting life challenges, hence making their lives better.

Helping is also about empowering people. Empowerment speaks of helping service users "gain access to power in themselves, in and with each other, and in the social, economic and political environments" (Lee 2001, p. 26). Prospective social workers expressed their hope to empower diverse populations in various ways. Tsepiso and Doreen (students) want to have their own non-governmental organisations, which empower young women and young children, respectively. According to Tsepiso, her organisation would promote independence amongst young women. She said she wants to see women being less dependent on men. On a similar note, Doreen wants to help young rural kids with writing skills. She mentioned that her ultimate goal is to help the poor kids publish their works until they reach the age of 21. She said, "I want to work with kids from young age to make sure by the time they turn 21 they will be sorted. If we can have a thousand copies in ten years, that can make a difference in their lives. We will not take cash and give it to the kids, but we will mentor them through and see what they get after ten years." Similarly, Mantso (student) expressed her professional hopes by saying that:

> my goals are to help as many people as possible, but not just help but to help them to be able to help themselves in the future, so that they will also be able to help others as well. Helping is

also about equipping people with skills and if I help as many people as possible, the world will really be a better place. *(Mantso, student)*

None of these students aspires for minimal professional achievements. They envision themselves making huge professional achievements. That is, they want to make a difference on a larger scale.

Who might have influenced them to think in this way? As Ray (2006) suggests, people emulate, imitate and learn from those who are like them, or around them (see also Ray 2003; Appadurai 2002). During field practica, students learn from the works of their fellow social workers and field instructors. Through that exposure, they develop crucial capacities which can serve as the base of their professional journey. They cultivate, for instance, a sense of self-concept (the capacity to know themselves, how they differ from others, as well as their roles), narrative imagination (an appreciation of the lives of diverse people), coupled with empathy. Such capacities enable social workers to feel and think *with* rather than *for* the service users (see Brammer 1979).

In fact, the practice experience kindled the students' passion to help and empower diverse people. Nyakallo and Doreen (students) respectively evidence this. Nyakallo said, "[Through the practicum], I learned to accept people, as they are, being able to relate to them and understand what their needs are, so that I can be able to provide them with resources." Doreen similarly explained that,

> The supervisors at the field practicum site prepared me so much for the actual practice. The strengthening was so much… I am much stronger now. Now I can relate to clients [diverse populations]. Some of them come from very difficult situations and I can literally tell them, if you are willing to work with me, we can improve the situation, because I know it can become better (emphasis added). *(Doreen, student)*

Tavengwa (practising social worker) pointed out that, just like these students, some practising social workers dreamt of huge achievements at one time. However, following their extended

practice exposure, they adapted their aspirations (adaptive preference) as they came to terms with what was realistic in their context. She stated that,

> What I hoped to do and where I am, it's two different worlds. I thought I can change everyone and the sooner you accept that that is not possible the happier you are likely to be because you put unnecessary stress onto your shoulders… *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Kuseka, another practising social worker, added that,

> Whatever I envisioned, I did not have a clear idea of what I was going to do. I envisioned myself not as an angel, but this person who is going to help everyone and bring peace to the families. It is not like that…you cannot make one hundred percent of a difference in everybody's life. That is not what I am experiencing now… *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

There is a clear shift in what practising social workers aspired for in terms of helping or making a difference. Such a shift can be explained in terms of the social workers' practice experience. Through experience, practising social workers began to appreciate the gap between their current circumstances and what they hoped to achieve (aspiration gap) when they were students. They began to appreciate how the work environment determines what is achievable or not. Kuseka (practising social worker) further explained that, "it is not possible…the reality is the caseload is much higher than whatever you imagined…you are faced with different problems. It's not just children and families…it is social problems, society." What Kuseka (practising social worker) was saying was that work-related challenges such as heavy caseloads, combined with the fact that social workers deal with challenging issues, constrain their realisation of certain helping aspirations.

A number of participants reiterated what Kuseka said about the work environment. They also explained how the issues raised by Kuseka, together with working in resource-constrained environments, affect their physical and emotional wellness, which is in itself integral for their helping capacity (I discuss the issue of work environment and its constraining impacts in the next chapter). For instance, Erina (practising social worker) stated that:

the work environment [is challenging], definitely heavy workloads and lack of resources…You [also] deal with very upsetting and disturbing situations… It is tough, you work for long every day and you emotionally get involved with the families…but you have to eventually go home and reflect. You think, what have I done today, what was that all about, that poor girl, that poor man, you know it plays in your mind and you cannot switch off. There is a lot of administration work, there is a lot of pressure, and for example, you have to get your paper work done. You have a deadline. Some days do not feel long enough. You over work, you are so drained… so physically the body is stressed, emotionally you get affected, and that in a sense affects the self…[yet], when you feel better in yourself, you can get things done, but when you are stuck or stressed you just can't do what you are supposed to be doing… (emphasis added) *(Erina, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Bongi and Lineo (students) stated that:

..the amount of work that we do…the type people and the type of issues we deal with can be really exhausting. It takes a lot from you. ..I end up being depressed……what type of services am I going to provide to the next person if myself I am depressed, if I myself am not happy? *(Bongi, student)*

…you cannot have a high caseload or be underpaid or not having necessary resources and still do good. Those are some of the things that affect me. I think at first I might try my best but as time goes on with my caseload continuously going up, I get fed up and won't be able to [help] as I really want to do. *(Lineo, student)*

Lastly, Khauhelo (student) said:

Remember in social work we deal with people, we deal with different challenges people are facing. As we deal with those, we also experience trauma indirectly… *(Khauhelo, student)*

In order to realise their aspiration to help others, social workers also aspire towards having good working conditions. Good working conditions for some involve not being overworked, and having adequate resources and proper supportive supervision. For instance, Doreen (student) mentioned that:

I think what would make me feel like sure I am alive is resources…I know what I am supposed to be doing; I am not just supposed to be doing the things that look like I am working. I am supposed to be actually helping a human being. So, if the resources are there to actually help a human being, that for me would be perfect. *(Doreen, student)*

Lineo (student) buttressed this point, saying:

As a professional, the ideal would be working in an environment where I am not overloaded with casework. Having a good supervisor and getting to learn and progress. I should have my own office; have access to resources to help my clients… *(Lineo, student)*

Working under good conditions influences the extent to which social workers can live healthy lives, a key aspiration for many of the prospective and practising social workers. The importance of being healthy emerged when participants were talking about the physical and emotional impacts of their work environment and what these challenges mean for their ability to help others. They also talked about its importance when answering my question on what would constitute a good life for them as professionals. The following are some of the views that emerged:

> … I should be healthy. If [I am] healthy, I put more effort in my work. My heart will be in what I will be doing. But if not…I will do it tomorrow when I feel better or just put it somewhere else. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*
>
> …you as a person need to be healthy, so [it's about leading] a good life style. *(Erina, practising social worker)*
>
> …you have to really see to it that you are healthy not just physically but emotionally as well. *(Zanele, practising social worker)*

As is clear, informants felt that these conditions lead to job fulfilment and effective helping (see section 5.4).

5.3.1.2 Professional growth

Both prospective and practising social workers aspire to grow professionally. Professional growth includes getting a social work job, the expectation of attaining higher positions at work, working for bigger organisations, opening non-governmental organisations and enrolling for postgraduate education.

Only the prospective social workers expressed their longing to obtain social work jobs after graduation (because all practising social workers were working). For instance, Lineo, one of the students, aspires to do forensic social work, whilst Bongi (student) wishes for an administrative or research job. She stated, "In terms of social work, I do not want to do direct

practice with clients… but I am thinking more in terms of research or administration (Bongi, student)." On the other hand, Erina (practising social worker) aspires towards promotion to a supervisory role. Furthermore, Nxobile (practising social worker) wants to continue helping by providing suitable solutions to social problems. She thinks that working for an international organisation such as UNICEF would provide her with a strong platform to achieve this aspiration.

A larger pool of participants (from both prospective and practising social workers) expressed anticipating the opening of their own non-governmental organisations. Amongst the prospective social workers are Doreen, Tsepiso and Khauhelo, whose views I highlighted above. Practising social workers such as Pamela, for instance, stated that, "I would like to have a private practice and equip parents to be better parents who can be better husbands and better wives too and have decent families." Similarly, Mary mentioned that, "during my studies… I wanted to own my private practice and I still want to achieve that…I see the need." Mary's position supports the idea that even though some aspirations may not be realised, this does not necessarily mean that the person will adapt their aspirations. For some, unrealised aspirations remain persistent (see Mkwananzi 2017).

Finally, both prospective and practising social workers aspire towards further education. For a number of participants, enrolling in postgraduate studies is the ideal way of getting specialised knowledge or boosting professional knowledge. The following excerpts speak to this point:

> Next year, I want to do my Master's in African Studies. I want to understand how we can adapt the social work education and curriculum to fit our African countries, families and communities. *(Doreen, student)*
>
> I want to improve my knowledge and not just to be a social worker who has a degree or Master's. *(Mantso, student)*
>
> I was thinking that by this time, I will have my Master's, but I still want to pursue it…Going for Master's is about improving my knowledge and specialty… *(Mary, practising social worker)*

In addition to the professional aspirations of helping and professional growth, social workers also aspire towards personal or private achievements. I discuss these next.

5.3.2 Personal aspirations (valued functionings) of social workers

Goal attainment (personal or professional) is one of the benchmarks of wellbeing or meaning making (Emmons 2003). When asked to define what would make their lives valuable and meaningful, social workers articulated their different personal life goals, wishes and preferences; those they deem worthwhile for the future. These include getting a job, getting married, having a family, financial stability and material achievements such as owning some businesses, having a car or a house. I clustered these personal goals into personal growth and material achievements. The table below summarises the various personal aspirations as they emerged from both social work students and practising social workers.

Table 8: Social workers' personal aspirations (valued functionings)

Social work students	*Practising social workers*
Personal growth • Getting a job • Financial stability • Having a family (being married and having children) Material achievements • Owning some businesses, having nice cars and houses)	Personal growth • Financial stability (can also be understood as an aspect of material achievement) Material achievements • Meeting basic needs

This is explained below, and I begin with personal growth.

5.3.2.1 Personal growth

Personal growth speaks of the growth or development of individuals as well as the realisation of their potentialities, such as getting a job, marriage, transitioning into parenthood as well as financial stability or independence (see Ryff 1989). Financial stability can also be understood as an aspect of material achievement (see the discussion below). As Ray (2006) points out, depending on one's place in the socio-economic hierarchy, these achievements can complement each other. The views I got from both prospective and practising social workers support this. Five of the ten students identified getting a job as one of their future goals. Some of them spoke about work or getting a job in relation to financial stability. Doreen, for example, spoke about entering academia as a way of getting a second source of income or for financial stability. She said, "I plan to go into academia because as a social worker I am not going to be able to pay for necessary [good] schools for my kids." Similarly, Khauhelo (student) talked about employment and financial earnings, saying, "I want to achieve personal goals such as graduating, being employed and making most out of my work." This can be taken to suggest a complementary relationship in the achievement of these functionings.

Correspondingly, when both prospective and practising social workers talked about their aspiration for financial stability as a valuable functioning, they mentioned it in relation to the achievement of other functionings such as meeting basic needs such as health, or self-care, food, and taking care of own kids or sending them to good schools. For instance, Bongi (student) stated that:

> … If I have a health emergency, I do not have to struggle because of finances. I should have the amount of money that I would need at any specific point. Yes, that is the type of life I want to live. I would want to provide for my kids, I do not want to literally say, I do not have money. *(Bongi, student)*

Similarly, Lineo (student) stated that:

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> I need money. If I have money I think I will be good…I want to have a comfortable home, food to put on the table, not having to run around and to make sure that my children can have education or to make sure that they eat something. *(Lineo, student)*

It is in the same vein that Pamela (practising social worker) aspires to have sufficient money to meet basic needs such as having a house and food to support her family. Mary and Nxobile (practising social workers) aspire to have adequate money to take care of themselves, to go on holidays and release work pressure.

On the other hand, many students (eight out of ten) identified *having a family or marriage*, as a valuable personal achievement. Naleli, one of the students, stated that, "I want to have a family at some point. I want to get married and have kids…" Similarly, Doreen said that she wanted to be married. "I respect marriage and children born under the cover of marriage", she elaborated, noting, "In marriage, my husband can counsel me on how we can raise the kids together …a good life would be having children and being able to take care of them (Doreen, student). According to Naleli (student), such achievements are signs of personal growth.

Unlike the students who are still aspiring towards getting married and having families of their own, some practising social workers (in a different life stage, compared to the students) talked about these aspects as achieved goals. Nxobile (practising social worker) for instance, stated that, "There are things that I hoped to have and I do have…some of them include independence and being married." Similarly, Tavengwa (practising social worker) explained that, "…if you asked me this question [about my personal aspirations] four years ago my answer would have been very different because my situation changed tremendously. I got married to such a wonderful boy…"

These disparate aspirations between students' and practising social workers' responses can be attributed to their age differences. For instance, those students who spoke about

marriage are still in their early twenties, but Nxobile is in her late twenties and Tavengwa is over 40. Other than highlighting their aspirations for personal growth, my participants also expressed their ambitions for material achievements.

5.3.2.2 Material achievements

Material achievements speak of the attainment or ownership of physical property such as businesses, houses and cars. Related, although somewhat different, is also the ability to afford basic needs, such as food and good sanitation. The views on material achievements such as owning a business, nice cars and houses emerged mostly from the students. However, whilst prospective social workers aspire towards relatively ambitious material achievements, practising social workers were actually adapting their aspirations to new, more attainable goals. For instance, Mantso, one of the students, indicated that she would want to have her own businesses after graduation. Also Nyakallo (student) said, "I want to live a normal life and have the basics, like a good house, car…" Similarly, Naleli (student) stated that she wants, "a nice house somewhere out of town and a car…" Another student, Bongi, explained that she understood that these were "basic things," but she needed "to have a nice car, a very nice car." "At first," she elaborated, "I can have any car but in the end, I need to have a nice car. I need to have a nice house…"

In this regard, students' personal aspirations for material achievements differ from those of practising social workers. Whereas students such as Nyakallo, Naleli and Bongi aspire to buy nice cars and houses, practising social workers such as Pamela have lowered their expectations. She said:

> [I] used to say, I want to have a nice life, my husband should be rich and will have money and have a nice car and a nice house on this side of the town but it was a dream especially when you are working as a social worker… [also] some of us can't do that because of family responsibilities, we can't spend money on the self because we are taking care of other people…

> So I am saying, just having the basic needs, will be better…such as a house, being able to take care of your children and feeding them… *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

This difference is accounted for by the fact that Pamela has real life experience of the realities of being a social worker. For example, she is aware that the entry-level annual salary for a social worker is ZAR210 000, a figure that cannot sustain the students' high expectations. Pamela raises three important points. First, personal growth often comes with responsibilities. Second, she recognises that the gap between her current status and her aspirations (aspiration gap) is too wide and so has adapted her preferences (see Ray 2006). Third, she reminds us that the social work profession is not well remunerated in personal-material terms. This raises the question of whether there are any tensions between personal and professional aspirations. I turn to this question in the next section.

5.4 Tensions and synergies between personal and professional aspirations

Views from the social workers suggest that there are both tensions and synergies in the achievement of professional and personal aspirations. An understanding of the relationship between these two sets of achievements is crucial in devising ideas on how social work education can advance professional wellbeing (considering what might be feasible or not in the South African context). I discuss both tensions and complementarities concurrently.

Ideally, as my findings suggest, there should be a synergy between being healthy and effective helping (refer to other examples given in section 5.3.1.1). In explaining the complementary relationship between the two aspects, some participants made the following analogies:

> As [a social worker], you are like a coffee machine. You have all these beans and you are making coffee for everyone but once the coffee beans are finished you can't get coffee to anyone, so you have to keep on filling up yourself in order to be able to help other people. *(Zanele, practising social worker)*

> I think [helping] is like a car. If your tank is empty, then your car is not going to go. So, [being healthy] is a huge issue. You have to make sure that you are ok. You have to look after yourself because you can only give out what you have inside of you. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

However, a number of factors can undermine the concurrent achievement of these functionings by social workers. These include structural problems such as working in contexts of dire poverty. Work-related challenges such as huge caseloads exacerbate this tension (see Chapter 2 and section 5.3.1.1). Both prospective and practising social workers talked about how working under extreme conditions puts their health at risk and ultimately hampers effective helping. Zanele, one of the practising social workers, stated that, "We have high caseloads, sometimes I feel like I am not coping and that makes it difficult for me to be okay and to feel that I am doing a good job." In a similar vein, Tavengwa (practising social worker) explained that:

> There is not enough time to handle all extreme cases… With burnout, social workers end up in hospital. They [are] damaged. For example, [what happens when] there are 300 or 400 cases hanging? Somebody has to take over those clients, whilst she has her own caseload. So, [that] burns out the second one… I think a healthy life is very necessary. I would like to be healthy and continue making a difference in people's lives. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Correspondingly, Buang (student) talked about her internship challenges, pointing out that "the demands of the work, the workload was overwhelming. There was no time to take care of myself… [But] I think if you are well, you can render good services. You can provide good services if you are in good shape." As it emerges, the research participants are more focused on helping individuals and communities than campaigning for change of conditions.

On the other hand, some social workers talked about the emotional impacts of serving as a social worker. These result from the type of issues they deal with. Bongi (student), for instance, mentioned that social work could be depressing and depression leads to ineffectiveness. She stated that, "It takes a lot from me…I end up depressed…whatever, I do,

will not be effective because I will not be in the right state." Similarly, Khauhelo (student) mentioned that:

> Remember, in social work [we] are dealing with people, dealing with different challenges people are facing... Even if you are not aware of that, they (clients' issues) do affect us as well, so if you are not well yourself, how will you help your clients? *(Khauhelo, student)*

Lastly, Pamela (practising social worker) summed it all up by saying, "You cannot give good services to your clients when you are not well… you cannot be effective."

These views suggest that social workers need conducive working environments in order to help effectively (see also Walker & McLean 2013). They also need to be healthy. However, in some instances, some social workers are confronted with a difficult choice. That is, to either continue helping or to stay healthy. In such cases, some social workers end up adapting their preferences and sacrificing their own health. Pamela (practising social worker) alluded to this scenario when she said:

> There are a lot of challenges but you need to try to be strong and push that aside and say this is my life… that's what I am trying to do now. Seeing that you have made a difference in a person's life is what is important. You forget all those negative things that happen to you…It is that satisfaction that is important. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Another tension exists between helping and material achievements. Pamela's case (discussed in the previous section) points to this tension. At the time of her graduation, she hoped to acquire material things such as, "a nice car, house and to live on the other side of the town." However, following her practice exposure, she realised that she was unable to achieve all this. She said:

> …when you hear that someone is a social worker, it sounds like it's a fancy profession and when you become a social worker you realize that you are actually a door mat, [laughing]. [I] used to say… [I] will have money… but it was a dream. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Mary (practising social worker) suggests that there should also be complementarity between financial stability and helping. However, several of my informants pointed out that it has not been possible to achieve both. Zanele (practising social worker) spoke of this tension when she said, "the finances are a problem…many social workers are leaving the field because you can't survive on [a] social worker salary." Doreen (student) stressed that one's financial position has a bearing on his/her effectiveness as helper when she said:

> Most people when they are distressed at home then they cannot be good social workers. So, for example, a person who has financial issues cannot work well because of those frustrations. Like I am sitting here, I am helping all these people and my kids are sitting home with my mother because we cannot take care of our kids. *(Doreen, student)*

Other informants suggested that the achievement of personal aspirations such as having a family could lead to effective helping. For example, Doreen (student) stated that, "Having a family can be refreshing and one can work better when he/she goes back to work." Tavengwa (practising social worker) made a similar point when she said, "…if you are happy at your house it makes you happy in general and you can absolutely work well with your clients."

Overall, these tensions among social workers' personal and professional aspirations (valued functionings) point to different conversion factors (constraints), which hamper professional wellbeing achievement (I discuss these in the next chapter). At the same time, understanding these valued functionings and the corresponding complementarities and tensions provides a basis for identifying the capabilities that should be promoted for professional wellbeing achievement. I now turn to these capabilities.

5.5 Capabilities for professional wellbeing

The capability approach stresses the importance of identifying and prioritising people's valued freedoms (see Sen 2002, 2004, 1999; Crocker 1995; Alkire 2008b). As Hobson (2011) states, the decision on which capabilities matter is dependent on what aspects of wellbeing are being evaluated and for whom (see also Sen 2004). The capabilities I identified underpin the functionings of helping and professional growth. However, in identifying them, I heed Robeyns' (2017) advice that the selection of the capabilities ought not to be a technocratic exercise. I also retain Alkire's (2008b) idea that the participants should identify capabilities. In short, the majority of the participants identified the capabilities that I discuss in this section as valuable (see also Buckler 2016). The capabilities set out below emerged from the perspectives shared by both prospective and practising social workers. These capabilities are more than mere private goods, but necessary opportunities or freedoms, which can be influenced from outside, for instance through policy (see Alkire 2008b).

Table 9 below provides an overview of the seven professional wellbeing capabilities identified and their descriptions, as they emerged from both social work students and practising social workers. These capabilities are revisable based on context and additional voices; but nonetheless provide a starting point for conceptualising professional wellbeing (see Walker 2007). In order to give the reader a sense of how much these capabilities are valued, I attached the number of participants who indicated each capability. Each capability is thereafter discussed individually.

Table 9: Capabilities for professional wellbeing: Views from social work students and practising social workers

Capability	Description	Number of participants who indicated the capability (out of 18)
1. Affiliation	Relations based on the ideas of care, respect and service; narrative imagination or understanding the lives of the vulnerable groups; rapport building; support systems, families and friends; supportive supervision	**16** *(9 students plus 7 practising social workers)*
2. Adaptation	Coping with the working environment, its changes and challenges; being positive, patient; resilient	**12** *(6 students plus 6 practising social workers)*
3. Self-care	Having an appreciation of how to take care of oneself and the importance of that in order to function effectively; self-awareness; time off, going on holidays	**14** *(7 students plus 7 practising social workers)*
4. Work-life balance	Having a clear distinction between private life and professional life or activities, control over work, caseload; the ability to plan and organise work, job security, having family time, leisure	**14** *(5 students plus 8 practising social workers)*
5. Reflexivity	An understanding of how one's own values, beliefs and emotions might impact professional actions or the self; self-concept, maintaining appropriate emotional boundaries, for example, empathy vs sympathy; switching off; reflection; being open-minded	**11** (*5 students plus 6 practising social workers*)
6. Knowledge and skills	Basic professional knowledge, theory and practical; integrating theory and practice; helping process and activities, assessment, interviewing, communication and intervention; policy; life skills, time management, problem-solving	**16** (*9 students plus 7 practising social workers*)
7. Values and Principles	Appreciating and maintaining professional values, principles, attitudes and attributes which enable effective functioning, service, commitment, respect, confidentiality, service, human dignity; integrity,	**11** *(4 students plus 7 practising social workers)*

Affiliation

Many social workers (both students and practicing) acknowledged the relational aspect of wellbeing. They highlighted the importance of *affiliation* as a valuable capability for professional wellbeing. Affiliation speaks of one's ability to live with others and towards others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings (Nussbaum 1995). It has to do with developing relationships and rapport across social groups and status (professional) hierarchies (Walker & McLean 2013; Nussbaum 2000). Some features of affiliation which emerged from participants in this study include having a strong support system, whether these are friends, or family and supportive supervision. As suggested by Bongi (student), the good life for social workers entails having a strong support system. According to her, having someone to tell about your challenges or good experiences enhances social workers' ability to help effectively.

Social workers value relationships and partnership with their colleagues and clients (Mantso, student). The establishment of such relationships is instrumental in effective helping and [professional] wellbeing (see DuBois & Miley 2014). This was supported by Georgina (practising social worker) in her saying that helping depends on upholding relationships with clients. On the other hand, the complexities of social work practice made both students and practising social workers realise the intrinsic value of supportive supervision (some form of relationship with colleagues). The goal of supportive supervision in social work is to enhance job performance through providing emotional and practical support (Suraj-Narayan 2010). Therefore, as "practising social workers" the participants, particularly students, benefited from supportive supervision by acquiring better or higher levels of coping skills for their general wellbeing. Amongst those who benefited from supportive supervision are Khauhelo and Tsepiso. These two students found their practice experience to be emotionally draining for

different reasons, and supervision became their source of strength. For example, Khauhelo (student) spoke about her experience saying:

> [After handling an emotional case] I pretended to be emotionally okay. I knew this was my career and now I was ruined. The thoughts of what happened during work came back to me. I was so anxious [but] my supervisors were there to encourage and support me. *(Khauhelo, student)*

Just like her, Tsepiso also found emotional management challenging. She could not draw a fine line between her personal life and work. This resulted in her taking home all the emotions from work. She described how supervision became her pillar of strength, saying:

> There was one case that I kept on thinking about even after work. It was a very emotional incident. My supervisor later told me that I do not have control over clients' actions, behavior or stories and that I must not beat myself up for that…From then, I changed. *(Tsepiso, student)*

Unlike these students, some practising social workers talked about supportive supervision as something that is lacking in their practice contexts. They regard lack of supportive supervision as one of the hindrances to their wellbeing achievement. In this regard, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that,

> … we do not get proper supervision from them [supervisors]. You [social workers] are expected to give results but there is no support, sometimes they [supervisors] don't say thank you, they don't care but whenever you make a mistake they come after you. You feel like you are not protected; you are not appreciated. I know clients come first but my wellbeing should come first too…if I had proper supervision when I was still young I could have gone very far. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Adaptation

    Adaptation also emerged as one of the social workers' valued capabilities for professional wellbeing. It refers to the active efforts by individuals to fit into their environment, so that they can survive, develop and succeed (Germain 2010). Social workers talk about the need to adapt in relation to their challenging work environments. This has an impact on their (social workers') physical and emotional wellness (I discussed this earlier). Adaptation is an

instrumental capability for the professionals' health and helping functionings. In order to cope with the pressure at work, social workers ought to initiate some 'reactive changes' in themselves. Reactive changes include building coping strategies such as staying positive and having patience. All these build up to resilience. Resilience, as Fraser, Galinsky and Richman (1999) suggest, is also a response to the environment, which is represented by three aspects, namely overcoming the odds, sustaining competence and adjusting successfully to the challenges.

Talking about the work challenges and their impacts, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that, "…if you look at this job negatively all the time, then you are going to be ill, because there are many negative elements to it. You have to be positive." Similarly, Khauhelo (student) stressed that, "[You should] not be negative but try to understand that this is the situation and I do not have control over it. There is nothing I can do, you know, just hope it will change and be patient."

Those who have been in practice for a long time, talk about the need to cope and adapt to the ever-changing practicing context, as a prerequisite for effective helping. Georgina (practising social worker) put this point eloquently when she said:

> Every day I get new things, everything change (sic) overnight. So, you must be willing to adapt or die. So, you have to overcome those obstacles by teaching yourself and be willing to be taught all new stuff. The things in 2017 is (sic) not the same as in 1976, and you cannot stay behind. You have to grow with it [practice changes]. That is actually the good thing, although it is sometimes overwhelming… *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Tavengwa (practising social worker) noted that:

> I think my education was very good and relevant for those years, but many things have changed. [Social work] it is like having your children and grow with them. You have to grow with the changes that come in. You have to adapt as the changes come in. I think [social work education] was relevant by then. For example, we did not have to do anything on computers then, it was all typing machines. You will find that social workers from my age do not have computer skills. We never had it as a subject in school and we did not do it when we studied for social work, but now I can do all the basics and not fancy things, I can type a report… *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

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Another practising social worker, Erina, stressed the same point, stating that:

> You should have the ability to adapt and change. There is always change ahead of us, things change at work, things change in the law. You must be a person that can adapt otherwise you are not going survive, definitely not. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

Self-care

Social workers highlighted self-care as one of the important capabilities for professional wellbeing. Self-care, as Mantso (student) understands it,

> is about focusing on yourself. For instance, sometimes you have to relax or go out and not just focus on other people's problems. It also involves spending time with family without letting the challenges that other people are facing come down to you in a negative way. *(Mantso, student)*

Social workers stressed the importance of self-care in relation to the challenges they face in practice, such as heavy workloads and dealing with difficult service users. They highlighted the instrumental role of self-care in ensuring their [personal] wellness or health as well as effective helping. The majority of the social workers shared the student Mantso's view that, "[one] needs to be well in order to promote other people's wellness." Mary (practising social worker), for instance, explained that her supervisor always said, "…you need to take care of yourself, so that you can be in a position to take care of your clients." Similarly, Erina (practising social worker) said:

> I don't think people really understand how difficult and stressful this job is. So, if you did not learn from the early days about self-care or your emotional wellbeing, you will not know at what point should you stop. By the time you realize that, you are either booked out by the doctor or you are ill and it's too late. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

It is in this regard that some social workers spoke about the importance of advancing self-care in and through social work education. For example, Erina (practising social worker) believes that this capability would constitute a significant part of professional development which one

can utilise throughout one's entire lifetime. On the other hand, and yet reinforcing what other social workers have highlighted, Bongi (student) indicated that social work lecturers should teach them self-care because she cannot take care of someone's life when hers is not taken care of. The common view from social workers is the fact that self-care is a necessary ability for social workers. Not only is this ability important for their health or effective helping, it is fundamental in advancing the practitioners' overall wellbeing which, as highlighted earlier, is integral to social wellbeing.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance "is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and … in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath & Brough 2008, p. 326). It is about balancing work and other aspects of life such as family, leisure, or the need to prevent work activities from excessively invading into people's lives (see Lewis, Gambles & Rapoport 2007; Fleetwood 2007). In their concerns about the more demanding nature and difficult work environments (conversion factors), which result in working under pressure and emotional stress, some social workers highlighted the need for effective balance between private and work life (as discussed in one of the sections above). Such balance is instrumental in the achievement of health and overall wellbeing (Hobson, Fahlén & Takács 2011; Hobson 2011). Talking about what would constitute their wellbeing as social workers, Zanele and Nxobile (practising social workers) said the following:

> I think having good life for a social worker is a balance. For instance, working but leaving your work at four o'clock, relaxing at home, doing activities that you love. That is how really balanced a social worker's life should be. Often you are working with people with different issues. At the end of the day, you know what situations people are in. Even if you go home, it can challenge you to switch off. I really think it is important for social workers to make a balance between their career and own life. *(Zanele, practising social worker)*

Good life would be coming home and not to think about work. Just to move on with life, watching television and having coffee without thinking about work. For me that is good life for a social worker, but so far that hasn't happened. Even when I am on leave like right now, I get calls and text messages from work. So, I never get the chance to say okay this is the point where am relaxing, unless I leave the country and switch off my data so that nobody can call me, then maybe I will feel a bit relieved. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Kuseka (practising social worker) stated that:

You have to learn how to separate your personal life from your professional life. Sometimes you go home, you still have cases going around in your head, and you need to learn how to manage that. To say, I am leaving the office now, this is my workspace, I am going home, and this is my family time. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

For some participants, work-life balance depends on the social workers' ability to plan or organise work. Nevertheless, this raises a question of how much choice or agency freedom social workers, as employees, have in striking this balance. As Lewis *et al.* (2007) suggest, people tend to overlook how the nature of the work, workload and managerial practices can constrain individual choice in striking a work-life balance (see also Hobson 2011). Tavengwa makes this point when she said:

I feel safe if I can control my workload to a certain extent. I like planning.There is no way that you can plan in this job because you think that you planned your work and then you are here, Friday 3:45 you hear, 'you will be having a training course for three days next week,' you don't have a choice. That disappoints me a bit. I do not like it… I would like to know and have my things done because that is putting more pressure on me… Yesterday (on weekend) I worked at my house from 11:00 to 6:00 in the evening but I know it is my time and it is my private time… *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

From these views one can discern that work-life balance is "something of value and if achieved will enhance quality of life" among social workers (Hobson *et al.* 2011, p. 170).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is mostly understood as one's ability to make sense of his/her own values, beliefs and feelings and how they flow into practice action (see Chapter 2; Rennie 2004).

However, as it emerges from the data, the concept also speaks of the capacity to maintain professional boundaries as well as emotional management. Being a reflexive practitioner involves both self-concept and reflection (see Chapter 2). As some participants suggest, reflexivity is not only instrumental for effective social work practice but also for the protection of the practitioner and the services users. For example, Nxobile (practising social worker) explained the instrumental role of reflexivity in protecting services users and effective helping by stating that:

> I do not allow my beliefs, values and attitude to get in my work because they will clash with the values of my clients. I rather work from the clients' value system. I should be able to detach myself from my belief and deal with the client. But, it takes more than a module in social work but also a lot of courage to do so. I also go to church, I am a Christian but there are certain Christian things that I believe shouldn't be happening but then now when I see a client who does not believe in them what must I do? I must accommodate the client, from his/her own frame of understanding without bringing in my own values. If I do not do that, I am not truly helping the person. I try very hard to do that but it is not easy to detach myself when dealing with clients. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Kuseka (practising social worker), who is also a Christian, does not believe that her Christian beliefs should interfere with her work. She stated that:

> My faith in God is very strong. It is something that I rely on one hundred percent but...that is just my personal conviction. Professionalism is [also] important for me…individualization, self-determination and confidentiality, all those things are very important [in practice]. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

As I mentioned above, reflexivity goes beyond making sense of one's beliefs and how they might affect practice, to include emotional management (Walker & McLean 2013). For some social workers, emotional management is contingent on one's capacity to maintain professional boundaries. Four of the eight practising social workers highlighted the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. Mary and Tavengwa, for instance, spoke about the importance of not being overly attached to services users. For them, becoming too attached to the service users might result in one being more sympathetic than empathetic, which also results in being stressed.

Part of emotional management is knowing when and how to switch off. Switching off speaks of the social workers' ability to stop thinking about their work encounters and move on with life. As it emerges from the data, switching off is a necessary capability for the wellbeing of emotional labourers like social workers. However, as some social workers suggest, being emotionally reflexive is not an easy task. Nxobile (practising social worker) expressed this. saying:

> Social work is highly emotional. It is difficult to leave those emotions behind. You know with the construction workers, they wear their boots. They wear their overalls and stuff like helmets. When they are done with work say at five o'clock, they just remove their stuff, leave them in a locker and walk home. However, with social workers, you cannot say, okay these are the emotions I went through during the day so let me just remove them and put them in a cabinet and go home. You carry them home, but then it takes experience not to let that affect you at home... *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Tavengwa another practising social worker, explained how emotional management can be a challenge. "Many times," she said,

> I speak to myself and I would say, 'stop thinking about this case now and think about your life and what is nice in your life.' [Social work practice] can overwhelm you [to the extent] that you cannot focus on your family; you cannot focus on anything nice in your life. It is not always easy that you can just do that. [Your mind] is not a button that you can switch on and off... *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Just like Tavengwa, Tsepiso also found emotional management challenging. She could not draw a fine line between her personal life and work. This resulted in her taking home all the emotions from work. Hence, for the protection of social workers, service users and effective helping, Erina (practising social worker) believes that social workers in South Africa should be taught to be reflexive in and through social work education.

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge and skills constitute a necessary capability set for social workers (see Walker & McLean 2013). In order to address the many complex challenges faced by diverse populations, social workers ought to have a strong knowledge and skills base. For instance, in

talking about the importance of having a strong grounding in professional knowledge, some social workers such as Doreen (student) and Kuseka (practising social worker) suggested that in order to be more effective helpers, social workers should be allowed to specialise in their final year of study. According to them, this allows social workers to focus on one practice area, hence attain sufficient knowledge. In a similar vein, a number of social workers highlighted the need to go for postgraduate studies as a way of enhancing their knowledge base or professional growth (see section 5.3.1.1). Such views are in agreement with Trevithick's (2012) assertion that the acquisition of a sound knowledge base enhances the social workers' abilities to understand people and their different situations as well as formulate and negotiate action plans appropriate to each circumstance (see also DuBois & Miley 2014).

Nyakallo, one of the students, showed an appreciation of the importance of certain professional skills and knowledge when she said:

> Social work education helps us to view things differently from how other people view them. For example, people's challenges. I want to grow as a social worker. Growing comes with experience, so now I have to explore how social workers work and how to help address people's challenges. I want to learn more. I want to be able to use social work helping methods as effectively as possible...Lectures should provide knowledge and skills so that people will be able to do well in practice. *(Nyakallo, student)*

Nyakallo believes her ability to do well in practice hinges on her acquisition of professional knowledge and skills. It seems, for her, professional growth entails the proper use of social work helping methods and being an effective helper. As highlighted by Mantso (student), the helping methods include case, group and community work. The acquisition of such knowledge is therefore a necessity.

In addition to that, social workers' knowledge of human diversity is crucial in their helping endeavour. Doreen (student) narrated how social work education, particularly the module on Diversity and Non-discriminatory Practices opened her mind, as a professional. She stated:

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I give social work education credit for the module on Diversity and Non-discriminatory Practices that we did in second year. It opened up my mind so much. I had so many prejudices; I thought white people do not have problems. I was like, what are you talking about, black people have problems, white people have money. That module opened up my mind. *(Doreen, student)*

Apparently, this module did not only equip Doreen with an understanding of human diversity, it also facilitated her open-mindedness. Ideally, with such knowledge and the ability to accept new ideas and opinions, Doreen can work without prejudice. This is one way in which social workers can effect change.

Participants also highlighted other professional skills such as time management, interviewing, communication and problem solving, as crucial tools for effective helping. For instance, on interviewing skills and time management Mantso (student) stated that:

…if I do not have the skills of interviewing…I will not be able to get as much information. I will not be able to help; I will not be able to reflect on feelings or context.

Writing a report in time contributes in one's ability to help other people. You can help as many people as possible. You will not write false information. If you do not manage your time, you will just write things just to be done. *(Mantso, student)*

To some extent, these skills are also in part viewed as valuable life skills. For instance, talking about time management, as a life skill, Bongi stated that:

Having time management or being able to manage my time correctly, having goals, plans and deadlines can help me achieve other goals in life. For example, I was saying I want to do my Master's and study further, if I do not have that goal written down and have not done planning correctly, I might not go back to school. So, I have to put down my things and make sure I do what I said I am going to do. *(Bongi, student)*

Similarly, Buang (student) spoke about communication skills, saying, "If you cannot communicate with people then I do not think you can have good life because having support requires you to be good at communicating."

Also of importance is the social workers' capability to integrate knowledge and skills (theory and practice) in practice. This is why Trevithick (2012) defines intervention as knowledge and skills in action.

Values and principles

As Vaughan and Walker (2012) clearly state, values are essential to an individual's capability set because values shape one's valued functionings. The social workers that I interviewed confirmed this point. A majority of them expressed an appreciation of how significant professional values are in guiding their practice as social workers. It is in this regard that they highlighted the importance of respect, confidentiality, service, human dignity and integrity in advancing their mission as social workers (see Chapters 1 and 3).

Other than pointing to the professional values, the social workers also highlighted the importance of their own personal values. These included respect, being honest and being trustworthy. Ten of the participants suggested that their personal values ought to be in alignment with professional ideals. For instance, Khauhelo (student) stated:

> …we were taught about ethics, they were not only directed to the client *per se* but also to you as an individual - how to conduct yourself. Even if it's not with your clients but with other people as well, so I would say ethics, they were directed more on me both professionally and personally. *(Khauhelo, student)*

5.5.1 Juxtaposing professional wellbeing capabilities with public-good professional capabilities

In this section, I contrast my professional wellbeing capabilities list with the public-good professional capabilities list as advanced by Walker and McLean (2013) (see Chapter 2). The comparison points to some of the specificities of professional wellbeing for social workers

that are not captured in Walker and McLean's more general list that includes several professions and is focused on the public good, not professional wellbeing *per se*. The table below shows the two lists of capabilities.

Table 10: Professional wellbeing and public-good professional capabilities

My professional wellbeing capabilities	Walker and McLean's public-good professional capabilities
Affiliation	Affiliation
Adaptation	Resilience
Self-care	Informed vision
Work-life balance	Assurance and confidence
Reflexivity	Emotions
Knowledge and skills	Knowledge and skills
Values and principles	Integrity
	Social and collective struggle

At a glance, more differences than similarities can be drawn from the above capabilities lists; but, they certainly overlap in several respects. The two lists do not conflict. Their differences are a result of the different purposes of our studies. Whilst Walker and McLean focus on the general public-good outcomes, my work fits in the same broad discussion but tends to be more specific about the value of professional wellbeing in the advancement of public-good services, particularly by social workers. My study makes it clear that in order to achieve the public-good outcomes or social transformation as set out by Walker and McLean, there is a need to advance professional wellbeing.

One can also note that there are some elements of wellbeing in Walker and McLean's list. Hence, some parallels can be drawn between our lists. For instance, in their broader focus on the public good, the two scholars flagged the importance of resilience. In my study resilience

was spoken of more as an offshoot/outcome from being adaptable. For professional wellbeing achievement, one needs more than resilience. In fact, resilience precedes adaptation.

Similarly, integrity emerged as an essential capability for public-good professionalism. In my list, however, integrity is an aspect of values and principles. In Walker and McLean's case, integrity has to do with one acting ethically, being responsible and being accountable to communities and colleagues. My capability of values and principles goes beyond professional values to also include personal values, together with the importance of having them in alignment in order to achieve professional wellbeing.

Where Walker and McLean talk about emotions, I talk about reflexivity. In my study reflexivity goes beyond emotions and emotional management or narrative imagination to include the need for introspection. One should be able to interrogate his/her personal values, beliefs and question how these affect not only professional actions but private actions as well. Hence, reflexivity involves self-concept and an understanding of what roles one should play as a professional and private individual. As a professional, one should be able to draw and maintain healthy boundaries, distinguishing empathy and sympathy and knowing when to switch off. Being able to do this benefits both the service users and the professional self.

We also share the same capabilities of affiliation and knowledge and skills. However, whilst Walker and McLean emphasise the importance of human skills and a firm grounding in professional or academic knowledge, this study shows that professional wellbeing requires more than that, to include certain life skills such as time management, problem solving and communication. Nevertheless, in comparison with Walker and McLean's list, my professional wellbeing capabilities are narrowly defined and do not include 'informed vision' or 'social and collective struggle.' This difference can be explained by the fact that a capability list has a normative element and that it can only express what people value. Other capabilities such as

assurance and confidence are all encompassed in the views on helping as a valuable functioning. Overall, these similarities or overlapping areas support the importance of the capabilities I have identified.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the social workers' different reasons or motivations for entering the social work profession. I showed that social workers, on the whole, had both agency freedom and achievement; that they had an opportunity to choose and pursue social work as their preferred profession. I followed this with a discussion of the aspirations and plural functionings that social workers value for their wellbeing achievement. However, it emerged that there are some tensions and synergies in the achievement of these aspirations and valued functionings. Those tensions and synergies point to the different conversion factors, which constrain or enable wellbeing achievement among social workers, respectively (see Chapter 6). However, in delineating how student and practising social workers define professional wellbeing (and the critical role that social work education should play in advancing it as set out in coming chapters), my analysis goes beyond agency freedom and valued functionings to include the various, necessary opportunities or freedoms (capabilities) that underpin those valued functionings (see Chapter 3). Therefore, the chapter ends with the presentation of a list of seven professional wellbeing capabilities (namely: affiliation, adaptation, self-care, work-life balance, reflexivity, knowledge and skills, and values and principles), and how they speak to the public-good professional capabilities identified by Walker and McLean (2013). In the coming chapter, the focus turns to the extent to which social workers are able to realise these capabilities, together with a more detailed analysis of conversion factors influencing the wellbeing of social workers.

CHAPTER 6
PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING ACHIEVEMENTS AND FREEDOMS

A good human life is among other things a life of freedom (Sen 1999, p. 70).

The 'good life' is partly a life of genuine choice and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life (Sen 1996, p. 59).

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the social workers' views on what would constitute professional wellbeing in an ideal world. This chapter expands on that and analyses the extent to which social workers are able to realise their valued capabilities and functionings (highlighted in Chapter 5) in the real world, considering the various personal-professional wellbeing tensions and synergies. The first section is a brief discussion on the social workers' achieved functionings. I follow this up with an analysis of the social workers' wellbeing freedoms. Lastly, I map out the different conversion factors (personal, social, environmental/organisational and professional) which enable or constrain the social workers' ability to convert resources into capabilities and capabilities into functionings. Tied to this is a discussion on the importance of identifying resource thresholds for professional wellbeing achievement. This chapter, therefore, addresses my first research objective which seeks to examine what social workers and prospective social workers regard as their wellbeing by shedding light on the realities of professional wellbeing achievement.

6.2 The social workers' professional wellbeing achievements

The primary feature of an individual's wellbeing is the functioning he/she achieves, that is, one's ability to realise valuable functionings (see Chapter 3; Nussbaum 2011). However, as Alkire (2005a, p. 120) asserts, in assessing human wellbeing a focus on achieved functionings alone, is incomplete. A valid assessment incorporates "the freedom [individuals have] to decide which path to take, or the freedom to bring about achievements one considers

to be valuable, whether or not these achievements are connected to one's own well-being or not" (see also Sen 1996, 1999). In this spirit, I start this chapter by presenting the social workers' achieved functionings. I follow this up with an analysis of the extent to which social workers had the freedom to realise their valued capabilities (as identified in Chapter 5). This analysis reflects the extent to which social workers have the freedom to lead the lives they have reason to value (see Alkire 2002). Table 11 below is a summary of the social workers' achieved functionings. The table lists, describes the valued capabilities identified and then indicates the number of students and practising social workers who had been able to achieve the corresponding functioning.

Table 11: Social workers' achieved functionings

Achieved functioning	Description	Number of students who achieved the functioning out of 10	Number of practising social workers who achieved the functioning out of 8
Helping people (in a very minimal sense)	Helping people through casework, statutory work, counselling, foster care services , childcare services, mediating between clients and doctors, adoption services	10	8
Job fulfilment (by adapting their preferences)	Owning non-governmental organisations, graduating with a MSW	3	4
Professional growth		0	0
Personal growth	Got jobs, independence, marriage, and having families	0	8
Material achievements	Financial security, bought a personal car	0	2

My findings suggest that regardless of their different practicing contexts, all social workers have objectively achieved the functioning of helping in some way (see Chapter 4). As

shown in Chapter 4, of the eight practising social workers, six work within non-governmental organisations, one works with the Department of Social Development and the eighth one works for a private hospital. Similarly, ten students have achieved helping through field practicum experience. During their field practica, some students worked in non-governmental organisations where they offered foster care services. Others practiced within the military and special schools (see Chapter 4), intervening with children, members of the army and children with learning disabilities. In all these contexts, social workers undertake various roles and responsibilities. These include, counselling, statutory work and adoptions, among other duties. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, wellbeing achievement is also about satisfaction - the extent to which one finds his/her achievements worthwhile.

My findings suggest that this is not the case with the majority of the social workers. Due to the various work-related challenges, as well as various tensions between the achievements of their valued functionings, many social workers are not content with the extent to which they can help (see Chapter 5). They do not have the freedom to achieve the functioning to the extent that they value. Consequently, they sought to adapt their preferences (see some examples in Chapter 5). Restrictions on their helping achievements have, largely, to do with different opportunity unfreedoms (as will be shown in the next section). For instance, among other factors, work environment issues such as working with limited access and use of resources constrain their capacity to help. The social workers, therefore, find themselves with very limited choice but to be content with whatever positive change they make, no matter how small. This is where their sense of job fulfilment comes from, albeit, limited.

Other than the work environment issues, the majority of the student social workers indicated that their capacity to help was also restricted by the mismatch they found between theory and practice. They felt that the two were incompatible, yet, it is the integration of the two which makes good practice (I discuss this in detail in Chapter 7).

None of the social workers (both student and practising) reported having achieved professional growth. Professional growth, as I highlighted in the previous chapter, speaks of being promoted, owning non-governmental organisations or proceeding to postgraduate education. Lack of achievement of this functioning, on the part of the practising social workers, also has to do with both work-related and personal unfreedoms. Mary and Pamela (practising social workers), for instance, stated that although they wanted to study further and get into private practice, they could not do this because of financial constraints. This is a result of the poor salaries they get as social workers.

Only two practising social workers confirmed the attainment of material achievements (Nxobile and Tavengwa). None of the students confirmed having attained material achievements. Views from the practising social workers suggest that without a second source of income, material achievements in terms of having nice [new] cars, houses and owning businesses can be impossible, especially if one is relying on a social work salary. This buttresses the tension between being a social worker and huge material achievements. Both Nxobile and Tavengwa (practising social workers) talked about how their husbands' financial contributions aided their material achievements as well as financial stability. For instance, Tavengwa (practising social worker) stated that:

> I got married… and that made everything different. [Previously] I did not have financial security. It was not there. [Now] I am not worried about financial security *per se*. I think single parents who depend on a social work salary are struggling. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Likewise, Nxobile (practising social worker) spoke about how her husband who is an accountant offers her significant support in achieving material goals or leading a better life. She said:

> I used to think that should [if] I work I will be able to take care of myself and my son, whether I have a husband or not, but then with the kind of salaries we get then it's not possible… *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

The majority of practising social workers have achieved personal growth in some way. For instance, they are family women, married and have children. Nevertheless, we cannot judge their wellbeing achievement solely on the basis of these achievements. As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, a full account of wellbeing achievement goes beyond the issue of achieved functionings to include an analysis of the individuals' underlying wellbeing freedoms (see Chapter 3). I take this discussion further in the next section, exploring whether social workers have control over the way in which they can achieve their valued capabilities and the resultant functionings.

6.2.1 Beyond achieved functionings: An analysis of social workers' wellbeing freedoms

This section considers the extent to which social workers are free to achieve the lives they value in the ways they desire. It interrogates the social workers' wellbeing freedoms, focusing on the identified, valued professional wellbeing capabilities (see Chapter 5). I begin with affiliation.

6.2.1.1 Affiliation

My participants identified the capability of *affiliation* for both its intrinsic and instrumental value in the achievement of professional wellbeing (particularly the achievement of healthy lives and effective helping, see section 5.4). Affiliation, as I noted in the previous chapter, involves building relationships (both professional and private). Such relationships can be classified into obligatory and self-directed affiliations (see Sugrue & Solbrekke 2014). Notwithstanding this distinction, the questions I am grappling with now are whether social workers are free to realise the capability of affiliation. If so, how, and what are the implications for the achievement of their valued functionings? The findings suggest that although social workers are capable of building private and professional affiliations such as friendships or

having families, supervisor-supervisee relationships and client-helper relations, a number of factors determine the extent to which they can enjoy this freedom. Factors such as the work environment, organisational culture and the professional principles determine the nature and extent of their affiliations. For instance, in the work environment are issues such as lack of resources, work demand, high caseload, and time constraints. A combination of all these results in social workers working under intense pressure, hence limiting their freedom to fully build and utilise relationships. Their capability for affiliation as well as their freedom of affiliation is in fact constrained by these factors, as will be evidenced in this discussion.

Despite the idea that having a family, friends or support system can be refreshing for social workers and, hence, contribute to effective helping functioning at work (see Chapter 5), the findings suggest that sometimes social workers do not have adequate time to enjoy those relationships to the extent they require due to high work demands and resultant time constraints. Tavengwa (practising social worker) evidenced this when she said:

> [The work] can overwhelm you [to the extent] that you cannot focus on your family. You cannot focus on anything nice in your life. It is not always easy that you can just do that. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Buang (student) explained how the demands of the work during field practica restricted her time to socialise. She said:

> I am a social person. When I was doing my placement at a school, my social life was limited. For instance, I wanted to go out and socialize with other people [but I could not]. *(Buang, student)*

Likewise, speaking about time constraints and its impact on the helping relationships, Tavengwa (practising social worker) stated that:

> There is not enough time in a day, to really to sit down with the client who is broken. I promise you I do not know if we are doing crisis management all the time. We are [always] referring clients and many of them do not ever get 'Don't go' …But these are broken people… it is just not possible to come and sit with them, saying let me hear your heart… it is not possible. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Other than pointing to the issue of high work demands and time constraints, all these excerpts point to the complexity of the social workers' identity as another source of their relational unfreedoms. For instance, other than being social workers, they are parents, friends or marriage partners and each of these identities has its own demands and type of affiliations. However, sometimes the space and times during which one can enjoy the inherent affiliations are in conflict.

The demands of the work, together with time constraints, not only limit the social workers' freedom to engage in their private or helping relationships, they also affect the amount of supportive supervision they get from their superiors (see Chapter 5, also Whitaker, Weismiller & Clark 2006). Lack of supportive supervision negatively affects how social workers manage their work as helpers. In fact, as Calitz, Roux and Strydom (2014) suggest, supportive supervision correlates very well with higher job satisfaction. Yet, only a few participants have confirmed benefiting from supportive supervision and the related capability for affiliation in the work context. One of them, Kuseka, stated that:

> One of the opportunities we have for our wellbeing is regular [supportive] supervision. We do individual and group supervision. That helps a lot because from those we learn various skills, techniques on how to cope, coping strategies and self-care strategies. We are not alone. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

However, for the majority of social workers (particularly practising social workers) this opportunity (supportive supervision) is significantly lacking in practice. It is constrained. Talking about this issue, Steven, one of the lecturers, explained that despite social workers' dire need for supportive supervision, due to work pressures, the only thing their supervisors can offer is administrative supervision[26]. He explained:

> The problem that we are experiencing currently is the fact that, both newly appointed and more senior social workers do not receive proper, regular [supportive] supervision. I think that is really contributing to burnout among social workers, considering the type of work that they do. They should receive continuous supportive supervision. Unfortunately, they do not always get

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[26] Administrative supervision in social work involves carrying out managerial functions such as assigning, delegating, monitoring and evaluating work, at an organization (Kadushin & Harkness 2014).

that. One of the reasons for that is supervisors have their own caseloads meaning that they have their own clients and they have to ensure that they do that part of the job, [whilst] supervision is also part of their job. It does not always happen [because] there is not enough time for good practice supervision. So, what sometimes happens is that supervision just becomes administrative, or a matter of 'you should know this'. For instance, I pop into your office and ask you something and that is supervision. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Frank, another lecturer, reiterated the same point in saying:

[Social workers] do not have access to supportive supervision, although there are supervisors. It is unfortunate that even supervisors do not have time to supervise. Some of our students experienced that challenge… *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

In the same vein, Georgina (practising social worker) expressed dissatisfaction with the type

of supervision she is getting, saying:

…the big bosses [supervisors] only want work to be done. They just want the results. Unfortunately, I think, for them being a boss is about that. But, I don't think so, especially when people working under you do not have anyone to go to and say, I don't know this, I am so tired, I am so fed up… You want somebody to boost you… *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

This extract also points to the fact that social workers have limited choice or decision-making

capabilities regarding the nature of their professional relationships. The organisational culture,

high caseloads as well as managerial style can prescribe the nature of their working

relationships and this sometimes undermines the capability for affiliation. [27]

Expanding on the issue, Georgina also indicated that in some instances poor supervision

infringes on their freedom of affiliation as private individuals. Narrating her experience, she

said that she and her colleagues used to get together on Friday nights as a way of releasing

pressure. However, for unknown reasons their supervisor advised against that. She said:

…we did that once or twice a year after work, on Friday night. We took our husbands with us and have a braai. We chat, laugh and have funny but now [supervisors] have an issue with that. We are not supposed to have relationships with our co-workers after work. [Yet] what I do at my spare time should be my problem. How [then] could they come and tell us all that they [supervisors] are not happy with that. We cannot go for a party or a braai. I do not mean partying as in drinking and dancing or something like that… I mean building relations makes us feel more like a family at home. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

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[27] Organizational culture is "the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand organizational functioning and thus provide them norms for behaviour in the organization" (Deshpande & Webster 1989).

This restriction on peer affiliation undermines engagement, information sharing and professional growth (see Calitz *et al.* 2014).

Similarly, the SACSSP Code of Conduct suggests the type of relationships social workers should have with service users and colleagues.[28] Such guidelines of course have a positive impact on how social workers function. They seek to advance healthy relationships and effectiveness (I discuss the enabling effect of values in section 6.3.4). For instance, the SACSSP highlights the importance of having truthful, understandable and transparent relationships with service users. In fostering these ideas, many organisations do not allow their social workers to share contacts (private cellphone numbers, etc.) with service users.

However, Mary (a practising social worker at a private hospital) suggested that sharing contacts with services users is not always a bad thing and in fact is sometimes a necessity. She said:

> My supervisor is very strict about giving clients our telephone numbers, but sometimes we have to do that. For example, we have some clients from Lesotho, who cannot speak English or Afrikaans. They sometimes have to call me, for instance if they want to tell the doctor about the child's condition after being discharged. They sometimes call saying… please tell the doctor the child is doing so and so or please tell the doctor what must I do. *(Mary, practising social worker)*

All these views suggest that, in general, social workers have the capacity to form relationships at both personal and professional levels; however, their freedom to enjoy those affiliations is constrained by a number of factors. These include working in resource-constrained environments, working with heavy caseloads and poor supervision among other factors, all of which require change at policy and organizational level. This, notwithstanding the social workers' conceptualization of affiliation does not include getting together and lobbying for change. The social workers' limited freedom of affiliation, as it emerges from the data, in turn

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[28] The code of conduct is "a list of statements that describes the standards of professional conduct required of social workers when carrying out their daily activities (SACSSP Code of Conduct,n.d)
Accessed at https://www.sacssp.co.za/Professionals/Conduct.

affects their capacity to help and grow as social workers. With greater choice on the nature and level of their relationships than the social workers currently have, the data suggests that the social workers would be able to grow and help more effectively.

6.2.1.2 Adaptation

Adaptation emerged as an instrumental capability for healthy lives, effective helping and professional growth among social workers (see section 5.5). The social workers' capacity for, and ways of, adaptation depend on various factors. For instance, the intense and ever-changing work environments, organisational or work expectations, as well as welfare settings make adaptation a necessity for social workers. These factors determine how social workers adapt. As Mintzberg and Westley (1992) point out, sometimes, through experience and exposure to the challenging work environment, workers engage in emergent learning. Emergent, as opposed to deliberate learning, involves picking up new ways of thinking and behaving as ways of responding to the pressures of the environment. This same experience compelled some of my participants to realise the importance of being patient and staying positive. Part of their adaptation was developing an understanding that helping is not only about "making a difference in everybody's life, even one case matters" (Tavengwa, practising social worker). This adaption of expectations ultimately contributes to their sense of job fulfilment.

Speaking of the changing organisational or work expectations, Tavengwa (practising social worker) said she had to acquire basic computer skills which were not available when she started working as a social worker. Very much in line with the changes in organisational or professional expectations are the shifts which have been taking place within the South African welfare system (see Chapter 1). Georgina, one of the social workers, alluded to the welfare changes and the need to adapt when she said:

> The things in 2017 is (sic) not the same as in 1976, and you cannot stay behind (see section 5.5 for the whole extract). *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

Welfare changes are reflections or responses to economic, social, and political forces (see Chapter 1). In South Africa, following the extended periods of colonialism and apartheid which consisted of unjust and racially biased welfare service provision, the transformation or democratisation of the welfare system past 1994 introduced some major changes in the welfare sector (Gray 2006; Patel 2003; see also Chapter 1). The changes involved the adoption of the social developmental paradigm in South African social work. The paradigm, as I discussed in the introductory chapter, sought to ensure the welfare of the poor by way of creating a more caring and just society. As a result, developmental welfare broadened both the welfare provision to previously excluded groups (the black population) and the occupational base for offering social welfare services (Gray & Lombard 2008). Poverty alleviation became the major focus of social work (see Chapter 1 for the poverty statistics in South Africa; Gray & Lombard 2008; Gray 2006). In a way, these changes increased the number of service users, whilst complicating service provision. These changes required social workers to adapt to the new agenda of poverty alleviation. Hence, Whitaker and colleagues' (2006) observation that nowadays social workers are confronted with an increase in paperwork, severity of client problems and high caseloads, holds. Tavengwa (practising social worker) captured this when she said:

> [You have to adapt]…the world is getting worse. Circumstances are getting worse. The cases are getting more intense. In the past it was like one in every month but now it can be one every week or two every week, it is so intense. It is overwhelming and it helps to have proper organization with [supportive] structures in place where you can feel safe and have [adequate] resources. At least you can be comforted from that way. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Other than pointing to the complications in service provision, this excerpt suggests that adaptation for Tavengwa is not an individual endeavour. It is not solely dependent on the individual's choice; organisational factors such as support structures and resource availability are determinants as well. Nevertheless, given the environment in which social workers function as well as these changes, adaptation becomes more of a necessity than an act of choice for

social workers. Ironically, adaptation, as presented by the social workers does not mean taking full control of one's situation in a much-organized manner.

My findings suggest that only a few social workers have managed to adapt. Four practising social workers (Tavengwa, Georgina, Pamela and Erina), who have longer practice experience, described how they have adapted. As stated in Chapter 5 (section 5.5), Pamela (practising social worker) mentioned being positive and hopeful as necessary attitudes towards her adaption. In describing how she adapted, Pamela stated that:

> Although practicing came with some challenges, it was a good experience. I grew a lot. I have become a better person…There were challenges here and there, for instance [sometimes] you would feel like you are not getting enough support from your superiors, but you have to make the best out of the available opportunities, even if the conditions are not favourable… *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Erina (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> There has been times it [practicing] was hard. It was stressful. It was hard work. I [was] constantly working with difficult cases, but I have learned. I have learned a lot from it, as person. I think my experiences had some positives impacts as well and I cannot say I am not enjoying my work… *(Erina, practising social worker)*

Likewise, Tavengwa (practising social worker) expressed how her work experience enables her to adapt. She said:

> Work experience makes you look at certain situations a little bit different from the young and new social workers… You cannot expect a young social worker to know all these things [work challenges], so I am grateful for my experience, yes, I am grateful. It makes my work easier. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Lastly, Georgina (practising social worker) stated that one of the things which enabled her to adapt was her zeal to learn new things. These social workers expressed contentment with their helping functioning. Their views point to the importance of practice experience in adapting.

6.2.1.3 *Self-care*

Social workers identified self-care as an instrumental capability for their healthy lives. In stressing the importance of self-care, the social workers understood that their [personal]

wellness was the basis for effective helping. Wellness speaks of emotional and physical health. However, the findings also suggest that the social workers' freedom for self-care is constrained, due to factors such as limited knowledge of how one can take care of him/herself as a social worker, intense work pressure and time constraints. Both practising and student social workers acknowledged lack of knowledge as one of the hindrances to self-care. They suggest that despite them being aware of the importance of self-care, they cannot really do it because of this lack of knowledge. Those who engage in it do so mostly by trial and error. Thirteen (13) participants confirmed this (six students plus seven practising social workers). One of them, Nxobile (practising social worker), stated that:

> I remember this other time we had a training on self-care and the trainer asked, what do you do as a measure of self-care? No one could confidently answer that. Only one person tried to guess and said I just take my dog and walk. In my organization, we were about 20 social workers, but only one person could try to answer that. Since then, I started to ask myself what I should do to take care of myself… so in our profession we are busy taking care of other people but we do not know how to take care of ourselves. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Khauhelo (student) mentioned that:

> We are taught on how to attend to clients, clients, clients, but there is what we call self-care. Knowing how to take care of yourself is important… in order to offer good services. *(Khauhelo, student)*

Also, as I highlighted in the previous chapter (section 5.5), social workers emphasised the importance of self-care in relation to the challenges they faced in practice, such as heavy workloads. Heavy caseloads or work pressure, for some, consumes the time they otherwise would have available for taking care of themselves. Buang, one of the students, agreed with this point. She recounted that during her internship period the workload was too much, to the extent that she could not find time to take care of herself. She stated that:

> The demands of the work, the workload was overwhelming. There was no time to take care of myself… *(Buang, student)* (see also section 5.4)

In addition, as Georgina (practising social worker) suggests, poor supervision can also restrict the social workers' opportunity for self-care. She said:

> It is difficult, for example, if I say to my supervisor I cannot cope with this case and I am feeling like today I have got a migraine. I feel that I cannot focus today because of my headache; they will turn against you. You cannot tell them that… They will say, oh no she is too old, she cannot work. So, you keep everything to yourself. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

Thus, even those who find value in self-care cannot engage in it due to work circumstances. Yet, in the context of social work, if realised, self-care becomes a fertile functioning (see Nussbaum 2011; Wolff & De-Shalit 2013).[29] It can lead to heathy lives and effective helping among social workers (see extracts in section 5.3.1.1 for support of this argument). This capability resonates with work-life balance.

6.2.1.4 *Work-life balance*

Just like the capability of self-care, work-life balance has been identified as an instrumental opportunity for the realisation of professional wellbeing in the sense that if one can have leisure, family time or free time, he/she is more likely to be an effective helper. Mary (practising social worker) evidenced this when she said:

> If I go for a break or leave, I come back refreshed and that way I can help them effectively but if I do not take a leave for long sometimes I feel like I am stuck or I am sick. (*Mary, practising social worker*)

Doreen (student) similarly stated that:

> Having family time can be refreshing and one can work better when he/she goes back to work. One will not have to think like, I have backlog to work on at home. *(Doreen, student)*

As I highlighted in section 5.5 of Chapter 5, the social workers indicated the importance of work-life balance as a response to their concerns about the demanding nature of their work and difficult work environments. These same factors constrain their freedom for a balanced life. None of the social workers interviewed in this study reported having a balanced life despite the fact that this was a valued capability. This suggests that social workers' choice regarding work-life balance is largely constrained. Some of the participants also reported that as the poorly

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[29] A fertile functioning (or capability) is one that tends to promote other related capabilities (Nussbaum 2011, p. 44).

funded organisations in the welfare sector strive to secure funds from government, specific targets need to be met. In trying to meet these targets, social workers end up taking their work home or working long hours. This does not only affect how they perform as helpers, but also consumes their time for professional growth. Nxobile (practising social worker), explained this issue saying:

> There are very high caseloads, unrealistic caseloads. [Although] we cannot handle them but then at the end of the day, we work for an NGO and there are targets to be reached. Should funders give us money, we have to reach the target. So, it ends up being about finances… we end up doing everything to be funded next year. We have to impress the funder. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

This explains why some social workers feel neglected in their organisations. For instance, Georgina (practising social worker) stated that,

> …for the bosses it is more about getting the work done and the results. It is not about my wellbeing. They are task oriented and not people oriented. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

6.2.1.5 *Reflexivity*

The majority of the social workers highlighted the importance of reflexivity in advancing effective helping. For them, reflexivity is mainly about emotional management and aligning values than it is about pursuing a longer-term vision. Social workers mentioned the significance of reflexivity in ensuring their healthy lives. One of them, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that:

> You need to be reflexive otherwise that [lack of it] will affect you or there will be some imbalances in your life. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Speaking about the same issue, Tavengwa (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> It [reflexivity] is not that easy because at night, when it is quiet and when everybody goes to sleep, you start thinking about what the answers or solutions to the clients' problems. What is the solution?...As social workers we have this personality, we want to do everything for everyone. But, the sooner you know what exactly your priority is, the better. Many times, I speak to myself and I would say stop thinking about this case now…It can overwhelm you. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Nxobile (practising social worker) stated that:

> As a social worker you cannot say, okay these are the emotions I went through during the day so let me just remove them, put them in a cabinet, and go home. So, you carry them home, but then it takes experience to not let that affect you… *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

As it emerges from the data, a majority of the social workers also appreciate how they can separate personal values from work. Speaking on that issue, Nxobile (practising social worker) said:

> I usually do not allow my values and beliefs to get in my work because they will clash with the values of my clients… I rather work from the clients' value system. I detach myself from my belief and deal with the client… *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

Speaking of the same issue, Kuseka (practising social worker) stated that her personal beliefs and values are merely her own personal convictions and she treats them as such.

Lastly, all the social workers except for Erina confirmed that they are struggling with emotional management. What differentiates Erina from the rest of the social workers is that she took classes on reflexivity as part of her post-qualification experience. According to practising social workers, their biggest challenge is switching off. Their failure to switch off leads to emotional stress, which also negatively affects the way they help. Their capability of reflexivity is limited, due to their lack of knowledge. Hence, as Erina (practising social worker) suggests, other than learning through experience, attaining formal education on reflexivity might be of help for all social workers.

6.2.1.6 *Knowledge and skills*

Both professional knowledge and life skills have an instrumental value in the achievement of professional wellbeing. Professional knowledge and skills can serve as important tools in the achievement of helping as a functioning. One of the lecturers, Theresa, evidenced this when she said:

> …if you do not have that knowledge you cannot help other people. We find that a lot of times people who do voluntary work say we do social work. They do welfare work but they do not do social work. Only a professional social worker can do social work because we teach them for four years those skills that they need to have and those intervention models that they need to use to help others. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, life skills serve as protective tools for social workers' health. In South Africa, social work education is generic; hence, students acquire generic practice knowledge. This determines the nature and type of knowledge and skills that social workers should acquire. However, some participants suggested that having a specialised type of education could go a long way in ensuring effective helping and professional growth. Doreen (student), for instance, stated that:

> If we were specializing…to say no I am going to do child care and protection, I am going into forensic social work or whatever… it wouldn't be that I have to be doing this and this and this and instead I will be focusing on this one thing and will work effectively. *(Doreen, student)*

Similarly, Kuseka (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> I think that there needs to be more specialization in social work. So for example, it is currently generic. Yet, social work is such a wide field. There should be an option for you to specialize, maybe in your forth year… to say, I am going into old age care [gerontology], I am going into statutory work; I am going for youth care… It is just like having a general doctor and specialized doctor. A general doctor cannot do everything, cannot be a cancer doctor or a heart doctor, I think specialization is very important. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

These opinions notwithstanding, the views obtained from lecturers suggest that specialisation comes after the basic degree. Of importance, however, is the social workers' capacity to implement the acquired knowledge in practice (in the way they deem fit). The social workers' capacity to implement attained knowledge and skills in practice depends on a number of factors. For instance, with limited time in practice, one cannot implement the professional knowledge attained through social work education (I discuss this in Chapter 7).

6.2.1.7 *Values and principles*

Social workers identified values and principles as important tools for effective helping. These values and principles relate to individual relationships with clients. They, particularly professional ones, are prescribed by the professional council (SACSSP). There is a professional Code of Ethics, which, as Elisma (lecturer) stated, specifies how social workers should conduct themselves as professionals. It clearly states the values and principles which should be upheld by social workers (see Chapter 1). Hence, social workers do not have a choice on which value

or principle to uphold or not. Speaking on this issue, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that:

> [In this profession] respect takes priority, and they [SACSSP] also talk about the importance of human dignity and rights, clients have rights. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

In the same vein, Erina (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> You should respect each person for who he/she is…In our work you cannot just go and grab children. You need to work with people with a lot of empathy and respect…no matter how difficult it might be… *(Erina, practising social worker)*

The values and principles do not only guide the social workers in practice, as I will discuss in the next section, but they can also be understood as conversion factors (enablers) when it comes to helping.

The findings also suggest that although social workers have their own personal values, these are usually in alignment with the professional values and principles. More than half of the participants indicated that their personal and professional values are aligned. Theresa, one of the lecturers, evidenced the importance of this alignment when she said:

> I tell the students that those values [professional] must become part of yourself. And you must learn them. We can apply them as social workers but also in our private lives… they can't forget ethical values and principles. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, one of the practising social workers, Erina, spoke about this alignment saying:

> I believe in respect. In our job, that is the way of dealing with people… In this job, it is constant conflicts and you have to stay calm and respectful. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

Thus far this section has largely alluded to the various factors that limit the social workers' wellbeing freedoms. I take this discussion further by highlighting the various constraining and enabling factors for professional wellbeing achievements.

6.3 Enablers of and constraints on professional wellbeing achievements

Another core dimension of the capability approach in the analysis of wellbeing achievements and freedoms is that people have different capacities to convert resources into

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functionings. There are different elements (conversion factors) which determine the extent to which one can transform a resource (in this instance, a social work degree) into capabilities, and capabilities into functionings. A focus on conversion factors provides "a mechanism for understanding what is needed to realise potential outcomes (functionings)," whilst giving an account of individual differences (Wilson-Strydom 2011, p. 412). Many scholars often categorise these factors into personal, social and environmental factors (see Robeyns 2011, 2017; also Chapter 3). In this thesis, I retain the idea of personal and social/structural factors; I speak of the environmental issues under organisational factors and proceed to the discussion of professional factors. This classification captures the specificity of what I am discussing. I present these, as they emerged from all participants, in the table below.

Table 12: Conversion factors for professional wellbeing achievements and freedoms (all participant groups)

Type of conversion factors	Conversion factors	Number of participants for whom the conversion factor was relevant
Personal factors	Work experience (number of years in practice) Young/new social workers vs old social workers	18
	Nationality	2
Structural factors	Poverty and inequality	18

Organisational or institutional factors	Organisational/institutional culture: norms and beliefs; supervisory style; also benefits and allowances
	  Practicing context: NGO/ Private institutions vs DSD
	  Work environment: resources availability; access to resources
		18

The collective features of the profession	Social welfare policies, examples include: White Paper of 1997, Service Delivery Model for Developmental Welfare Services of 2006, the Code of Ethics) Professional values and principles	18

6.3.1 Personal factors

As it emerges from the data, personal factors such as *work experience* and *nationality* determine the extent to which social workers can convert capabilities into professional wellbeing functionings. Taking for instance the conversion of professional *knowledge and skills* into the functioning of helping, the findings suggest that the more experienced one is, the more capacitated he/she is in converting this capability into a valued functioning. In fact, the social workers' capacity to effectively implement knowledge and skills in practice and yield different capabilities significantly depends on one's practice exposure. All participant groups attest to that. They emphasised the point that competence grows with experience and more exposure. It is in this light that seven out of ten students recommended more practicum hours or practice exposure. Speaking of this issue, Tavengwa (practising social worker) shared the experience of one new social work graduate who with all the professional knowledge and skills could not offer help due to lack of experience, saying:

> We have Lorraine, here who was the best student at Mopane University. She is here with us, a wonderful and intelligent social worker. I was here when she started crying… You might be the most intelligent social worker getting the highest scores [in University] but the practical living part of being a social worker is very different from the book. Not even six months practical can really prepare you for what's coming because when you are here[for practicum] you get 8 or so caseload yet when you are done [in real practice] you will have 120 files and they are your responsibility baaaaam, it's overwhelming… the more experienced you are the better. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

In addition, views from participants, particularly practising and student social workers, suggest that the new and old social workers' level of reflexivity and adaptation differ significantly, according to practice exposure. Speaking about reflexivity, Tavengwa (practising social worker), again, explained that with experience one develops a sense of self-concept and begins to appreciate his or her boundaries in practice. She said:

> People won't value knowing the boundaries and taking care of one's self at the beginning but with experience and more clients looking up to you, you become a 'Tannie' and the 'Tannie' knows (sic)…The more experienced you get, the less stress you allow in your life. Your boundaries will be clearer. I would love for each new social worker who had the same experience as me to have strict boundaries because they are there to protect us. I have been out

there and I know how it is… The younger ones [new social workers] need to get to the point where they say I know where the boundaries are, I know what I can do and what I can't do because of these years of experience. I feel sorry for them because they have questions like, how do they handle a client and how do I protect myself. You cannot expect a young social worker to know all these things, so I am grateful for my experience, yes I am grateful. It makes it a bit easier I think. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

My findings also suggest that work experience enables the capability for adaptation. That is, the social workers' capacity to cope with the work environment depends on their practice exposure (see also section 6.2.1).

Unlike work experience, which emerged as an enabler for effective helping, the issue of nationality emerged as one of the constraints for the functionings of helping and professional growth, particularly for immigrants. The liberty or extent to which one can help or grow as a professional when he/she is in a foreign country significantly differs from that of a national or local social worker. Two participants raised this. Nevertheless, tentatively speaking, this might be a bigger issue, considering that South Africa has many migrant workers. Nxobile, one of the practising social workers, explained how being an immigrant limits her opportunity to help or grow as a professional in South Africa, saying:

Another [constraining] issue is being a foreigner here in South Africa. Now the issue is no longer about who can do the job effectively, but it is about where are you from. So, if you are not South African they will just say we don't care for what you have[qualifications], because I have been applying for jobs but I have never been called for an interview. Maybe it is because the first time they see that you are not South African, they think you want to take their opportunities. Maybe they want to develop their own people. I think that puts me off. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

The same view came from one of the lecturers. Other than these personal factors, there are also some structural factors which constrain the social workers' capacity to convert capabilities into functionings.

6.3.2 Structural conditions

Structural conditions such as poverty and inequality significantly influence how social workers convert resources into functionings, particularly professional growth and helping (see

Chapter 1 for the prevalence and significance of poverty and inequality in South Africa). As clearly noted by Woolard and Barberton (1998), the most fundamental challenge confronting South Africa is poverty and inequality reduction. These two issues interfere with South African social workers' efforts at facilitating the social functioning of the disadvantaged individuals and groups with whom they work, especially considering that other socially embedded challenges such as unemployment, poor housing and public health, malnutrition, illiteracy, violence and abuse become rife under such circumstances (see Drower 2002; also Potgieter 1998). Bearing in mind that social workers operate with very limited resources, systemic poverty and its attendant challenges provide a significant constraint to effective helping and professional growth among social workers in South Africa. For instance with more than 500 cases to handle, one will definitely have no time for personal growth.

What one can do for disadvantaged people in a poverty-stricken country such as South Africa and in a developed nation differ. Erina, one of the practising social workers who once practiced in England, spoke of this, saying:

> Heavy caseloads always freak me out because I have never had such a high caseload. In England, you [social worker] have about between 20 and 30 cases, but you work in a team with 20+ social workers. So, it is a big office but, a caseload of 30 was nice and no social worker could go beyond that. [But] look what we have got here, we have a 120+ and that 120 is the average. Some of us have a lot more than that. So, no way that you can feel in control of your own work. It worries me so much …I feel social workers should be giving help but they cannot get to do that because they are sitting with high caseloads and they get new cases every week and often crises. That worries and stresses me…there was a time when social workers had cases of about 800, [imagine] how can you work like that? You never get around it [caseload], it is impossible. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

6.3.3 Organisational factors

Under organisational factors, the practice context emerged as an important conversion factor for social workers. The experiences of those practicing in non-governmental or private organisations have proven to be different from those who work in public institutions or the Department of Social Development (DSD). Their differences extend to resource availability

and the social workers' access and use of resources. Pamela, one of the DSD practising social workers, clearly highlighted this when she said:

> Another challenge is of resources, there is not enough resources and sometimes you have to share offices, like you see the set up here. These are social workers, but you see how we are seated and I think we need conducive offices for our jobs, especially considering the issue of confidentiality. All those things, they do not happen here, they are partially happening. We say confidentiality but when we get to the practical part of it, it is not happening. The last time I saw it is when I was working with the organization, the NGO, not here. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

For Pamela some non-governmental organisations are better resourced than government institutions. Many social workers, particularly those who worked for non-governmental organisations, confirmed this view. One of them, Zanele (practising social worker), stated:

> I think I am very privileged. I have my own office and I can decorate it, as I want. I have a car I can drive every single day and go where I need to go. I really feel enabled in the sense that I can do my job, especially when I compare this with what I hear about DSD. We are very privileged to be in an environment we are here. *(Zanele, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Tavengwa (practising social worker), mentioned that:

> [In the NGO] we have our offices and air conditioners and that is …we each have a laptop, this is not new, but at least it's working …it is important that everyone do his or her job. *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

In some organisations shortages result in selective allocation of resources. This affects social workers' abilities to effectively perform their duties. As the Social Work Task Force (2009) observed, effective frontline professionals depend on a system which provides them with the resources and conditions they need to do their job well. However, only four participants (Naleli, Mary, Tavengwa and Kuseka) expressed satisfaction with their access to workplace resources. The majority of the social workers (students, practising social workers and lecturers) suggested that access to resources is a constrained opportunity for them.

Frank (lecturer) spoke of this issue clearly, saying:

> Most of our social workers do not have enough office space. They do not have the tools of trade. For example, vehicles to go to different places they are supposed to render services, be it telephones or basics such as printers. Those things are very important, and unfortunately, most social workers do not have access to those tools and stuff. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Limited access to available resources also has an impact on professional growth. For instance, Doreen, one of the students, stated that during her field practicum she could not access a vehicle because she was a student social worker. Consequently, her freedom to access and use a car to visit her clients was limited.

However, neither lack of resources nor social workers' limited access to resources is necessarily the organisations' own making. These challenges result from poor funding of social welfare services by the government. The Department of Social Development is responsible for the funding of social welfare services by both public institutions and registered not-for-profit organisations (DSD Funding Policy 2014; Lombard 2008; Skhosana, Schenck & Botha 2014). Yet, as Lombard (2008, p. 124) notes:

> …in an attempt to redress the legacy of the past and the consequent inequalities in social welfare, in the first decade of democracy the [South African] government allocated the bulk of its welfare resources to transforming the social security system at the expense of social service delivery. As a result, South Africa has a costly social security budget with social services on the brink of collapse, leaving social workers and other social service professionals with low morale in the face of the huge challenge of providing welfare services with scarce resources, especially in the non-government sector.

In short, because the government prioritises other forms of social security, both public and private social service providers are underfunded.

However, my findings suggest that in order to attain professional wellbeing, a certain threshold level of resources should be met. These findings confirm Velaphi's (2012) observation that, if sufficient funding is not provided, some social service organisations might close. One of the lectures, Frank, evidenced this by saying:

> …right now we have problems of underfunding of NGOs. I was seeing in the news yesterday, that several organizations in the Eastern Cape are going to shut down. They are going to do away with half of their staff because of the issues of budget cuts. An organization that was receiving 4.5 million per year from the Government, funding has been cut to five hundred thousand. So that literally means that they might have to shut down or maybe left with two people. So, I don't know how they are even going to operate. Even here, we have other organizations that are now operating four days a week, cutting off on staff, stuff like that. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

The resource threshold for the achievement of professional wellbeing should be in place in both the professional setting and at personal level. One of the students, Lineo, stated that, in order to function effectively as a social worker,

> You should have your own office, have access to resources to help your clients like maybe a car if you need to do home visits. Maybe resources when you want to do community work… Basically, you having resources, you having a phone to call your clients. All these are necessary resources to help your clients. *(Lineo, student)*

Similarly, Kuseka (practising social worker) stated that:

> I do know of other social workers that are stuck, who are really struggling with their environment, specifically resources. By resources, I mean things like cars, fax machines, laptops, telephones that work and copy machines for your reports. [They do not have] those things … and that makes the job more challenging. *(Kuseka, practising social worker)*

Many social workers (six practising social workers and four students) explained the limits imposed on their ability to help in the absence of sufficient resources in the professional setting. Without access to basic workplace resources such as offices, cars, printers, fax machines, laptops and telephones, no helping could effectively take place.

Similarly, social workers pointed to the importance of meeting a certain minimum resources threshold at a personal level, when they were talking about personal growth and material achievements as aspects of professional wellbeing. They highlighted the importance of having cars, houses and adequate money for a decent living (see some examples in section 5.3.2.2, Chapter 5). The determining factor in the achievement of this is the amount of money they earn in salaries. A recent newspaper article from Business Tech (2018) shows that the average monthly salary for South Africans has significantly declined from where it was in 2017.[30] Citing Stats SA (2017), the article indicated that the average monthly earnings paid to employees in the formal non-agricultural sector decreased from R20 060 in November 2017 to R19 858 in February 2018. This would amount to R238 300 a year. However, some

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[30] Business tech website: https://businesstech.co.za/news/finance/254827/south-africas-average-salary-versus-the-world/

newspapers carry pieces that suggest that in South Africa a good salary ranges from R240 000 to R360 000 per annum or even more (News24 2015, see also Quora 2016; Business Tech 2018). This, as some suggest, would allow for a comfortable life (see the South African Labour Guide; News24 2015). Yet, as Pamela (practising social worker) states, the entry-level annual salary for a social worker is around ZAR210 000. Apart from the fact that social workers' salaries are low, the question of whether this is enough to sustain one's good life depends on a number of factors, e.g. whether one works and stays in a rural area or in a big city. When assessing wellbeing (achieved or achievable), it is not sufficient to know how many resources a person owns or can use in order to lead a valuable life. Rather, we also need to know more about the person's access to those resources and the circumstances in which he or she is living (Robeyns 2011).

Speaking again of the disparities between the DSD and NGOs, my findings suggest that when it comes to other benefits such as housing allowances, salaries, cars and cellphones, the DSD is a better option than some NGOs. These largely speak to the functioning of material achievements. Elaborating on this issue, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that:

> In the NGOs, there is no much opportunity for wellbeing, because they highly [NGOs] depend on funding from the donors. There are no opportunities in the NGO as compared to here [DSD]. We have benefits here. For example, one can get a car, a laptop, a cellphone and housing allowances. *(Pamela, practicing social worker)*

In the same vein, Georgina (practising social worker) said:

> Our salary is not up to standard if you compare it to the Department [DSD] salary. The Department salary is higher, maybe twice our salaries. A person who had only one year experience went to the Department at (sic) health Department, medlife; he gets nearly my pay. Even, if you receive something like seventeen thousand (rand), with pension, and a house allowance and medical aid that is better. We do not get any of those things. Ok, we have pension, but not subsidies. No medical aid. Nothing like that…It makes me feel like crying but at least I have a job. That is the most important part. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

All these excerpts suggest that to a certain extent the conduciveness of the work environment is contextual. It significantly varies between DSD and non-governmental organisations,

depending on what one foregrounds between personal material achievements and access to resources for helping.

Another aspect which varies according to context or organisation is the organisational culture (defined in the previous section). From the interviews, it emerges that the organisational culture influences how one accomplishes the helping functioning. As I discussed in one of the sections above, even the supervisory styles are in one way or another informed by the organisational culture or vice versa. Drawing further on the example of a supervisor who interferes with the colleagues' private lives and affiliations discussed above, it is important to note that such practices constrain the extent to which social workers convert affiliations into helping or professional growth. However, in some contexts, for instance where proper supervision is offered and healthy affiliations are promoted, the opposite is likely to be the case. A good example is Mary's case, whose supervisor encourages healthy and empathetic relationships with clients. Her chances of utilising the relationships in effective helping are high. She said:

> My supervisor talks about maintaining good boundaries and relationships with clients…she is strict about taking giving clients our telephone numbers… and that helps. *(Mary, practicing social worker)*

6.3.4 The collective features of the profession

The social workers' achievement of professional wellbeing significantly depends on the collective features of their profession. Such features include policies, values and principles. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, the social work profession in South Africa is policy informed. The profession is guided and regulated by welfare policies such as the Welfare Laws Amendment Act of 1997, the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997, the Financing Policy of 1999 and the Service Delivery Model for Developmental Welfare Services of 2006 (see Chapter 1 for the aims and objectives of these policies). Such policies are expected to be supportive structures for effective social service provision in South Africa. They are in essence

enablers for the helping professionals. The White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997 is a good example. The policy clearly sets out the vision, goals, principles and guidelines of developmental social welfare in South Africa. Such an outline is important and shapes practice. Steven (lecturer) evidenced the importance of policy in effective helping when he said:

> …if you look at the policy of social development in South Africa, we should work on a developmental approach. So, we are teaching the developmental approach… We are ensuring that our graduates are able to work within the policy framework. If that does not happen in practice, then there will be a problem. If it does not happen, then it is not our faulty but the Department's fault, of not implementing their policies… *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Frank (lecturer) stated that:

> We need to engage or work closely with the NGOs and the Government Department that do social development to ensure that the framework is embraced in South Africa. [Also] we have the White Paper for Social Welfare. We need to really embrace those policy frameworks…we are on our way… It is taking us long. We need to do more on that because there was a research that was done and the findings were showing that social workers who are in the field do not know about this White Paper. They know that it is there, but they do not know what it is and how to implement it. That goes down, even to the issues [of practice], for instance issues of children's rights. You know when social workers do not know the principles around those policies, [then there will be a problem]. So, that is something that we have to work on as well to make sure that students are not just doing this to get a degree but we are teaching them for something [effective helping]. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

The way one would operate with or without policy guidance differs. This was highlighted by Nxobile (practising social worker) when she spoke about the importance of abiding by policy, such as the Children's Act when intervening with children. She stated:

> [As a social worker] I should be guided by the Children's Act and it is a beautiful act. It is this big book, big like a bible, well written. [Unfortunately], there are some social workers who do not understand how to implement it. [Yet]They just do not need to have the knowledge [about it] but should also know how to implement or make use of it in practice. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

The same applies to the issue of values. The findings suggest that social work values and principles are also enablers for effective helping. The values, as I indicated in the first chapter, include social justice, respect for people's worth, human rights and dignity, competence, integrity, professional responsibility and service delivery (SACSSP n.d.*b*). As SACSSP states, in pursuit of quality services, social workers should aspire and subscribe to these values. The majority of the social workers interviewed believe that the values are part and parcel of the

profession. Actually, they understand that the values define them as professionals. As Elisma (lecturer) suggested, the professional values and principles should be part of professionals' lives.

Giving an example of how ethical values can be enablers, SACSSP suggests that "social workers' primary goal is to assist individuals, families, groups and communities and address social needs and problems. Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest" (SACSSP n.d.*b*).[31]This is more than informative for the social workers, but rather directive. The results one can yield under the guidance of professional values might differ from what he/she would achieve without them, especially with the tensions between helping and material achievements that I highlighted in Chapter 5. Without being held accountable through ethical values, one might opt for self-satisfying options. The fact that social workers should uphold professional values and principles possibly deters them from doing so.

In addition to that, the professional principles clarify the nature of relationships that social workers should have with clients and other colleagues (SACSSP n.d.*b*). They clearly stipulate what is expected and what is not expected of social workers in those working relationships, thus, in a way, advancing effective helping. For instance, social workers should not engage in exploitative relationships with their clients and should be respectful to their colleagues (see SACSSP n.d.*b*). In that regard, one of the values which received significant attention from social workers in this study was respect for human dignity and worth of the person. Speaking of how this value would lead to effective helping, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that as a professional, she feels connected to the value. She mentioned that:

> [When it comes to] the values and principles, respect takes the priority, [respect] for human dignity and rights…clients have rights. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

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[31] This is found on SACSSP website under the value of Service delivery. Accessed at https://www.sacssp.co.za/Professionals/Conduct

Speaking of the same principle of respect and upholding human dignity, Tavengwa (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> [In helping], I try to treat my clients with dignity. Even if that person has a low intellectual ability, I do not have to be his/her boss… I should always make him comfortable… *(Tavengwa, practising social worker)*

Along the same lines, Erina (practising social worker) also stated that:

> …as a professional, you have to help people but you also have to work within the [values] framework. For example, the issue of respect; there are some instances when people [clients] walk into this building …they scream at you but you have to stay calm and show respect, whether you get that respect back or not. It is about staying professional… You cannot just force things on people; you have to respect people for who they are and where they come from. Respect in our job is just the way of dealing with people and calmness diffuses things a lot better. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

These three excerpts refer to one of the professional values and from what these social workers are saying, values (in this case respect for human dignity and human worth) can aid in the achievement of their helping functioning. In fact, they accentuate their professionalism. Kuseka (practising social worker) confirmed this in mentioning that professionalism is one of the most important aspects of social work practice. For her, this speaks largely of work ethics and the way one treats service users. Hence, social work values and principles stress the point that social workers should always be competent in their duties. Henceforth, they should also engage in on-going learning. This does not only enable effective helping, but also advances professional growth, which is also one of the social workers' valued functionings.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter described social workers' wellbeing achievements and freedoms. In the first section, I presented the social workers' achieved functionings. This was followed with an analysis of their wellbeing freedoms. From that discussion it is apparent that in reality the social workers are achieving their valued functionings (as set out in Chapter 5) in a minimal sense. Various factors interfere with the social workers' wellbeing freedoms and achievements. These factors are either personal, or organisational and structural. This study has shown that in order

to function well, as both professionals and private individuals, social workers need a certain amount of resources. Without access to certain resources such as telephones, printers, laptops, fax machines and cars, social workers cannot effectively help clients. Similarly, in order to lead decent, private lives, social workers need to have a certain amount of resources. The social workers' ability to convert resources into different functionings depends on a number of factors that can also be personal, structural and organisational. The next chapter looks into how social work education is advancing or can advance professional wellbeing.

CHAPTER 7
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING

Education is a foundational capacity intrinsically important for human well-being and an enabling capacity for people to live lives they have reason to value…, at its best[it] provisions individuals to see alternative ways of being and doing and to develop sufficient agency to pursue lives of value…(Wood & Deprez 2012, p. 471).

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews how social work education (as a social arrangement) at Mopane University relates to the social workers' aspirations and valued functionings. It discusses how professional wellbeing is advanced in and through curriculum and pedagogical practices. The opening section is a presentation of seven lecturers' opinions on the social workers' identified valued capabilities. I follow this up with a discussion on what is being done in and through social work education at Mopane University in advancing social workers' valued functionings. In that discussion, I also present one of the overarching challenges confronting social work education –the tension between theory and practice. Attached to that are the social workers' suggestions for improvements. I end the chapter with a presentation on the social workers' views on the possible implications of advancing professional wellbeing in and through social work education. In essence, this chapter attends to my last research objective:

d) Reviewing how social work education can create opportunities (capabilities) for social workers to make both personal and professional choices, and expand their aspirations and wellbeing.

7.2 Social work education and the social workers' valued capabilities and functionings

This section advances Walker and Unterhalter's (2007, p. 8) view that education ought to be "an unqualified good for human capability [formation], expansion and human freedoms."

It therefore pursues the question of how social workers' valued aspirations (functionings) and capabilities are (or can be) advanced and expanded in and through social work education at Mopane University. I begin this section with a presentation on the lecturers' views on social workers' identified professional wellbeing capabilities.

7.2.1 Lecturers' perceptions of identified professional wellbeing capabilities

There is general unanimity on what students and practising social workers identified as necessary capabilities, and what lecturers understand to be essential opportunities for professional wellbeing. Some minor differences in their interpretation of the capabilities can be seen though, as will be shown in this discussion. Just like the student and practising social workers, five lecturers supported the relational aspect of professional wellbeing. In their views, which sought to highlight the continuity of professional wellbeing, the lecturers highlighted the importance of both private and professional relationships, in and outside university. I discuss the lecturers' views on the importance of student-student relationships, student-lecturer relationships as well as university- organisations relationships in section 7.2.2, where I discuss how social work education is advancing social workers' helping capacity. In talking about the practice setting and its possible impact on the wellbeing of the social workers, the lecturers stressed the significance of supportive supervision. For the majority of them, supportive supervision is an important, yet missing opportunity in practice. Lecturers attribute this situation to lack of skilled supervisors, limited time for supervision, as well as lack of responsibility by the University. In highlighting the challenge of lack of supervision, Steven, one of the lecturers stated that:

> The problem that we are experiencing currently is the fact that, both newly appointed and more senior social workers do not receive proper, regular [supportive] supervision…that is really contributing to burnout among social workers. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Daniel (lecturer) stated that:

> It seems to me that the supervisors are absent and many students come back and tell us: 'we do not have any supervision.' That is actually one of the main tasks of the supervisor; to look after this young person as a person and not only about forms and administrative things. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

According to Steven (lecturer), the demanding nature of social work requires continuous

supportive supervision, yet that does not always happen. He mentioned that:

> I think we really need dedicated supervisors out there. People, who have been trained, well trained in supervision because what happens in practice usually is that the senior social workers become the supervisors. Unfortunately, you can be [an] extremely good senior social worker but that does not mean that you are going to be a good supervisor, vice versa. So, we need dedicated people that has (sic) been trained in supervision that understands why we need something like supportive supervision, how can we help these people [social workers] with the techniques that they can use in helping. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Manyewu (lecturer) expressed that:

> When [social workers] are in practice it is the responsibility of the supervisor to make sure that [the social workers] are well, but supervision is not always taking place the way it is supposed to. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

Likewise, Frank (lecturer) mentioned that:

> The social workers need care; they need supportive supervision… It is just that they do not always get this kind of supervision when they are in the field. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Some lecturers think that the depth of this challenge necessitates their intervention as educators.

For them, intervening enhances the quality of supportive supervision the social workers get.

For instance, Frank (lecturer) stated that:

> We need to train our own social workers who are already in the field on how to be of help to their subordinates. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Theresa mentioned that:

> We are looking forward, with the hope of giving more workshops on supervision, because there is not a lot of qualified supervisors in the field. They [supervisors] have to look after the

wellbeing of the social workers, especially student social workers because they are overwhelmed during field practicum and that is why supervision is important. [Supportive supervision] is part of social work. It has to be and unfortunately, it is not always there. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

The lecturers also expressed discontent with the role the University is playing in ensuring quality education for social work students. They are of the view that the university should at least compensate those people who supervise their students during field practica. For them, this would motivate the field instructors and boost their performance as supervisors. Frank, one of the lecturers, stated that:

Another problem is that, we do not pay our supervisors. For years now, we have been trying to motivate the University to pay even a small amount. The [field instructors] end up also feeling that they are not being paid for supervising, so why waste their time. Already they have a huge workload, so, why wasting their time. They end up doing what they feel they can do because it is for free. I think, once we get funding for those people to be paid even a small amount, that can change their supervision approach. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Other than reinforcing the importance of supportive supervision, the lecturers also supported the idea that social workers should be able to take care of themselves if they have to take care of other people and grow as professionals. One of the lecturers, Daniel, indicated that self-care is an important capacity for the wellbeing of social workers. He said:

I think self-care is very important …I even asked one of my students to do research on self-care. I asked the fourth year students if they wanted to do the research on the topic. The title had to do with *the state of the self and practices of social workers*. I would not do this if I do not think it is very important. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Steven (lecturer) stated that:

I tell them [students]…you need to look after yourself because if you are not fine, you cannot help your clients. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Correspondingly, Elisma (lecturer) stated that:

A social worker should be able to take care of him/herself and if I am talking about taking care of him/herself, I actually mean he/she must also know him/herself. You must know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses. If you know that then you know how you must take care of yourself…Yes, social workers have the responsibility to take care of themselves and they will

be able to take care of themselves once they understand who they are… *(Elisma, social work lecturer)*

Thus, for Elisma self-awareness precedes self-care. She believes that self-care is crucial for social workers' wellbeing. However, for social workers to be in a position to take care of themselves, they should know who they are as individuals.

The lecturers understood that for social workers to be effective as helpers they need to practice self-care. Lisa, one of the lecturers, stated that, "if I do not address the issue of self-care, [then] I will not help the person [clients] well." For her, self-care can be exercised at different levels. That is, at intrapsychic or individual level as well as at family level. In Lisa's opinion self-care is taught in one of the final-year modules which addresses issues of loss and trauma. For her, failure to exercise self-care might result in the exploitation of service users as well as the use of clients for the professionals' benefit. She said:

> Self-care is important otherwise you will use your client to sort yourself out. For instance, when a social worker's wellbeing is at stake, then he/she would be very subjective and come up with direct advice, for instance in marriage counselling, one would just say, *get a divorce*. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

Adding on to this, Lisa mentioned that self-care goes as far as questioning one's own belief system or religion, in a practice setting. Nevertheless, the questioning of one's own beliefs and value systems in practice speaks more of reflexivity than self-care.

Some lecturers supported the view that social workers ought to be reflexive. However, unlike Lisa, they did not collapse it under self-care. For instance, Frank argued that social workers should be able to separate their private lives from practice. This, for him, is a necessary measure for having a healthy life style and effective helping. He said:

> Unfortunately, being reflexive is difficult, but they [social workers] have to separate their lives and the work that they are doing because sometimes you can carry your work home. It might not be physical files, but something that has happened, emotional stuff. You might also end up transferring your frustration to whoever… You can also carry it to the clients. So it is very important for social workers to make sure that they are reflexive. That is why it is always encouraged that before seeing the client, the social worker should have self-awareness to say

am I in a position of stability to see this client. Is there something that can hold me back? It could be something that happened in my past, which may end up coming back because of the problem that this client has or the file that I have seen. So, before I see any client, before I agree, I have to think openly, is it possible? *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Daniel (lecturer) mentioned the importance of reflexively maintaining health and empathetic relationships with clients. He said:

[It is important] to also have a little distance between you and the client because sometimes you get too involved, especially the younger people [social workers]. They get so involved in the cases [to the extent that] they actually become part of that system. At the end of it, or maybe in five years' time they will not be able to handle the work anymore, they burnout. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

Expanding on this point, Steven explained how they are promoting reflexivity among students, particularly emotional reflexivity. He said:

Promoting reflexivity [should be] part of supervision and training. We make them aware of its importance. All the staff members in this department have practice experience. We have had problems with it. All of us have had those moments that you lie awake and think about your clients and things like that and all of us share that with our students. That is the only thing we can do. We can only share with them our experiences and hope that they can learn from that. I do not know what we can do more. That is something everyone have (sic) to work out for himself or herself. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

From these excerpts, one can note that not only do lecturers think that reflexivity would protect service users and enhance effective helping, but they also believe that the capability has an intrinsic value for the social workers. According to Steven there is not much they can do in fostering reflexivity among students, other than sharing their own experiences with them. For him, it is also the students' responsibility to figure out how they can be reflexive. However, the question I would like to advance here is whether there are other ways of advancing reflexivity within social work education.

Other than addressing the issue of reflexivity, Daniel's excerpt also speaks of resilience (the social workers' ability to overcome challenges and bounce back to the normal state). Four more lecturers stressed the importance of resilience. They pointed out its importance with reference to the work challenges encountered by social workers. For instance, Lisa stated that:

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What happens is that they [social workers] suffer from burnout, physical, psychological symptoms, they get secondary traumatization, high blood pressure and they do not sleep well. So, it doesn't help if you just tell a person that you must sleep well… [They] must develop resilience first. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

For her, resilience precedes self-care. However, as I discussed in section 5.5, resilience, as it emerged from interviews with the majority of the social workers, is a response to the environment. It speaks of their capacity to bounce back to the normal state and precedes adaptation instead. Three lecturers spoke about resilience in this line of thought. Steven mentioned that:

Resilience is something one can develop… I think in order to be resilient and be able to cope effectively with the job that they are doing, there are basic things they[social workers] should manage. First, I think they should know what they are doing; they should have proper knowledge of what they are doing. That takes away a lot of stress. I think training is extremely important …In social work, resilience is not just a buzz word, it is really something [important]. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

For him, despite it being a necessary capacity, social workers' aptitude for resilience differs and that necessitates specific training in social work education. He said:

Resilience differs from person to person...We need a holistic approach to wellbeing. Basically, helping them to be more resilient in the work, I think. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

In the same vein, Frank mentions:

It is important for the social worker to be trained in resilience …just to make sure that the social worker at the end of the day is in a position to say my wellbeing is normal. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

However, as I noted above, this aspect of resilience speaks more of adaptation than self-care.

In speaking about the need to foster adaptation among social workers, Frank also stated that:

Social work now needs to do more in promoting adaptation. We are doing it, we do have a module on supervision and resilience, I think all over South Africa now. I think one of our lecturers here teaches a bit of that. It is important to prepare our students on how to adapt in situations that are emotionally draining, or traumatizing or negative work environments. To some extent, we are trying but I think now we need to do more because there is really a lot that is happening now in the field that we need to help with as social work educators. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Other than the capability of adaptation, the lecturers also upheld the importance of a work-life

balance. Theresa stated that:

> I know how important wellness is for working people or practicing people…You cannot work
> 24/7 and you cannot relax 24/7. There must be a balance of life. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

Talking about the importance of this capability, Daniel said:

> I think, [as a social worker] you must also have a happy personal life in spite of your work, the
> conditions and circumstances. That should not to affect your personal life, your family life,
> your relationship with your own children or friends… I know they [social workers] need to…
> believe in themselves and know that when they are at work they do their very best for clients…
> and when they are at home, then they are there for their families and to enjoy life. Sometimes,
> the working conditions take you on a trip and many social workers do not have any control and
> I think that loss of control causes a lot of problems, for instance, one might have a caseload of
> two hundred or five hundred and the referrals will be just coming. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

Along the same lines, Manyewu stated that:

> Wellbeing is [also] if someone can feel good about him or herself and his/her life. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

Speaking about how they are advancing the capability of work-life balance, Theresa (lecturer)

mentioned that:

> From first year, we tell the students that they have to look after themselves; they have to have
> a balanced life style… I am very strict on that. I say to them over time, look after yourself. After
> a weekend I ask them, how was the weekend, then they say good or bad and I say did you
> study?, *yes*, Did you party?, *yes* then I say good because you have to balance the life. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

She added that:

> I say to them surround yourself with friends, go out and have a good time because in that way
> you look after yourself, you cannot deal with other people's emotions and problems all the time
> if you are not a healthy person yourself. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

The lecturers also supported the view that social workers should have the relevant knowledge

and skills if they are to intervene effectively with disadvantaged people. They believe that

social work students should acquire the necessary theoretical knowledge within the university.

However, they are also of the view that social workers should go beyond possessing

professional knowledge to being in a position to implement what they have learned in a practice setting. The majority of the lecturers highlighted the importance of integrating theory and practice. They also believe that they are doing a great job in fostering this capability (I discuss this further in section 7.2.2). For instance, one of the lectures, Steven, stated that:

> I think we have a very good program in social work that we are teaching. So, they definitely have the knowledge and the skills and if they can combine the knowledge and the skills that we provide them with, their own passion and the right personality to do the job, I think they can be excellent social workers. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

The value of having knowledge and skills in effective helping explains why Theresa mentioned that, "Only a professional social worker can do social work because we teach them for four years those skills that they need to have…" Furthermore, some lectures hold the view that social workers should also possess values and knowledge of policy and legislation. These match very well with the expected exit-level for the Bachelor of Social Work, as pronounced by SAQA (see SAQA 2018). Amongst those who talked about the importance of imparting policy knowledge are Steven and Frank. Steven indicated that one of the things they are doing as a department is ensuring that the students walk out of university with policy knowledge. He said:

> We have one full module on the Children's Act…The regulations are discussed with students… That is part of the training. We provide them with the theoretical knowledge… *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Frank said that:

> We should work on a developmental approach. So, we are teaching the developmental approach. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Still on the topic of policy, Lisa stated that:

> We aim at producing graduates who have the basic knowledge about a number of aspects, such as social work policy and legislation. Remember, according to the global definition of social work, social work is a practice-based profession. It is important first and foremost that one is able to be a good practitioner, that is what is meant by the signature pedagogy of social work, that you must be a good practitioner adhering to the values of social work, the principles of

social work , yes the ethics of social work, being an ethical social worker, and skilled. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

Lisa's excerpt not only speaks about the importance of policy knowledge, it also draws our attention to one of the identified capabilities for professional wellbeing: values and principles.

The lecturers reinforced the view that professional values and principles constitute an important capability for the social workers' wellbeing. As an example, one of them (Theresa) maintained that:

> Values address the issue of professional wellbeing. Taking the value of respect for example, if you respect yourself, then you will look after yourself. You will make sure that you develop yourself professionally, personally but also that you will take care of yourself. I think they do. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

This excerpt points to both the instrumental and intrinsic value of social work values and principles when it comes to the social workers' wellbeing achievements. Elisma and Steven (lecturers) reiterated the same view. Elisma stated that:

> As a social worker, your values for social justice and human rights for communities are important but they are also important for yourself. I think you cannot be an asset to others when you are not going to look after yourself, your own human rights are also important. *(Elisma, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Steven noted that:

> If you take caring as a principle for example, it is not just caring for other people, it is caring for your colleagues and yourself as well. If you think of humaneness, you are being humane to others but to yourself as well. I think the values and principles advance professional wellbeing, but I am not sure if the students realize that. They might not realize that. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Speaking more about the importance of the values and principles in the advancement of helping as functioning, Elisma stated that:

> Values such as social justice and the [advancement of] human rights are linked to the empowerment of people…As a social worker you should have a certain attitude, you should advance social justice and believe in human rights. All those principles are well aligned with our goal, which is to improve the social functioning of people. *(Elisma, social work lecturer)*

Some lecturers shared views on how they are advancing professional values and principles through social work education. Steven, for instance stated, that:

> We teach them the values of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is basically about humaneness, it is about caring, sharing, support and social justice. I think those are the most important values that we try to teach them… we would like to think that the values lead to effective helping but I cannot say that we have ever done something so structured to ensure that. But, I also think that since it is part of the ethos of social work, all of my colleagues that are trained as social workers will try to convey those values. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

In the same vein, Frank stated that:

> Here, we teach them around issues of values and principles; issues of respect and dignity, confidentiality, treating the information of the client with utmost confidentiality, rights to self-determination. We want those kinds of students that can embrace those principles and values of social work in the work place and amongst the clients in the communities. [We want] social workers with a helping soul, social workers who care for other people. That does not just aim being theoretical but that should flow into making meaningful contribution. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

For the majority of the lecturers, professional values are more important than personal values. In fact, many were of the view that personal values should be subordinated or aligned to the professional ones. For instance, in response to the question on whether the social work students were comfortable with the professional values, Steven stated that:

> If they [social work students] are not comfortable with the values and principles, then they should not study social work. They should have the value of caring and supporting other people, the value of Ubuntu…I would say that Ubuntu does not matter from what culture you come. If you look at the values of Ubuntu, it includes the European, Western, and African cultures. I would suppose that they [social work students] are absolutely comfortable with those values. If they do not feel comfortable then I would not think that they should study social work. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, speaking about subordinating personal to professional values, Theresa stated that:

> You cannot separate your professional person and your personal-self. You cannot have a different set of values to say from Monday to Friday you are in the office and observing the values and after hours, you forget about them. We [social workers] move around in the community, we are role models, so how can you forget your values… You must know that you are a social worker and have the public eye. That is why I say to the students, those values must become part of yourself, and you must learn them. We can apply them as social workers but also in our private lives. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

For Theresa, the professional values and principles should define who social workers are. She said:

> In the beginning of the second year, they [social work students] take the oath where they say they will respect people, keep everything confidential and that they will abide with the code of ethics and respect social justice. All the values we talked about are very much part of the code of ethics, so you must become that. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

From this discussion, it is apparent that the lecturers believe that the identified capabilities are crucial for the wellbeing of the social workers. However, unlike students and practising social workers some of the lecturers believed that in addition to those capabilities, the social workers need to be critical thinkers and assertive in what they do. Speaking about critical thinking, Manyewu (lecturer) stated that:

> I think one of the most important capabilities is being able to think in a critical way. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Frank stated that:

> We [also] would want to produce social workers who can be very critical of what is happening and of how social work can be relevant because right now we have many problems in practice… *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Frank also mentioned the importance of being assertive in practice:

> Social workers should also be able to stand up for themselves and for the people they serve.
>
> *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

It is in the same vein that Daniel mentions:

> [The social workers] should be able to tell the supervisor that you must help me now. You see, many students and former students come back to us and they tell us how bad it is outside, they say, we are scared of our supervisor or we do not see the supervisor at all. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

These are all crucial capacities for the social workers, which can aid in enhancing their professional wellbeing. The identification of the two capabilities (critical thinking and

assertiveness) indicate an educational need. In the next section, I present views on how social work education is advancing the social workers' valued functionings (professional wellbeing).

7.2.2 Advancing the functioning of helping in and through social work education

Table 13 below summarises what is being done in social work education at Mopane University to advance professional wellbeing functionings, particularly helping and professional growth. In discussing how social work education can advance professional wellbeing, I will only focus on these two because the other functionings, of personal growth and material achievements, are more personal and private. Although these two functionings can be shaped by policy on salaries, they can hardly be influenced by educational policy changes. Lineo, one of the students captured this when she said:

> To be realistic, I do not think social work can do something in terms of finance. Even the achievement of the things I mentioned such as buying all I want, buying my own car, house. *(Lineo, student)*

Table 13: Educational arrangements for professional wellbeing

Views from students, practising social workers and lecturers	Description
Bursary opportunity	Provided through the Department of Social Development
The transformative type of education (curriculum and pedagogy)	Dealing with personhood and moulding professionals: Fostering professional attributes, attitudes, values and principles Imparting professional knowledge and skills, professional theories, models, values and principles, critical thinking Advancing policy and teaching professional code of ethics Promoting continued professional development
Preparing students for practice	-Theory learning and practicum: Pushing for the stipulated learning outcomes (according to CHE and SACSSP) Facilitating the integration of theory and practice Supervision Teaching different social work methods (group work, community work and case work) Promoting research, involving students Cultivating resilient and reflexive professionals Promoting self-awareness and healing among students Overcoming the disjuncture between theory and practice) -Multidisciplinary education -Extra-curricular activities
Advancing student wellbeing, which is integral for professional wellbeing	Promoting healthy lifestyles: Building relationships or affiliations at different levels, in and outside university: *(Student-student, Student-faculty, Department of social work and social service organisations, Students-experienced social workers (field instructors))* Making referrals for counselling and mentoring Fostering life skills through curriculum and Extra-curricular arrangements, student council, student representative, the pairing of senior and new students Friendship initiative (not real name), the success programme (not real name)
Different teaching and learning approaches (Introspective learning)	Lectures, tutorials, discussions, reflections, poster presentations

Views from the lecturers and other documents I reviewed suggest that social work education

at Mopane University is advancing the social workers' capacity to help in various ways.

However, this does not seem to be done with the conscious view of helping as a valuable

functioning for the social workers' own wellbeing, but more as an expected professional

function. Moreover, in response to my question on how social work education is advancing

professional wellbeing, a majority of the lecturers conveyed the idea that wellbeing is always in progression, meaning that they are advancing student wellbeing (the wellbeing of student social workers), which they presumed to be integral for professional wellbeing. The lecturers shared some views on how they are advancing students' wellbeing, particularly physical and emotional wellness and self-care, without making much reference to helping. Of all the seven lecturers, six mentioned referring students to the University Wellness Centre for counselling as one of the many ways they are advancing student wellbeing. One of them, Theresa, stated that:

> As lecturers, we cannot provide full time counselling to our students and that is why we refer them for counselling. We are aware of the resources on campus, we refer them, and as I said these things are done but not all students make use of them. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Daniel stated that:

> We invite students with problems, emotional problems, physical problems, learning disabilities every year. Please come and see us. Then the students come. Then we refer them to the wellness clinic… I also have such information in the study guides, there is a link where the students can click, if there is a problem, if they do not have enough food, if they have emotional problems, if they have learning problems and they don't want to come and see me or the lecturer directly, they can get the help from that link. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

Other than referring students for counselling or other online platforms, the lecturers indicated that they are also facilitating some forms of affiliation, as a way of advancing student wellbeing. These types of relationships fall into two categories, student-student, as well as student-lecturer affiliations. For instance, student-student affiliation is promoted through the "Friendship Initiative" (not the real name). In explaining the development of this initiative, Frank, one of the lecturers, indicated that in 2017, the Department of Social Work initiated the Friendship Campaign. According to him, this initiative is meant to connect old and new students in a way that advances their wellbeing as students. However, the students did not mention this initiative. This could be because the initiative does not take priority on their

agenda or it could be that they did not benefit from it because it only started in their final year.

In explaining the essence of this initiative, Elisma mentioned that:

> This idea of [Friendship] was an idea from 2016 students and I was always asking what do you think we can do to help other students…This year we did the [Friendship] Campaign in our department where seniors are connected to new students. We had a function at the beginning of the year. At that function, we wanted the first year students to get together, so that they get to know each other. The seniors were also invited because the complaint was always that students do not know each other, so through this campaign we tried to create an opportunity for the students to get to know each other. Also, the seniors adopted first year students to see for their wellbeing… We also identified a student union and the seniors who could do that big brother, big sister thing. The skills that they gain from that can be carried to the professional life. *(Elisma, social work lecturer)*

Other than the Friendship Initiative, this extract points to another initiative (at departmental level), which was highlighted as being equally important for student wellbeing, the Student Council (association). According to Frank,

> The association serves as the platform for social work students to share experiences. Be it their learning experiences or social lives, even experiences on issues they need DSD to address. So, they do have various portfolios that students can refer to, for instance there is finance, there is entertainment, there is marketing, there is academic. So all those portfolios allow us to see how we can help social work students. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Views from the lecturers and students also suggest that there is a student representative who advances the students' queries to staff members. Frank explained:

> That student is like a messenger. He represents the students. But, [we] never get to know the names of the people he will be representing. So, that protects the identity of the students... If we do not know, who said it then we can sort of do an introspection and see how we can address it, especially if it is genuine and we look into it. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

This also speaks of the advancement of student-lecturer affiliation. In addition to this, all seven lecturers stressed the point that, as a Department, they have an open door policy, which enables the students to go and share experiences with lecturers at any time. Elisma spoke about this saying:

> We all have [an] open door policy for students that they should come and make an appointment if they are having problems with their work or if they are not sure so that we can discuss that. *(Elisma, social work lecturer)*

As I pointed out above, the point of highlighting all these factors is that the lecturers believe that wellbeing is continuous and needs to be integrated throughout the learning experience. Lisa captured this when she said:

> [In advancing wellbeing] we do not look at the wellbeing of the social worker as the professional but we also consider the wellbeing of the student social worker, the person sitting in front of you. Student wellbeing is part of professional wellbeing. You cannot just say you are working on professional wellbeing or that I am just working on your personal wellbeing, the two are intertwined. They are interdependent. What I will work with first and foremost is the student. I will then… [Go on to talk] about the social work profession, the professional opinion, recommendation regarding the life of this child, what is going to happen in your profession. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

Other than highlighting the continuity between student and professional wellbeing, this excerpt also speaks of the transformative process which takes place when educating students (I discuss this in section 7.2.1.3). Lisa explained this processes when she mentioned that, unlike many other fields of study such as Education, social work training deals with the person first as a way of preparing him/her for practice. She reminds us that theirs is a helping oriented profession. According to Lisa, helping should be understood as the core professional function, which ought to be prioritised and advanced in social work education. She said:

> Remember professional wellbeing is important in order to be a good social worker, but you are not in this job in the first instance because it is about you. You are here because it is a calling and you want to make a difference and sometimes you pay severe sacrifices. I have to say perhaps, I am not feeling well this morning, but I still have to go to the children's court, so that is one thing that I want to put on the table. The students' wellbeing or professional wellbeing is important but if that becomes the main focus, then you should rather see a therapist. It should not be about that. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

This excerpt suggests that although the wellbeing of the social worker is important, the fact that one is supposed to help takes precedence. This directs us to one of the questions I raised earlier about whether social workers are the means or ends of development. This excerpt clearly stresses that social workers are the means of development, or expected helpers (which is also true but not the whole picture). This tells us something about the way in which social work education is structured in South Africa, particularly by the accreditation boards, such as the

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The learning outcomes for the Bachelor of Social Work, as spelt out by SAQA, evidence this. Despite having mentioned that "the social work qualification is also designed to enable learners to pursue further personal and professional development and to promote life-long learning," under the rationale of the BSW qualification, of all the 27 exit-level outcomes outlined by SAQA, none of them addresses the issue of professional wellbeing. After a word count, I learned that the word 'wellbeing' in relation to the word 'professional' is not even mentioned once (see SAQA 2018a, pp. 2-4)[32]. Emphasis is placed on factors such as the attainment of knowledge and skills, developing and maintaining working relationships with clients, an appreciation of the helping process, values, principles, policy and legislation, all of which give prominence to helping or effective interventions with disadvantaged people. The issue of professional wellbeing is less strongly, if at all, emphasised by accreditation boards (see also CHE 2015, Chapter 3).

It is important to note that the same exit-level outcomes by SAQA and CHE inform how social work education is structured, both in the curriculum and pedagogically. The Department of Social Work at Mopane University offers 21 compulsory modules. These are supplemented with electives from other departments such as Sociology, Psychology or Criminology. All 21 of the compulsory modules offered emphasise helping or intervening with the disadvantaged as a valuable functioning. They seek to advance the social worker's ability to intervene with people at different levels by equipping them with all the relevant knowledge and skills that will make them effective helpers. Yet, only one of the modules (*Social work with the individual)* mentions the provision of life skills to the student social workers as one of its goals. According to Daniel this module on life skills seeks to help the students to become stronger persons. The life skills possibly speak of the personal wellbeing of the social workers.

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[32] South African Qualifications Authority Bachelor of Social work: http://allqs.saqa.org.za/showQualification.php?id=23994 Accessed on 31 May, 2018

However, from my reading these life skills are also enhanced in order to enable the social workers to render effective services (see Appendix D for a summary of the compulsory modules). Whilst these modules stress the importance of helping (a valued functioning for social workers), they do not take into account that one's capacity to render effective services depends on his/her wellbeing, in this case, physical and emotional wellness. These modules cover both theory and practical learning.

7.2.2.1 Theory learning and practica

Theory and practica are compulsory components of social work education worldwide (see Chapter 2). The two allow for the students' acquisition, and implementation, of professional skills and knowledge, in university and in practice. In fact, these two (theory and practice) prepare students for the helping functioning, as will be shown in this section. Erina (practising social worker) highlighted the importance of theory and practicum when she said:

> …you need to learn theories and practicum, all of that. *(Erina, practising social worker)*

In highlighting how theory and practice prepared her for the world of actual social work practice, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that:

> My educational experience helped a lot. I mirrored myself…they [educators] prepare you for practice… *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

In the same vein, Mpho (student) stated that:

> What I learnt was preparing me for social work practice. *(Mpho, student)*

Views from some lecturers suggest that the preparation of students for the helping functioning goes beyond equipping them with professional knowledge and skills. It is also about ensuring that the students are able to integrate the two. Steven made this clear when he said "the idea is not only to equip the students with the necessary knowledge, rather to ensure that they can

utilise that knowledge in practice." He stressed the point that in order to be a competent helper one should be able to integrate the two (see also Schmidt & Rautenbach 2016). Steven said:

> I think [social work] training is extremely important. It is not just about knowing the facts, knowing the theory but also knowing how to implement that. That is the link between the theory and practice. If you go and look at our program and you look at our outcomes that is something we are trying hard to do. That is why we have practical modules as well. Even in the more theoretical modules, we try to make them as practical as possible. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Frank stated that:

> We anticipate producing students that are able to practice what we teach them here and use it in real life situations…, in communities or society. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Theresa reinforced this idea by saying that:

> I want to produce the best social worker possible, people with a heart for other people and people that are willing to do the job that will walk the extra mile…They must be able to know how to put the theory that we taught them into practice because social work is a practice based profession. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

This point is emphasised in the Social Work practicum module. In fact, it is stated in the module that the goal of the practicum is to ensure that the students integrate theory and practice through the application of generic social work and through different intervention models within a diverse society (see Appendix D). However, the question we are confronted with is whether the prevailing conditions, both educational and structural, allow this to happen? Views across all participant groups suggest that this is not always the case. Nevertheless, before I turn to that, I want to make it clear that the opportunities for both theory learning and practice learning are made available at Mopane University, notwithstanding the other challenges (I discuss issues to do with the integration of theory and practice at the end of this section).

Students at Mopane University do theory learning from their first year. Furthermore, in fulfilment of the practicum requirement, social work students at Mopane University officially start their practicum in their third year. This comes after taking an oath at the end of their second year (Elisma, lecturer). According to Theresa (lecturer), the students do their practical at an organisation for two weeks, in that year. In their fourth year, the students complete the

practicum from the month of July until end of October (four months). As some students (Mantso and Lineo) indicated, it is during the field practicum that they get to apply theoretical knowledge through case, group and community work (see also Appendix D).

Other than being platforms for learning different social work methods, theory learning and practical exposure help in fostering professional wellbeing directed skills such as communication, interviewing, time management, as well as problem solving. Views from some students and practising social workers support this. For instance, Doreen stated that:

> I learned the interviewing skills in our first year at the university. We did role-playing in class, interviewing each other but I did not know it was that important. I thought you just sit with the person you talk to them, but I realized when I was doing casework (practicum), that for some sessions we could sit, talk and it could go nowhere. Now I realized that the skill helped me, I now know how to ask open-ended questions, do follow up questions and prompting the [client]. *(Doreen, student)*

Similarly, Pamela (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> Communication skills…, time management and better problem-solving skills are some of the things I have been taught, and am implementing them in practice. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

In the same vein, Tsepiso (student) said the following:

> What I have learned, for instance problem-solving skill can help in life. In family therapy, let us say someone comes to you with a problem, I have learned that I have to be patient and listen to the person... Field practicum helped me with the ability to solve problems…It really taught me different approaches when it comes to problem solving. *(Tsepiso, student)*

These are valuable skills for the functioning of helping. However, despite having learnt all these skills in theory, these students only realised their importance after practice exposure. This reinforces the importance of complementing theory through practice.

In addition to being necessary opportunities for the acquisition and implementation of professional skills, the two components of social work education (theory and field practica) also foster the development of desirable professional attributes such as being positive, patient, confident, humble, as well as using narrative imagination. Through practicum exposure, some

students got to appreciate the importance of certain abilities such as narrative imagination for helping professionals. The following excerpts support this:

> Practicum was amazing. It was an eye opener because I had to see how other people actually live their situations. It made me appreciate what I have. Practicum made me appreciate what I have, not to complain or compare because there are people who really do not have. We had clients who did not have anything but they were so happy, we had clients who had everything but there was a conflict. I got the opportunity to see that part of the world. Normally when you have everything, you are happy and when you do not have, you are poor and unhappy, I got to see that in my experience. *(Tsepiso, student)*

> Field practicum helped because now we can relate to our clients because some of them come from very difficult situations and I can literally tell them "*…if you are willing to work with me we can improve the situation, because I know it can become better.*" To be like, that *situation*, I found the reason to love and be grateful. That was just amazing to see. If I were in these situations, I would have given up or committed suicide, because I have never been there. So, from looking from outside ooh God this is so bad. The children have such a joy, even when people with pain or when the child is crying, they smiled and say I am so sorry. But, I am like the beauty in being a child and knowing that I will get out of this and will be better. That was the most important lesson for me. *(Doreen, student)*

These students learned to understand the lives of marginalised and disadvantaged people, how these lives differ from their own, as well as their duties as helpers through field practice. This capacity is crucial for the cultivation of competent helpers (see Keet 2015). However, despite having theory and practice in preparation for their helping endeavour, many students as well as practising social workers also highlighted a disjuncture between theory and practice. I discuss this below.

The tensions between theory and practice

Bozalek identified a disjuncture between theory and practice in South African social work education in the 1980s (see Bozalek 2004). My findings suggest that this has persisted, with six out of ten students having revealed this mismatch. One of them, Doreen, stated that:

> My educational experience was excellent, but I do not think it is realistic after being in the work place. It was totally different. I felt like they teach us the epitome of what social work should be and they do not prepare us enough for reality. When you get to the work place, you get depressed… *(Doreen, student)*

Similarly, Buang stated that:

> Practice is different from theory. That is what I have learned. What you study [in theory] and applying it is a very different process. … The theory that they teach us is nice but I do not think they allow us to be [good] practitioners. *(Buang, student)*

Likewise, Khauhelo mentioned that:

> Yes, theory is good but I think that it lacks when it comes to practice. *(Khauhelo, student)*

Some students reported feeling that more practical exposure would help them to integrate the two. However, the mismatch between these two main components of social work education has a lot to do with the various structural challenges facing the nation, its government and the welfare system. These include a shortage of funding to sustain the welfare system, which results in resource shortages, heavy caseloads amongst social workers, and lack of supervision. All of this points to government's failure in implementing social welfare policies in practice.

Some practising social workers have the same feelings and thoughts about the relationship between the two components of social work education. Speaking about how insufficient resources and offices affects issues of confidentiality in social work practice, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that:

> There is not enough resources. Sometimes you have to share offices. We say confidentiality… those things do not happen here. We say confidentiality but when we get to the practical part of it, it is not happening. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Steven, one of the lecturers, reinforced the point by saying:

> One of the ethical values is of confidentiality. Now, we have two people sitting in one office, who should have conversations with clients. They don't have confidentiality. I teach them these things. I teach them about confidentiality and the ethical code, all these kind of things. And when they get there, you know, the environment doesn't realize or doesn't want to realize our ethical code. So, it's true that what we teach them and what happens there is not always the same. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Georgina (practising social worker) mentioned that:

> Yes, I have got [many] years doing these things [practicing]. I have realised that what they teach at the university is of no, not that I would say of no help, but is totally different world from the practical…the difference comes down to helping people. Yes, I am proud of myself…I help people with problems but those are two different worlds. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

Speaking of how social work education should have prepared her for work challenges such as heavy caseloads, Georgina stated that she doubts if the educators know the reality. She said:

> They do not know the reality of what social work in the field is like because they do not work there. They do not have the experience of what is going on. *(Georgina, practising social worker)*

The views I got from the lecturers contradict Georgina's perception. In fact, according to some lecturers the issue of this mismatch is not new to their ears. One of them mentioned that:

> They [students] go out to the community in their first year and in second year. We place them in different organizations where they first observe and then 3rd year they start to be involved in practical work at the organizations. They do the same in their fourth year for the whole semester. That way we make them aware of what is going on outside. We try to prepare them in class. We say to them, it is not easy, you will be confronted with a lot of challenges and when they come back from those sites they say, we have never seen this before. For example, once, the students had to go out in an informal community and they came back with their eyes open, saying well this is the first time we have been exposed to this. And I said good and that is what social work is all about. Community is diverse, so we try to prepare them for the reality and what to expect, but it is not always possible to do that in the classroom. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Daniel acknowledged this challenge, saying:

> The problem is if you are not in that situation you are not really prepared. So I can prepare you in a competent way, then you think I will do this, I will do that, I will not allow this, but when you are in practice and you are faced with the reality it's a bit different from being theoretically prepared for something. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

The lecturers not only acknowledged the existence of this mismatch, but also clarified some of the reasons for the disjuncture. They made it clear that they are not to blame for the disjuncture. For instance, Daniel explained how work-related challenges such as a heavy caseload inhibit congruence between the two components of social work. He said:

> We are teaching how to work with individuals, with groups, with communities and then you go to work and you have a caseload of five hundred, six hundred, seven hundred. So, how can the training prepare you for that? *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

He added:

> I do not think you can prepare somebody for that because it is unrealistic. It is unfair to expect somebody to deliver high quality service if you have a caseload of five, six, seven hundred. So, how can you prepare somebody to work with two hundred cases of child abuse? It is just impossible. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

Other than the issue of workload, some lecturers also pointed to the issue of lack of supervision as one of the reasons for the mismatch. For instance, Frank stated that:

> Not many organizations are really practicing what social work education is embracing. So, then it is difficult for students to really feel that they have practiced what they were taught. I think it is also a matter of us and the field instructors or field organizations coordinating on what we are teaching and what they do so that when students leave for practicums, they feel that they are really embracing the theory that they are being taught here and the organizations are knowing what we are teaching. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Daniel made this even clearer when he said:

> It does not matter how much you [students] are prepared. The problem is at the site and absence of the supervisors. *(Daniel, social work lecturer)*

However, Steven reminds us that there is little they can do as educators, and that their hands are tied in that they have to function according to certain educational frameworks and guidelines. He said:

> This is a university. As you know, we need to teach the science of social work. The fact that it is not always the same in practice because of lower standards of service delivery and these other things does not mean that we should not teach them what it should be. What we are teaching is exactly in line with the outcomes, which are not determined by us but by Higher Education and the Council for Social Service Professions. So even if we want to teach something else, we cannot do that because we can only teach for what is stated, and I don't know if any of my colleagues gave you the exit outcomes maybe in your discussions? *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Another crucial point which was raised by Steven concerns the generic structure of the qualification (BSW). For him, the fact that the qualification is generic makes it a challenge for the students to master everything in greater depth. He said:

> We teach them a lot of things that many of them are not ever going to use if they work in a specific department. Something important to remember is that our program is a generic program. It is not a focused program. It is generic. So, we have to train a person who is going to work with the elderly, who is going to work with the youths, who is going to work in foster care… Our training is a general training… *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Theresa explained that:

> We can teach addiction but cannot attend to every aspect of it. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

In addition to this, the lecturers also highlighted the government's failure to implement welfare policies as one of the reasons for this disjuncture. Steven made this clear when he said:

> The other problem that we are experiencing is that, if you look at the policy of social development in South Africa, the policy is: we should work on a developmental approach. So, we are teaching the developmental approach. Unfortunately, if you go and look what is happening, in practise, that is not happening. Now, whose fault is it? We are ensuring that the graduates are able to work within the policy framework ... If that does not happen in practice, is it our faulty teaching them right? Or it is the Department's fault for not implementing their policies. *(Steven, social work lecturer)*

With this disjuncture, one might wonder how then, can the two components of social work (theory and practice) complement each other? The next subsection looks at multidisciplinary education and extra-curricular activities as a means of advancing professional wellbeing.

7.2.2.2 Multidisciplinary education and extra-curricular activities

The Department of Social Work at Mopane University promotes a multidisciplinary type of education.[33] Components of social work, namely values, skills, knowledge and applied competencies, constitute 50% of the curriculum, with the remainder consisting of cognate disciplines such as psychology sociology, anthropology and political science, among others (CHE 2015). Social work educators encourage students to take the modules from these other cognitive disciplines to inculcate an appreciation of human behaviour among them. Psychology, for example, allows the students to have an appreciation of the nature, functions and phenomena of behaviour and mental experience (Coleman 2009, p. 619), whilst Sociology places much emphasis on the relationship between the individual and his/her social environment (Trevithick 2012). This constitutes a valuable theoretical knowledge base, which contributes to effective helping as well as overall professional wellbeing. Doreen, one of the students, explained:

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[33] A multidisciplinary curriculum is one in which the same topic is studied from the viewpoint of more than one discipline. See http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/m/multidisciplinary-approach

> I appreciate the fact that our degree is structured in such a way that we actually have to learn other social sciences. I now understand more for instance, sociology and psychology. With my degree, I can absolutely do anything [in terms of social work]. *(Doreen, student)*

According to Elisma, as lecturers, they also encourage students to participate in some extra-curricular activities. For instance, students can engage in some on- or off-campus activities. The extra-curricular activities that were highlighted by the participants are not specific to social work and are not a formal part of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the onus is on the student to participate. An example of an on-campus activity is participating in the Success Programme.[34] According to Elisma the Success Programme facilitates the acquisition of relevant professional skills and knowledge such as time and stress management. Summit attendance and study tours by students are also some of the extra-curricular activities which students can be part of. One of the students said:

> I got the opportunity to attend the global research summit last year. I also got to be part of the Cape Town study tour. It was a historical tour. I learnt about slavery and how we, as young people can rewrite the history of South Africa for the future. Earlier this year I went on another study tour to Zambia, which was about regional integration, bringing together SADC countries. I do not think if I had not had that opportunity, I could have learned what I did. *(Doreen, student)*

Although this came from one student, it is worth mentioning that the opportunity is there for broader experiences whilst at university, and students should seek out such experiences. The lack of uptake of these opportunities perhaps reflects what four of the lecturers said concerning the students' reluctance in utilising the opportunities that lecturers made available to them. Manyewu made it clear when she said:

> Some of the things we arrange, students do not go. So, if we do not give them a mark for that, then they don't go. So, it's actually a difficult situation. How do you help them if they do not help themselves? *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

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[34] "Success [not real name] is a student support programme which deals with issues like time management, stress management financial management and workshops are given to students. It is run by the Center for Teaching and Learning at Mopane University" (Elisma, lecturer).

Theory and practical learning, together with multidisciplinary-type education, prepares professionals for effective interventions (helping). The two arrangements seek to equip the social workers with all the necessary knowledge for helping. Nevertheless, the advancement of other professional wellbeing-related capabilities remains an area to be explored. In the next section I discuss how a transformative pedagogy advances helping.

7.2.2.3 Transformative pedagogy

There is a very close connection between personal and professional dimensions of social workers' lives (see Coulter *et al.* 2013). In fact, the two influence each other. However, educationists seem to be more concerned with the effect of one's personal life on his/her professional operations. It is in view of this that opinions from some lecturers suggest that individual transformation is a necessity when it comes to the preparation of students for the helping functioning. This aspect of transformation distinguishes social work education from other fields of study. As stated by Lisa, there is a difference between professional and academic higher education training. According to her, people should appreciate the importance of the signature pedagogy of social work which she defined as "the transformation of an individual sitting in front of you to think and behave like a social worker." She mentioned that one of the things they do as educators is to ensure the transformation of students into change agents, putting it like this:

> Social work education is a specific field and higher education is something, but social work education is different, as you need to work with the personhood or the person of the students sitting in front of you. I need to transform you into a change agent so that you, as the social worker becomes the instrument of change. It is not that easy and it is unfortunately not recognized by people in higher education *per se* because they don't understand social work education and we see that all the time here at the university. There is a lack of the real understanding of professional training of social work students. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

Embedded within the idea of transformation is the "uncovering and questioning of the [students'] deeply emotional dimensions that frame and shape [their] daily habits [and]

routines…" (see Zembylas 2015, p. 166). When lecturers do this, it seems, they foster Boler's idea of the pedagogy of discomfort as a tool in transforming students into competent helpers. They encourage students to go "out of their comfort zone, whilst ensuring that they are still safe enough to participate [as students]" (Coulter *et al.* 2013, p. 441).

According to Lisa, uncovering and questioning the students' emotional dimension is important in educating social workers because most of the students are from broken backgrounds. In her opinion this will not only promote healing but will also aid in transformation. From what she said, the students' backgrounds and life experience inform how they behave, act and live as individuals, and that can affect their work if not addressed. Lisa mentioned:

> Many of our students of course come from poor backgrounds. ..Very often, it is about the wounded healer at the end of the day. Therefore, they need to address their own brokenness [first]. Many social workers have that. In fact not only social workers any person in the helping profession if you go into the family of origin background that is what we need to know. We need to know where the students come from. Many of our students were sexually abused, had problems with their relationships and had marital problems or may be coming from broken homes, have fathers and mothers with mental health issues. They need to address that [first]. Those things are important in helping the student to work through his own unfinished business in order to go out there and be helpful; otherwise, they are going to use their clients or the family or group to work through their own issues. *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

Manyewu also highlighted the importance of dealing with the students and "deconstructing the ways in which they have learned to see, feel and act" when she highlighted the importance of having students do reflections and compile portfolios (Zembylas 2015; see also Zembylas & Boler 2003). She mentioned that in one of her second-year modules, she sends students out to do voluntary work. According to Manyewu, one of the requirements for her course is that students write a reflection "highlighting the circumstances in which they did the situation analysis, the social issues of the people they get in contact with and sharing their thought and feelings." She reported:

> The main reason is to help them to understand their feelings and pick up unresolved issues, because if they have unresolved issues they will struggle in practice. They will work with issues

that might trigger their trauma… That helps them to get into contact with their own feelings and to be able to reflect how they feel and how they can deal with it. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Elisma mentioned that:

For community work, in the first year students also do situation analysis. They can do it as a group or individually. We look at what is it that they have learnt about themselves and how the community differs from their own… Most of them it's their first time and sometimes you find that the communities that they visit is not the same as where they come from, so they do situation analysis and reflection and that is very important. *(Elisma, social work lecturer)*

Expanding on this, Manyewu mentioned that:

In one of modules when we discuss sexual molestation, I would say I think that you do not have to come and tell me that, but I know there maybe some of you that went through this and it is very traumatic. If you did not experience this you must be sure that you will get this in practice and it can be disturbing. I tell them that is why you have to look after yourself and the whole thing of self-care. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

Likewise, Daniel and Lisa indicated that one of the activities they are expected to do is a reflection on their family of origin. For them, this exercise helps the students uncover their past as they become transformed into competent helpers. However, some students expressed dissatisfaction with how their reflections are handled by lecturers. They think their views are being disregarded or are less valued by the lecturers. One of the students, Mantso, stated that:

We do reflections, but I do not think they read them in detail. They just look at them and say, okay she feels it was difficult for her, she felt overwhelmed, but what about that, what are they going to do about how I felt? They do not do anything about that, they do not come back to us. They could see that okay she feels less confident, it was difficult for her to do this and that, but they do not do anything. Then what will be the use of the reflection. It should be more than marks. They should consider that. *(Mantso, student)*

Similarly, Lineo stated that:

We do reflections, they are good but I do not think they [lecturers] really sit down and think about them. *(Lineo, student)*

In speaking about this issue, Manyewu confirmed that the students have a reflection file. However, she stated that:

> We are asking them to do that because we are afraid that they are not going to do their work. … We are just worried that they might choose not to do the assignments and [that way] they will not deal with their emotions. We check the reflections file at least once a year. To check and not to read the reflections, necessarily. The reflections are not marked they are just meant to ensure that [they work on their emotions]. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

Furthermore, Manyewu indicated that only those reflections that are given as module assignments are graded. However, the fact that the students are completing reflection files which are not read undermines the idea of ensuring transformation amongst students. In fact, the lecturers miss a lot by doing so, especially considering that there is the possibility that the students will be dishonest in the graded reflection assignments because no control was exercised over the unseen ones. The chances are quite strong that they will write down that which they think will earn them more marks in their graded reflections. This probably means that the lecturers have to do more in terms of how they handle reflections.

As a solution to this, some students suggested face-to-face meetings as opposed to writing reflections. They reported feeling that this might serve as a better platform for them to express themselves. For instance, Lineo stated that:

> Instead of writing a reflection on a piece of paper, it is better to have them talk to us. They [lecturers] can, just give us the opportunity to talk to them… [so that] we can express our feelings, concerns and needs and work on them. *(Lineo, student)*

What emerges from these views is the need for a more interactive type of education, which allows the students sufficient room to express themselves.

Other than recording reflections, the students are exposed to tutorials and class discussions, which, according to Manyewu, allow for a form of introspection among students. These teaching approaches and exercises expose students to their discomforts, yet prepare them for the helping endeavour. They advance the ideas of uncovering and undoing the past whilst transforming students into competent professionals. This probably explains why the department also has an open door policy, where students can go and discuss issues with the

lecturers. All this supports Zembylas' (2015) assertion that sometimes educators offer uncomfortable pedagogical activities to their students as a way of fostering individual transformation. In the next section, I discuss how professional growth is advanced in and through social work education.

7.2.3 Social work education and professional growth

My findings suggest that social work education also advances professional growth in different ways. As discussed in Chapter 5, professional growth speaks of getting a social work job, promotion or the assumption of higher positions at work, establishing non-governmental organisations, as well as enrolling for postgraduate education.

The bursary opportunity serves as a stepping stone for some students. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, six out of the ten students confirmed having studied with the assistance of a bursary. With the bursary, the students can pay for their degree and possibly graduate with a social work degree, which is the prerequisite for getting a social work job. However, in order to get the bursary, one has to be shortlisted by the university's Department of Social Work (lecturers).Frank explained this process by saying:

> The bursary is given to the students that we select. I mean, who are successful in our selection processes. So, our criteria is that, that student should have thirty points on matric, thirty points and above, so if the student has thirty and below we reject in the Department and they will not be able to study social work. But, if they have thirty points, then they become part of our list of first years. Then we send it to DSD, and then DSD will consider that list, and say we are going to fund them or we going to fund just this number. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

This funding opportunity is important, especially considering that some of the students come from underprivileged backgrounds. Theresa, one of the lecturers, mentioned:

> Many are coming for social work because there are bursaries for social work students… I think it is because our students come from disadvantaged communities… *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

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Beside the bursary opportunity, the department of social work at Mopane University offers Continued Professional Development training for practising social workers. Between 2010 and 2011, it offered training sessions on foster care, child sexual abuse investigations, grief and loss, supervision and management in social work, social group work for social auxiliary workers, the narrative working method, report writing, child sexual abuse assessments, as well as therapeutic handling of adolescent boys with behavioural challenges. In 2013, the following training sessions were also offered: Introduction to adventure-based group work, Child-centred play therapy, Solving the "people puzzles" in your personal and professional life, Group work for auxiliary workers, as well as Dealing with the adult that was molested as a child. Similarly, in 2015, the department offered trainings sessions on field instruction, student supervision, family therapy, contracts and evaluation tools. One of the lectures, Frank explained by saying:

> We do have courses on Continued Professional Development and some of the courses that we offer though I am not sure of the content but I do know that it does focus on how social workers can take care of themselves. So we do offer that opportunity; those opportunities are there.*(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Theresa mentioned that:

> We see practising social workers cannot cope many times. That is why we want to prepare our students when they go out there. When they become social workers they must know where to find ways of caring for themselves. That is why it's so important for social workers in practice to be involved in Continued Professional Development (CPD.) We have CPD courses for them, we ask all the organizations in town to have those courses and we encourage people in practice to make use of that, for their own professional development but also for their personal development. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

Manyewu also emphasised the importance of on-going learning for professional wellbeing when she said:

> The social workers should keep themselves informed and they have to keep on doing courses that can help them to be better in what they are doing and that is important…They should engage in on-going learning. … because in any degree or specific profession you never will know everything from your studies. *(Manyewu, social work lecturer)*

7.2.4 Suggestions from student and practising social workers

Despite having all these arrangements in place, participants, particularly students and practising social workers, came up with their own suggestions on what ought to be done better to advance professional wellbeing through social work education. The suggestions that were raised concern preparing students for the world of practice and education for the professional self. In response to the disjuncture between theory and practice, some social workers highlighted the importance of more practical exposure as a way of preparing them for the world of practice. Six students suggested having more practica as one of the possible solutions. For them, this would allow them to learn and adapt to the work reality. One of them, Khauhelo, stated that:

> I think theory wise it's enough but practice, I think it's not enough…I think what we are missing a lot is exposure and the time to implement what we have been taught thoroughly and effectively, because I think that we need to. Not everything goes as we are taught, like the processes are not as smooth as we are taught, for example, community work, I don't think four months is enough to do that and implement and launch your community project. So, I think with this framework we end up doing things rashly, we don't really implement the skills, the principles accordingly. *(Khauhelo, student)*

Lineo supported this idea by saying, "There are some incidences where I feel like it wasn't enough so I think we could have done more practice." On a similar note, Tsepiso thought that being gradually exposed to the practice environment could have helped in preparing them for real work. She stated:

> We should have been used to all this, because now it's like we are experiencing something new, it's like a surprise. *(Tsepiso, student)*

Bongi, who also supported this idea, stated that:

> …some [of us] even now struggle a bit in terms of actually applying these things, because now I am in my fourth year and it's just all of this information for me and I am expected to apply it in three months… some of the things are already forgotten. I think they should improve in terms of having more practical. *(Bongi, student)*

Reinforcing this view, Nyakallo and Buang both asserted that the attainment of professional goals depends on the duration of practice exposure.

Some students and practising social workers expressed the view that social work education over-stresses the importance of intervening with clients, whilst hardly emphasising the importance of their own wellbeing. It is in this line of thought that some suggested that social work education should also attend to the professional self. Speaking on this issue, Bongi stated that:

> Social work education should not just be about the client and about you going out there. It should also be about the person who is rendering the services to other people also. *(Bongi, student)*

Reinforcing this same idea, Tsepiso suggested that although social work is about helping people, social work educationists should take into account that social workers should not only concentrate on other people's lives, but also their own. For her, social work education can attend to the wellbeing of social workers by fostering the achievement of their valued goals. Relating this to her own experience, Erina (practising social worker) stated that:

> Social work education should give the tools for the wellbeing in the earlier stage of education. I think that could set a bar for people to know it's important, saying [wellbeing] is not just something we give you to read tonight, this is going to be a life task that you are going to do every day. I don't think the university really prepared us for what was ahead. However, I graduated in 1998 and I don't know what the module is like now, that is whether there is something like that or not but in my days no. *(Erina, social work lecturer)*

One of the issues that received much attention in relation to professional wellbeing is the advancement of self-care among students. Half of the students spoke about the need to teach self-care, particularly the 'how' part. Drawing from the views of both faculty members and students, the social work students at Mopane are taught the importance of self-care. However, as I mentioned earlier, according to some students this comes as a chapter in one of the fourth-year modules on trauma and loss. According to Tsepiso, although they are taught about self-care in their fourth year, the time devoted to the topic is too little. She argued that although

social work education should not address all student issues, such as whether they will get a

decent salary or not, it should foster the ability of self-care among prospective social workers.

Some students went on to suggest the need for a specific module on self-care (Mantso and

Bongi). In support of this, Khauhelo suggested that a focus on self-care might lead to more

effective helping. She said:

> We are taught on how to attend to clients, clients, clients, but there is what we call self-care. I think that should also be emphasized, like in our learning. How to take care of yourself, you know, how you take care of yourself. Remember, in social work you are dealing with people, dealing with different challenges people are facing and as we deal with those, we also experience trauma indirectly. Even if you are not aware of that, the clients' stories do affect us as well. If you are not well yourself, how will you help your clients. I think that they should also focus on emphasizing or attending to how to take care of yourself as a social worker, in order to offer good services, as a support, something that would support us in order to be able to render good services for our clients. *(Khauhelo, student)*

Similarly, Mantso mentioned that:

> …they just tell us what is burnout, like burnout is about emotional strain. They do not really help us like in how to take care of ourselves. It's not practical, so in the real world you don't know how to approach that. They should teach us how to approach or deal with burnout or doing self-care, not just giving us theory, we want practical things. Because here in university we also experience that, like a lot of work you know. They should start preparing us how to deal with stress that we get from university before we go in the real world. Social work education should teach real self-care skills. *(Mantso, student)*

In the same vein, Zanele (practising social worker) stated that:

> I don't really think there is enough of that written into our study guide (about the professional's wellbeing).They [educators] should definitely address self-care, issues to do with burnout, how to know if you are burning out and how to make a work-life balance. I think those things should definitely be taught deeply. *(Zanele, practising social worker)*

Some students also spoke about the importance of learning directly from those in practice or

from real case scenarios, rather than relying on lectures. An example is Mantso, who

highlighted the importance of inviting practising social workers so that they can share their

experiences with the students. According to her, it is important to learn from the people who

are experiencing the actual challenges. In support of this, Lineo mentioned that this would

make learning more practical. Khauhelo reported sharing a very similar view, and advised on

the use of real case scenarios in preparing students for the realities of practice. She suggested that:

> …the [educators] should promote self-care and other than that I think to make us aware practically, maybe not by telling us like okay these are the kind of cases you will encounter but maybe trying to include media teaching, maybe which have some real case scenarios. Maybe showing us videos of this is what happened to me, this is how it affected me, this is how I got helped, this is how it helped or not, do you understand? [This will help us] to be prepared, to know that this is what could happen and if it happens while you are practicing, you remember that scenario, the real case scenario, like this is what that practitioner did. *(Khauhelo, student)*

Equally important is the idea of specialised education, which was raised by Doreen, a student. In her opinion, having specialised education at least in the fourth year makes the profession more valued, potentially raises social work salaries and prepares them for real practice. As she stated,

> … if we were specializing in fourth year, to say no I am going to do child care and protection, I am going into forensic social work or whatever, then it would be more valuable. …Our profession thrives because now I have to do this, this and this, instead of focusing on one thing. By [Focusing on one thing] I will work effectively. The country, the government would appreciate social work so much and even give more funding for it so, I think that would really [help]. *(Doreen, student)*

From these views, generally, what social workers want is an education that values their wellbeing, both as private individuals and prospective professionals. They desire to operate in a system which considers their lives and experience in and beyond the time of their education and they are calling for education for their valued lives (see Wood & Deprez 2012). In the last section of this chapter, I discuss the implications of advancing professional wellbeing in and through social work education.

7.3 The implications of advancing professional wellbeing

Views from all participant groups suggest that the advancement of wellbeing-related capabilities as well as functionings in and through social work education can yield some

positive impacts on social wellbeing. The advancement of the helping functioning through social work education, for example, has both intrinsic and instrumental effects on the lives of social workers. For instance, other than getting the satisfaction of achieving their valued functioning (helping), the social workers will also intervene more effectively with the disadvantaged and advance social wellbeing or the public good. The same applies to the advancement of professional growth. Not only will social workers benefit from that development, but society will also reap the benefits. Pamela (practising social worker) captured this when she was speaking of the implications of the achievement of her valued aspirations, for professional growth. She aspires to get into private practice and to work with families. She said:

> My aspirations are directed towards the good of the families and society. There will be a difference in their lives because once you give a person knowledge or education in a certain area they get better. People are not born as parents, husbands or wives; we are not born like that. We learn that through our backgrounds, environments and upbringing, there should be somebody who must teach you that, you must get it from someone and I think marriages are failing because people are not taught…so now if I know the areas families need help with, for instance the foundations [they will benefit]. *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

Similarly, Mary spoke about how pursuing postgraduate studies and opening a non-governmental organisation (professional growth) might advance social wellbeing. She said:

> I like helping people… so if have my own non-governmental organization I will be promoting better life for the disadvantaged…If I love what I am doing, if I am happy my clients will also benefit from my happiness. *(Mary, practising social worker)*

Zanele (practising social worker) also believes that learning more and studying further will make her a better social worker who can contribute to the betterment of the lives of the people she serves.

Those who understand the physical and emotional aspects of professional wellbeing, suggest that if both social work education and organisations allow for the achievement of the

two, both social workers and society will benefit. Speaking about being physically and emotionally healthy, Frank (lecturer) stated that:

> Professional wellbeing is very crucial because that is the only way you can render services. If you have some challenges, it is difficult. You cannot pour from an empty glass. You need to have something in you to say I am in a capable position to actually render services to clients. Therefore, it is very, very important. *(Frank, social work lecturer)*

Similarly, Theresa mentioned that:

> Professional wellbeing is a nice cup of tea and a saucer, when you fill the cup and you continue filling the cup until it over flows, what is in the saucer you can give away to other people but what is in the cup you must keep for yourself. First you must look after yourself and fill yourself and what is left you give to others. Otherwise, if you take from the cup, the cup becomes empty and where do you take some?... If I am well, I will render a better service. If I am depressed and emotionally unwell, I will not be able to help society… so happy social workers will make a happy society. That is what I think… I will not be a good social worker if I sit like this, overworked, underpaid, stressed. How will I be happy? Social workers start with themselves, their wellbeing. It's like that cup of tea, they have it for themselves first and then they will give to other people. *(Theresa, social work lecturer)*

These views suggest that the advancement of the social workers' wellbeing-related capabilities such as self-care would also benefit society. For instance, Erina spoke about self-care, saying:

> If I have not been taking care of myself properly, I get grumpy and I am tired. It definitely has an impact on service delivery because when you feel better in yourself and you are a bit more energetic you can get things done, but when you are stuck you just cannot do what you are supposed to be doing [because] you are grumpy. *(Erina, social work lecturer)*

Both social work education and organisations have a role to play in advancing professional wellbeing. For instance, if organisations can advance professional wellbeing, they can also contribute to effective public-good interventions. Nxobile (practising social worker) spoke about the impacts of being taken good care of as a professional, saying:

> I would want to say wellbeing makes you happy. If you are happy and content, then it will lead to effective services. I will give you an example of the public sector, public hospitals and private hospitals you can see the difference in terms of the way they treat you. In the public hospitals, the personnel there are not nice. I have been there. I have seen them they are not nice and sometimes when you are in pain they don't care they just want to bandage you and inject you and move on, but in the private sector they take care of patients. I feel like its interrelated If I am good and I am well taken care of, then I will be able to take care of others but if I am not, then I won't be able to take care of someone because I will see them as irritating me. *(Nxobile, practising social worker)*

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed how social work education (at Mopane University) relates to professional wellbeing. Central to this chapter was the question of whether social workers' valued aspirations and capabilities are advanced or can be expanded through social work education. In answering this question, the chapter presents the lecturers' perceptions of the identified capabilities. The findings, as shown in this chapter, suggest that there is general unanimity on what student and practising social workers identified as necessary opportunities for professional wellbeing and what lecturers understand as valuable capabilities. In talking about the advancement of the social workers' valued functionings, particularly helping and professional growth, the findings suggest there are quite a number of educational arrangements in place. For instance, in preparing students for practice (helping), social work students are exposed to multidisciplinary education, theory learning, practica as well as transformative pedagogy. However, views from some students suggest that there is a mismatch between theory and practice. Many students, therefore, highlighted the need for more practical exposure as a way of preparing them for the world of practice. Students also spoke about the importance of learning directly from practising social workers and from real case scenarios.

In addition, some students expressed the need for an education which values their wellbeing as professionals. They expressed the view that in order to be effective helpers, their welfare ought to be in a good state. In this regard, 50% of the students highlighted the need to advance self-care in and through social work education. The chapter also discusses how professional growth is advanced through offering Continued Professional Development courses as well as the provision of bursaries by the DSD. Lastly, the chapter discusses the implications of advancing professional wellbeing in and through social work education. I theorise these findings in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8
A CAPABILITY PERSPECTIVE ON PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING THROUGH SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

> *...the CA can be characterized as an alternative approach to the analysis of... wellbeing, one that has tried to find a middle ground between purely subjective theories of wellbeing on the one hand, such as the preference-based neoclassical paradigm, and, on the other hand, purely objective theories focusing on goods or, a bit less objective, needs* (Van Staveren 2008, p. 1).

8.1 Introduction

The last three chapters (5, 6 and 7) discussed this study's findings in terms of what constitutes the wellbeing of social workers in an ideal world, the real freedoms social workers have in achieving their valued aspirations and functionings, as well as how social work education at Mopane University relates to those valued achievements. This chapter theorises these empirical findings using the capability approach. It also discusses the importance of agency in wellbeing achievement and sheds light on the different conversion factors which either constrain or enable social workers' capacity to convert resources into their valued capabilities and functionings. It further discusses how and why the social workers' wellbeing achievement partly depends on adapting their preferences (adaptive preferences). Lastly, I revisit the role of social work education in advancing professional wellbeing.

I address the following three research objectives in the ensuing sections:

a) Examining what social workers and prospective social workers regard as constituting their well-being.

b) Exploring and highlighting social work students' and practising social workers' aspirations (valued functionings).

d) Reviewing how social work education can create opportunities (capabilities) for social workers to make both personal and professional choices, and expand their aspirations and wellbeing.

8.2. Conceptualising professional wellbeing

The findings from Chapter 5 remind us that neither subjective preference-based theories nor resource or income-based models on their own can adequately explain professional wellbeing (see Chapter 3). Apart from the fact that the different aspects that these models capture, such as happiness, satisfaction, resources or material achievements, are single components of the larger concept of wellbeing, these findings reveal that professional wellbeing is plural and multidimensional. Professional wellbeing, as I have shown throughout this study, is comprised of various aspects of human *functionings* and *capabilities* (see Chapter 3). Equally important to professional wellbeing is the concept of *agency*. I discuss social workers' valued functionings in the next section.

8.2.1 Valued functionings and capabilities for professional wellbeing

8.2.1.1 Functionings

As Alkire (2008a) reminds us, views on wellbeing or quality of life include an element of subjectivity, and this was clearly evident when looking at the conceptualisation of professional wellbeing. Whilst the existing literature (see Chapter 2) focuses on factors such as stress management and physical and emotional wellness as critical signs of social workers' wellbeing, the social workers interviewed in this study explained wellbeing in terms of the satisfaction or happiness that comes with their ability to help people, professional growth, personal growth and material achievements (see Table 8.1 below; Chapters 5 and 6). These aspired functionings constitute the central features of social workers' wellbeing (see Alkire 2008a). However, not all of these aspired functionings can be influenced through policy, although it is possible to do so for helping, professional growth and to some extent material achievements. Therefore, for the purposes of making recommendations on how social work

education can advance professional wellbeing, I will focus on helping and professional growth. In an earlier chapter, Tables 7 and 8 presented the social workers' valued professional and personal aspirations (valued functionings), respectively. Table 14 below shows the four functionings valued by the social workers and their descriptions. It provides a composite summary of the social workers' valued functionings.

Table 14: Valued functionings for professional wellbeing

Valued functionings	Description
Helping people	- Making a difference in people's lives or being influential - Empowering people - Working in a conducive environment (with access to resources and necessary support) - Being healthy (in order to be able to help other people) - Job fulfilment and effective helping
Professional growth	- Finding a social work job after graduation (direct practice, research or administration) - Being promoted and occupying an administrative post or becoming a supervisor - Owning non-governmental organisations or private practice - Further education - Working for bigger welfare organisations and being influential to larger numbers of people
Personal growth	- Getting a job - Having a family (being married and having children)
Material achievements	- Financial stability (can also be understood as an aspect of personal growth) - Owning businesses, having nice cars and houses - Meeting basic needs

The achievement of the above-mentioned valued functionings is what makes life valuable for social workers. Whilst it is true that the achievement of such functionings is likely to lead to satisfaction or happiness, Sen (1985c, p. 200) reminds us that the need to identify

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valued functionings "cannot be avoided by looking at something else, such as happiness…"

Reliance on happiness as the sign of wellbeing does not allow us to make interpersonal comparisons and to capture the nuances of professional wellbeing. Consequently, I argue that in order to capture the nuances of professional wellbeing we cannot solely depend on happiness or satisfaction as an exclusive definition or indication of professional wellbeing. We can only speak about these two aspects (happiness or satisfaction) in relation to the achievement of the social workers' valued functionings. As Alkire (2008a) stated, happiness can only serve two functions when it comes to quality of life. Sen (2008, p. 27) articulates these two when he said "happiness is not all that matters, but first of all, it does matter (and that is important), and second, it can often provide useful evidence on whether or not we are achieving our objectives in general." Mindful of this underlying relationship between the achievement of one's valued functionings and happiness or satisfaction, Sen (1985a) then reminds us that in analysing wellbeing we should not look at the happiness a person enjoys but his/her achievement of doing and being (functionings) (see Sugden 1986). The focal point here, then, is the achievement of the above-mentioned valued states of being and doing. Happiness, for the social workers, is an emotional state which follows on from those achievements. It (happiness) is an evidence of accomplishment (see Chapter 3). Some social workers evidenced this when they were talking about helping as a valuable functioning. They said:

> …my aim is to do my profession to better the lives of others. So when I have reached that I will be happy… *(Khauhelo, student)*
>
> I would want to continue helping people, to see our country being a better place, not full of poverty. I would like to see people having basic needs that they need. I think if I could help, then I will feel good. *(Buang, student)*
>
> When I am doing something for another person, it in turn fills me up. *(Doreen, student)*

As I noted in Chapter 5, helping people emerged as the chief valued functioning for the social workers. However, in talking about its importance, the social workers stressed the point that in order to effectively function, they also need to grow as professionals, work in conducive

environments and be healthy. Being healthy is one of the key intermediaries or fertile functionings that leads to effective helping (see Wolff and De-Shalit 2013); it is an aspect of professional wellbeing. In short, professional wellbeing is more than one's capacity to manage stress in difficult working environments or to be physically and emotionally well. It also speaks of working towards broader change (see Chapter 2).

The social workers also talked about material achievements as an aspect of their wellbeing. Material achievements, as I noted in Chapter 5, speak of the attainment or ownership of physical properties such as businesses, houses and cars. These aspects are not the ultimate ends, but the means to their own wellbeing achievements. These, as some students (e.g. Nyakallo and Bongi) explained, are the basic components for their wellbeing or good life. By and large, the social workers stressed the importance of resources and income in the achievement of their professional and private goals. Resources and income serve as critical means or inputs that ought to be converted into the social workers' various capabilities, which I discuss next (see Sen 1999).

8.2.1.2 Capabilities

As Sen eloquently points out, when determining one's wellbeing, the functionings [whether achieved or not] are not what ultimately matter. Instead, what matters are the real opportunities that the individuals have in achieving those functionings (Dreze & Sen 1995; Brandolini & D'Alessio 1998). A richer conceptualisation of wellbeing, Sen (1999) further notes, factors in both one's valued functionings and capabilities. This is important, because, as Walker (2006, p. 165) explains, "the difference between a capability and functioning is like one between an opportunity to achieve and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome." As was shown in Chapter 5, the social workers' accounts of wellbeing did not end

with highlighting important functionings. They also emphasised the importance of seven capabilities (opportunities, freedoms and options) for their wellbeing achievements (helping and professional growth). Table 15 below summarises the seven capabilities which emerged from interviews with the social workers. Unlike Table 9, this table integrates the other two necessary opportunities: critical thinking and assertiveness, as identified by lecturers. For the number of participants who indicated each capability, see Table 9 in Chapter 5.

Table 15: Professional wellbeing capabilities: Views from all participant groups

Capability	Description
Affiliation	Relations based on the ideas of care, respect and service; narrative imagination or understanding the lives of the vulnerable groups; assertiveness, rapport building, support systems, families and friends; supportive supervision
Adaptation	Coping with the working environment, its changes and challenges; being positive, patient; resilience
Self-care	Having an appreciation of how to take care of oneself and the importance of that in order to function effectively; self-awareness; time off, going on holidays
Work-life balance	Having a clear distinction between private life and professional life or activities, control over work, caseload; the ability to plan and organise work, job security, having family time, leisure
Reflexivity	An understanding of how one's own values, beliefs and emotions might impact professional actions or the self; self-concept, maintaining appropriate emotional boundaries, e.g. empathy vs sympathy; switching off; critical thinking, reflection; being open-minded
Knowledge and skills	Basic professional knowledge, theory and practical; integrating theory and practice; helping process and activities, assessment, interviewing, communication and intervention; policy; life skills, time management, problem-solving
Values and principles	Appreciating and maintaining professional values, principles, attitudes and attributes which enable effective functioning, service, commitment, respect, confidentiality, service, human dignity; integrity

The social workers' freedom to lead a particular type of life (wellbeing) is reflected in their capability set (see Sen 1993). The capabilities listed above are essentially the positive freedoms (opportunities) they should have in order to attain the lives they have reason to value (see

Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999; Crocker & Robeyns 2009). Whilst these capabilities can also be viewed as potential functionings, each one of them represents the real opportunity that social workers should have for their wellbeing (see Walker 2006; Sen 1992). Hence, the social workers' wellbeing achievement depends on the extent to which they have a wide range of these opportunities or capabilities (Sen 1985c; Walker 2006). In Chapter 5 I presented a detailed discussion on how and why these seven capabilities were identified. In the next subsection, I will only briefly explain one capability, which I think requires further elaboration because it is potentially controversial: values and principles.

Values and principles

In Chapter 2, I noted that professions are partly defined in terms of practicing under the guidance of certain ethical frameworks. My findings attest to the view that social work is a value-informed profession, but as I noted in Chapter 3, the question I was grappling with is: what place do values occupy in the social workers' valued lives? In answering that question, my findings have revealed that *values and principles* constitute a necessary capability (opportunity) for social workers' wellbeing. Table 15 above shows that an appreciation and maintenance of professional values and principles, such as the provision of service, commitment, respect, confidentiality, human dignity and integrity enhance effective functioning among social workers. When social workers enter the profession, they bring their own values with them. For instance, some social workers indicated that even prior to entering social work, they already had valued helping. These values are inculcated in them through the influence of their social and physical environments, religion as well as significant others (family members). However, as noted by Deneulin (2011), other than such influences, education can also guide what one values. The same argument is made by Vaughan and Walker (2012), who indicate that education could be a space where individuals can learn or develop values. Part of the social workers' professional training concerns the acquisition of professional

values and knowledge. According to the lecturers interviewed, values pertaining to social justice, respect for people's worth, human rights and dignity, competence, integrity, professional responsibility and service delivery are fostered through social work education (see also SACSSP n.d.*b*)[35]. These are all in alignment with human development values[36], but mostly in relation to the social workers' function: helping. However, as I noted in Chapter 3, if social work education is concerned with the maintenance of diverse people's valued functionings and capabilities, it should also advance the wellbeing of the social workers. Yet, and least we forget, a good human life [for social workers], as Sen suggests, "is among other things a life of freedom" (Sen 1999, p. 70). I discuss the issue of agency next.

8.2.1.3 Agency

Social workers' wellbeing not only depends on what they do or are, but on how they achieve functionings, and whether they are actively involved in the process of achieving the capabilities and/or functionings (see Deneulin 2006, 2014; Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011; Crocker & Robeyns 2009; and conclusion). Agency, as I noted in Chapter 3, is one of the central concepts of the capability approach. The concept speaks of freedoms - which can have two distinct but overlapping aspects: opportunity and process freedoms. In this case, opportunity freedoms concerns the social workers' ability to achieve the things they have reason to value (Alkire 2005b). Process freedoms probes the individual social worker's role in decision-making (Gasper 2007). It, as Alkire (2005b) asserts, observes that the procedures by which individuals obtain outcomes may have a value independent of whatever they achieve.

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[35] SACSSP Website: https://www.sacssp.co.za/Professionals/Conduct

[36] Human development values include empowerment, expansion of capabilities (opportunity to achieve valued ends), development of the doings and beings one values (achievement of valued ends), participation, equal distribution of main capabilities, security and maintenance of people's valued functionings and capabilities (Boni & Gasper, cited by Boni & Arias 2013).

As agents, social workers should therefore not only be able to act and make things happen, but should also be involved in the decision-making processes and actions that lead to the achievement of their valued beings and doings. Nevertheless, the findings, as I noted earlier, suggest that although the social workers have the passion to act and achieve their valued goals such as helping and professional growth, a number of factors interfere with that. Personal, structural as well as work-related issues such as abject poverty and inequality rates, poor supervision, and lack of resources or poor work environments hinder their ability to pursue and achieve their valued goals. These negative conversion factors limit their positive freedoms or the opportunity to shape their own destiny as professionals. They constrain their wellbeing and agency freedoms. I discuss conversion factors in more detail below.

8.2.1.4 Conversion factors

This subsection attends to my third research objective of:

- Identifying the contextual factors that enable or constrain the development of social worker's professional wellbeing and aspirations.

Scholars generally define conversion factors as the different personal, social and environmental characteristics, which can either enable or constrain the conversion of resources (inputs) into capabilities, or capabilities into functionings (see Robeyns 2011, 2017; also Chapter 3). However, in this thesis, I focus on personal, social/structural factors as these emerged most strongly from my data. Instead of environmental conversion factors, I consider what I have called organisational or institutional factors (see table 12). This classification, more than the one that focuses on the general environmental factors, I suggest, captures the specificity of social work in South Africa.

In Chapter 5, I showed that both internal and external factors can enable the achievement of agency goals such as becoming helpers. Internal factors include the passion to help, whilst external factors include previous life experience, one's physical and social environment, the influence of significant people and the opportunities associated with studying social work such as bursary opportunities and better employment prospects. Such factors can be understood as social and contextual conversion factors, which enable the transformation of aspirations into actual functionings (such as enrolling for a social work degree).

The views I presented in Chapter 6 reveal that social workers have different capacities to convert resources into capabilities, and capabilities into functionings. The same factors (personal, organisational, professional and social/structural) that affect the social workers' agency determine the extent to which they can achieve their valued functionings (professional growth and helping people). For instance, the collective features of the profession, such as policies, values and principles, can enhance effective helping as well as professional growth among social workers. On personal factors, an experienced social worker can find it easier to convert practice knowledge and skills into helping, than a relatively new social worker. In addition, although only noted by two participants, the issue of nationality presents a constraint to the functioning of helping, particularly for immigrants. The findings suggest that regardless of one's disposition towards helping, if one is an immigrant, finding a job as a practising social worker is likely to be a challenge.

In addition, structural factors such as poverty and inequalities interfere with the social workers' capacity to help or grow as professionals. In fact, as I noted in Chapter 6, whilst operating with limited resources has become the norm of the day, systemic poverty and its attendant challenges provide a significant constraint to those two functionings among social workers in South Africa. This calls for better social welfare policies which factor in the

prevalence of the particular challenges of poverty and inequality and how this ultimately affects the wellbeing of social workers and the work they do.

Equally important are organisational factors. The social workers' ability to help and grow as professionals depends on organisational/institutional culture (norms and beliefs; supervisory style; also benefits and allowances), the practicing context, (NGOs / private institutions vs government institutions, or the Department of Social Development) as well as the work environment or availability of resources. The views that emerged from interviews with social workers suggest that some non-governmental organisations are better resourced than other government institutions. Lack of resources as well as the social workers' constrained access to the few, available resources affect the extent to which they can intervene with service users and progress as professionals. The findings suggest that organisations such as the DSD that offer housing allowances, better salaries (as compared to NGOs), cars and cellphones, indirectly enhance the helping functioning among workers. When motivated, these workers are more effective and efficient. Such arrangements also advance material achievements among social workers. Finally, some social workers pointed out that organisational culture, particularly the style of supervision, affected their ability to convert resources into helping and professional growth functionings. Some supervisors interfered with the social workers' affiliations (both professional and personal) as well as with how they function. All these findings point to the importance of conducive working environments as a necessary condition for effective helping and professional growth. This calls for positive interventions by both the South African Government and welfare organisations. As I noted in Chapter 5, the persistence of some of these challenges has led to the tensions between social workers' wellbeing achievements and agency freedoms. I discuss this in the next section.

8.3 Tension between wellbeing achievement and agency freedom

The capability approach stresses the point that individual wellbeing can be assessed in at least four different spaces, namely wellbeing achievement, wellbeing freedom, agency achievement and agency freedom (see Chapter 3 for definitions). Sen suggests that when looking at wellbeing, it is advisable not to simply choose to focus on only one of these four possible spaces and disregard the rest. As I highlighted in Chapter 5 and in this chapter, the interviewed social workers reported having both agency freedom and achievement as far as becoming social workers was concerned. However, this is not the case with their wellbeing freedoms and achievements (see Chapter 6).

The social workers' achieved wellbeing is grounded in their achieved functionings (see Chapter 3; see also Nussbaum 2011). Such achievements, among others, include helping and professional growth, both important for human development (see section 8.2.1). Nevertheless, the findings I presented in Chapter 6 reveal that the social workers achieve these valued functionings (helping people and professional growth) only minimally. This is because, in their efforts to advance human development, social workers are confronted with a number of challenges. Various personal, organisational and structural factors limit their freedom to achieve valued beings and doings (see Chapter 6). My findings suggest that social workers are still confronted with many challenges such as working with very limited resources, lack of supportive supervision and high caseloads (see Sprang *et al.* 2007). For instance, some social workers indicated that they have more than 200 cases to work with. Explaining this issue, Pamela (practising social worker) stated that:

> When I was working in the rural areas, people [social workers] were having a caseload of about 800 clients, but now it has come down to 250 or 200 cases … *(Pamela, practising social worker)*

In fact, emotional problems such as secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma and burnout are responses to the many challenges they are confronted with as social workers.

Some scholars have suggested that social workers should adopt individual responses to such structural challenges by, for example, practicing mindfulness and career sustaining behaviours (see Lawson & Myers 2011). However, the fact that social workers continue to work with limited resources and high caseloads raises structural questions about the implementation of welfare policies (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1). The persistence of such challenges does not conform to the DSD's Framework for Social Welfare Service as of 2013. In that framework, the DSD recommended a ratio of 1 social worker to 134 (1:134) cases annually. In addition, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) stresses that poor working conditions in the welfare sector ought to be addressed urgently. Yet, 21 years down the line the challenges still persist, if not getting worse (see Dlamini & Sewpaul 2015; DSD 2013). Social workers' lack of wellbeing freedom is exacerbated by structural problems such as high poverty levels and persistent inequalities (see Chapter 2, section 2.2). All these factors infringe on social workers' positive and wellbeing freedoms and that impacts the extent to which they can achieve their valued states of doing and being.[37]

In fact, there is a tension between the achievement of the social workers' professional functionings and other private goals, such as personal growth and material achievements (see Chapter 5). For instance, as noted in Chapter 5, within the South African context it is not a given that material achievements are feasible on a social worker's salary. Similarly, it can be a challenge to think of living a healthy lifestyle (physically and emotionally) whilst working as

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[37] Positive freedoms speaks of being able to live as one opts to as well as having effective power over the achieved life outcomes (see Chapter 3).

a helper (social worker) who operates within extremely resource-constrained environments and dealing with heavy caseloads. All these tensions reflect the conflict that exists between the social workers' wellbeing achievement and agency freedom. Social workers have to make hard decisions about whether they should advance their own personal wellbeing or their agency goals (helping). Yet, ideally, the achievement of both personal wellbeing and agency achievement constitutes their overall wellbeing (see figure 2 below).
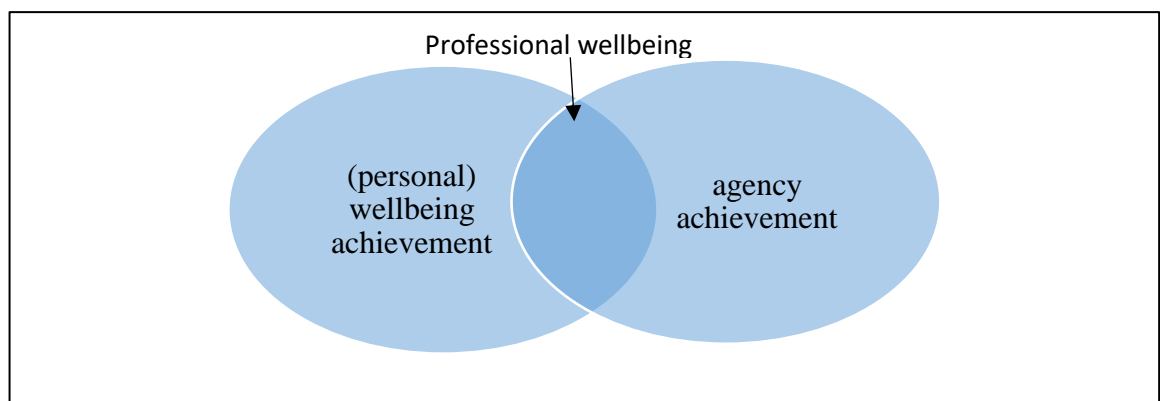
Figure 2: Professional wellbeing

In this diagram, professional wellbeing is a *universal set* containing other sets or elements, namely (personal) wellbeing achievement and agency achievement. In other words, the union of personal wellbeing achievement and agency achievement results in professional wellbeing.

The advancement of the capabilities identified by the social workers might be helpful in reconciling these two important aspects of their overall wellbeing. For instance, self-care, reflexivity, work-life balance as well as adaptation may help to ensure healthy lives among social workers, whilst promoting effective helping. However, this does not absolve the South African government of its responsibility of ensuring good working environments, as well as better welfare for disadvantaged groups who typically seek the services of social workers. This is especially important when we consider that much of this tension is a result of structural

factors such as high poverty rates and persistent inequalities, poor funding of the welfare system, all of which take their toll on the wellbeing of the social workers and their functions. Social workers are then confronted with severely resource-constrained working environments and unmanageable caseloads. Such challenges have led some social workers into adapting their preferences in terms of the achievement of their valued functionings, as discussed in the following subsection.

8.3.1 Adaptive preferences

Elster (1982) introduced the concept of adaptive preference. Capability scholars such as Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) later scrutinised the concept in their works on wellbeing or quality of life (see Teschl & Comim 2005). In their justification of the capability approach, they pointed to the shortfalls of the notion of adaptive preferences in defining and measuring wellbeing. The critiques were based on the argument that we cannot define wellbeing on the basis of one's adapted preference satisfaction because adapted preferences are deformed preferences which often result from adverse conditions or experiences (see Baber 2007; Nussbaum 2000). For Nussbaum (2000) any satisfaction that comes with deformed preferences does not count in any way towards one's wellbeing, especially considering that in such circumstances, decisions, choices and dispositions are made out of desperation. In this section, I advance two points: that we cannot exclusively judge the wellbeing of the social workers based on their adapted preferences, considering the various factors that limit their wellbeing freedoms. Instead, we should make a distinction between "what they really prefer and what they are made to prefer" (Teschl & Comim 2005, p. 236). What matters are the social workers' true or original preferences (the preferences they would have in ideal circumstances). Although this may appear to be paradoxical, it is also important to note that adaptive preferences are not

always negative, but that they are sometimes positive and good for one's wellbeing, particularly in contexts such as those in which social workers find themselves.

The various structural and organisational problems (sources of unfreedoms) have led some social workers to adapt their preferences in terms of the achievement of their valued functionings. As I discussed in Chapter 5, some social workers have adapted their preferences in terms of helping into being satisfied with whatever help they can offer to service users. Before entering into actual practice, social workers' true preference was to help multitudes of disadvantaged people. They hoped to intervene and make a difference at a larger scale. However, through their adverse experiences in practice, they had to adapt their expectations to what is feasible in their context. They realised how wide their aspiration gap was (see Chapter 5; Ray 2006). A combination of lack of resources, high caseloads and the intensity of the social problems renders the extent to which they would like to help unachievable. This, as a result, has led them to believe that they cannot do much when it comes to helping people. This scenario is captured by Brandolini and D'Alessio (1998, p. 10), when they noted that people's judgements on wellbeing are "conditioned by their aspirations that are in turn influenced by their experiences." The social workers' adaptive preferences are experience induced (see Elster 1982).

Similarly, the experienced social workers have come to terms with the fact that they are paid less and cannot achieve the level of material wellbeing that they desire. They have adapted their preferences to say that they just need to meet the basic needs of their families. Such dispositions are made out of limited choice. The social workers are beginning to normalise their situations. This probably has to do with learned helplessness, or what Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (1978) described as universal helplessness. For these authors, universal helplessness describes a situation in which people believe that neither they nor relevant others can solve their problems or reverse their conditions (see also Martinko & Gardner 1982;

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Lennerlöf 1988). It was evident from my data that the majority of social workers no longer believe that either they or their organisations can do much to change their circumstances. Dlamini and Sewpaul (2015) made the same observation in their study conducted in Kwazulu-Natal. According to them, some social workers feel that they have no power to change their predicament. Hence, the social workers' exposure to adverse environments and conditions, which they cannot control, leads to adaptive preferences. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, we cannot solely define their wellbeing on the basis of such dispositions. We should always remember that, as I noted in Chapter 3, wellbeing can be derived from one's sense of achievement or the ability to achieve his/her valued functionings, not to speak of adapted preferences. The fact that the social workers are now adapting their preferences points to the need to rectify the different sources of their challenges (high poverty and inequality rates, the poor funding of the welfare system, high caseloads and lack of resources). An analysis of, and intervention in, their wellbeing based on adapted preferences will undermine change (see Baber 2007). As Khader (2011) notes, deliberating with people who have adaptive preferences is key in intervening with them.

However, it is also important to note that, although we cannot solely define the wellbeing of the social workers based on their adapted preferences, we should not be caught up in thinking that adaptive preferences are always negative (Teschl & Comim 2005; Khader 2011). Watts, Comim, and Ridley (2008) made this clear when they said, "adaptive preferences might be positive when subsequent individual flourishing is based on recognition of one's limitations…" The fact that the social workers are acknowledging their limitations and adapting to what is feasible in their current situation can be viewed as a positive thing for their wellbeing and, indeed, for this reason adaptation was identified as a valuable capability (see Table 9). This would imply a reduction in worry over unrealistic goals, in the current context. This might be good for the social workers' physical and emotional wellness (both aspects of

professional wellbeing). As Khader (2011, p. 48) notes, in such instances, we might not find a case of adaptive preference but "we should always remember that we cannot isolate processes of preference formation that make adaptive preferences what they are." This positive angle on adaptive preferences explains why adaptation emerged as one of the important capabilities for professional wellbeing. These capabilities may be promoted through both policy changes and higher education. As Nussbaum (2000, p. 97) notes, education ought to "provide the individual[s] with more opportunities to develop the reflection and reflexivity needed to challenge adaptive preferences so that, even if it is not possible for [them] to change the circumstances constraining [their] wellbeing, [they] can cease [their] acquiescence in them and learn to recognise the potential for a better life." I expand on this in the next subsection.

8.4 Social work education and the promotion of capabilities for professional wellbeing

This section addresses my last research objective:

- Reviewing how social work education can create opportunities (capabilities) for social workers to make both personal and professional choices, and expand their aspirations and wellbeing.

As I noted in Chapter 3, the capability approach has moved beyond being a language of assessing individual wellbeing to include the evaluation of how social institutions such as social work education can expand wellbeing (Unterhalter 2003; Deneulin 2014). It is with this understanding that I revisit the role of social work education in advancing professional wellbeing, in light of my findings. The views I presented in Chapter 7 suggest that social work educators appreciate the multidimensionality of professional wellbeing. The lecturers, as I have already noted, highlighted that professional wellbeing is always in progression, hence, they are advancing student wellbeing which they argue precedes professional wellbeing. For instance,

they cited the example of advancing students' emotional and physical wellness by referring them for counselling (see section 7.2.2). Importantly, lecturers reinforced the importance of the seven capabilities that were identified by the social workers. Some of them noted that social workers need two other capabilities: assertiveness and critical thinking, which in this work respectively fall under the two broader capabilities: affiliation and reflexivity. For them, the advancement of the identified capabilities will not only lead to the good life among social workers, but will also mean effective interventions by social service providers. Table 16 below presents how, in a nutshell the seven capabilities are advanced at Mopane.

Table 16: Capabilities and Educational Practices

Capability	Educational practice
Affiliation	Facilitating relationships or affiliation at different levels, in and outside university: *(Student-student, Student-faculty, Department of social work and social service organisations, Students-experienced social workers(field instructors)*, Friendship initiative, open door policy, student representative, student association
Adaptation	The transformative type of education (curriculum and pedagogy) Promoting self-awareness and healing among students Students taught about resilience Students exposed to practice setting
Self-care	Content covered in some modules for instance Loss and trauma
Work-life balance	Students taught about the importance of the capability

Reflexivity	Introspective learning:
	    Tutorials, discussions, reflections
	    The pedagogy of discomfort

Knowledge and skills	Multidisciplinary education
	 Theory learning and practicum:
	    Pushing for the stipulated learning outcomes (according to CHE and SACSSP)
	    Imparting professional knowledge and skills,
	    Teaching different social work methods (group work, community work and case work)
	    Promoting research involving students
	    Cultivating resilient and reflexive professionals,
	    Facilitating the integration of theory and practice
	    Supervision
	    Fostering life skills through curriculum and extra-curricular arrangements
	    Continued Professional Development training

Values and principles	Fostering professional attributes, attitudes, values and principles Advancing policy and teaching professional code of ethics

Quite a number of educational arrangements are in place for the advancement professional wellbeing capabilities. However, as shown in the table above, some of the capabilities such as affiliation, knowledge and skills, values and principles are attended to more than others (self-care, work-life balance, reflexivity and adaptation). As already noted in chapter seven, views from both students and lecturers suggest that the capability of knowledge and skills is advanced in a number of ways. For instance, as the findings suggest, social work education at Mopani is multidisciplinary. Students can enrol for some courses from other disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology and Criminology among others. This enriches their knowledge as social workers. In addition to that, it is compulsory for each student to do theory learning and practicum. One of the lecturers' goals is to promote the integration of the two components of social work by students. This is promoted through different social work methods such as group work, community work and casework.

In addition, as already discussed in chapter seven, lecturers indicated that they are facilitating various forms of affiliation. These include student-student, student-lecturer, department of social work and social service organisations, students-experienced social workers (field instructors). Students are also taught the importance of professional relationships such as those between social workers and clients (see section 7.2.2).Similarly, the capability of values and principles is advanced at Mopane University. As I noted earlier, professions such as social work are partly defined by a set of values and principles that guide their conduct (see chapter 3). This makes the subject of professional values a compulsory component of the curriculum. Social work lecturers strive to not only advance professional values and principles but policy also.

In fostering reflexivity, lecturers facilitate introspective learning among students. In addition to that, students do tutorials, in-class discussions and reflections. These practices allow for some form of introspection amongst students, whilst transforming them into reflective

social workers (see section 7.2.2.3). Lecturers also seek to promote self-awareness and healing among students. Students are exposed to the practice setting as early as their first year. However, more practice exposure would help in fostering adaptation. Students are also taught about the importance of resilience in social work. However, as shown in the table above, the department of social work still needs to do more in fostering self-care. The importance of work-life balance ought to be reinforced in and through social work education.

In talking about the social workers' valued functionings, my findings suggest that social work education (at Mopane University) advances some aspects of professional wellbeing such as helping and professional growth, without consciously viewing the two as valued functionings for professional wellbeing (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). Helping, for instance, is viewed as an expected professional function that should benefit many disadvantaged people, more than the individual social worker. In light of this, certain professional knowledge and skills are fostered to promote competence among students. Examples of skills include time management, interviewing, report writing, problem solving and communication skills. One of the lecturers, Lisa, noted this in saying:

> [Social workers] are not in this job in the first instance because it is about [them]. [They] are here because it is a calling and [they] want to make a difference… *(Lisa, social work lecturer)*

This thinking informs how social work education - both curriculum and pedagogy - is structured.

Both pedagogy and curriculum foreground the preparation of students as prospective helpers. For example, none of the compulsory modules is dedicated to the wellbeing of professionals (see section 7.2.2.3). Hence, rather than considering how social work education can enhance an individual social worker's wellbeing, some lecturers view social workers as a means to an end; they are instruments of social development. This raises questions on the issues

of social justice and the distribution of education as an opportunity or resource within social work education.

The distribution of education as a resource is, therefore, conceived in terms of what educationists want the students to value as opposed to what the students might value (see Wood & Deprez 2012; Walker & Unterhalter 2007). In this regard, social work education strives to produce highly knowledgeable and skilled (competent) social workers, who value the advancement of social wellbeing. In as much as that should be part of the students' professional training, what I think is missing is the idea of education for reasoned, valued lives. As Wood and Deprez (2012) suggest, deliberative and reflective discussions can be helpful in allowing students to express their own values in relation to what they learn. It is within such discussions that educators would learn about the overarching conflict between social workers' wellbeing achievement and agency freedom.

Although educationists are advancing student wellbeing in different ways (for instance by promoting physical and emotional wellness and the acquisition of different sets of life skills), what lies at the core of social work education is the preparation of social workers as promoters of social development and social justice. What is also missing from the curriculum are the linkages between other personal wellbeing aspects such as being physically and emotionally healthy and the social workers' contributions to the social good. As I noted in Chapter 7, little (if any) mention is made of the social workers' wellbeing and its importance in effective helping. I have highlighted how emphasis is placed on enhancing the functioning of social workers as ordained helpers. This directs us to the ideas I discussed in Chapter 3: neoliberalism and education for employment or human capital purposes (see discussion on neoliberalism in chapter 3). As I noted in Chapter 3, when social work education focuses on employability, it potentially distorts and transforms the quality of professionals and what they value as individuals. However, in as much neoliberalism distorts the aspirations and aims of

professionals such as social workers, the educators ought to find ways of advancing professional wellbeing. Similarly, the social workers themselves need to find ways of surviving and leading valued lives (Garrett 2010). The capability approach reminds us of the importance of education for valued lives and human wellbeing (Wood & Deprez 2012; Deprez & Wood 2013). In the next subsections, I present my own reflections and recommendations on how social work education could attend to the wellbeing of social workers.

8.4.1 Reflections and recommendations

8.4.1.1 Social work education for human development and valued lives

Several scholars have deployed the capability approach to argue for an education that not only addresses questions of employability and human capital, but also fosters human development (Walker & Fongwa 2017; Walker & McLean 2013; Nussbaum 2011; Boni & Walker 2013; Deprez & Wood 2013). In talking about development, the capability approach stresses the point that our focal point should always be the individual. Individuals ought not to be treated as mere means to some ends such as social interventions or economic growth, but ends in themselves (see Qizilbash 1996). In this regard, social work education should factor in the fact that social workers are ends in themselves (see Chapter 3) and seek to expand social workers' valued capabilities, such as reflexivity, knowledge and skills, values and principles, self-care and emphasise the need for affiliation, adaptation and work-life balance. Social work education should also open up and expand on these necessary opportunities for the students' valued lives (see Bozalek & Leibowitz 2012; Wood & Deprez 2012; Walker 2012a). To do so would mean to foreground both the instrumental and intrinsic value of education in human lives (see Gale & Molla 2015). Unterhalter (2003, p. 7) puts it well when she says, "Education is good partly because it helps secure other 'goods', for example securing a job, contributing

to increased income, protecting one's own health or the health of a child, participating in decision-making... But education is also a 'good' for women and men, because education is good in itself."

8.4.1.2 A social justice approach to social work education

Higher education, as Walker and Wilson-Strydom (2016) suggest, is an important space for human development and justice. The capability approach can help us understand how social justice can be advanced in the realm of education, a point eloquently made by Walker and Unterhalter when they say, "the capability approach offers a method to evaluate real educational advantage, and equally to identify disadvantage, marginalisation, and exclusion. (Walker & Unterhalter 2007, p. 5). Drawing from this approach, the two scholars remind us that "when we evaluate social (and educational) arrangements against a criterion of justice and considerations of equalities, it is people's capabilities that must guide [our] evaluation" (Walker & Unterhalter 2007, p. 4). A focus on capabilities allows us to go beyond an evaluation that is solely based on functionings (achieved beings and doings), to consider the real freedoms or opportunities social workers should have in order to achieve their valued lives. Tikly and Barrett (2011) reiterate this, suggesting that a social justice approach or the advancement of individuals' valued capabilities and functionings ought to be part of a good education. This, for them, is also concerned with the extent to which the form and context of education recognise the identities and needs of the individual learners (see also Wilson-Strydom & Walker 2016; Walker 2006; Walker & Unterhalter 2007).

The idea of social justice in the realm of education does not only incorporate the language of capabilities expansion or the advancement of one's valued functionings to speak of individual agency. Agency speaks of giving power to the students to influence their own transformation. Harvey and Knight (1996) conceptualise this as empowerment through

education. Several scholars have since raised the need to advance agency in and through education (see Wilson-Strydom & Walker 2016; Gale & Molla 2015; Deprez & Wood 2013; Wood & Deprez 2012). In this study, I argue, together with Wood and Deprez (2012), that education ought to be for valued and reasoned lives. The enhancement of agency ought to be a priority in social work education. Failure to do so is likely to reinforce injustice on the part of social workers (see Gale & Molla 2015).

Social work education can advance social workers' valued and reasoned lives in a number of ways. Primarily, it should recognise and value the students' voices. For instance, in educating social work students, it might be a good thing for lecturers to have an appreciation of the different motivations that lead individuals to social work, as well as what valued functionings students aspire to achieve after graduation. Students should be able to choose and express their valued functionings as well as to act on them. A supportive and interactive educational experience can enhance this. Social work educators should therefore foster public reasoning and participation in and outside classrooms. Students' reflection exercises and module evaluations and discussions ought to be taken seriously. These platforms will make room for student voices not only to be heard, but to be interrogated as well. Discussions, for instance, are a good place for public reasoning. As Wilson-Strydom and Walker (2016) eloquently stated, through public reasoning, new ideas and reflections on one's positions are facilitated. Students will, therefore, through dialogue, be in a position to make well-reasoned choices in terms of their valued capabilities and functionings. Furthermore, a curriculum that allows for democratic and deliberative conversations would go a long way in advancing education for valued lives. These views are particularly important, in thinking about how individual life goals can be advanced in and through a just social work education.

Taking a cue from scholars such as Wood and Deprez (2012) as well as Walker and Wilson-Strydom (2016), my argument, therefore, is that a socially just social work education

strives to advance individual learners' agency, valued capabilities and functionings. A focus on these means more benefits from social work education, which would include the advancement of wellbeing and freedom among social workers whilst promoting social change (see Walker & Boni 2016; Walker 2012b). Put in slightly different words, social workers' wellbeing is integral to effective public-good interventions. This approach, in my view, will go a long way in giving us alternative ways of thinking about the transformation and enhancement of the lives of social workers.

8.4.1.3. Transformation as enhancement

This study has shown that social work education can be a transformative process. As Harvey and Knight (1996) note, this process consists of two basic elements: the enhancement and empowerment of students. For them, enhancement involves equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills, whilst empowerment involves giving the students the power to influence their own transformation. Drawing from my research findings, I offer suggestions on what enhancement for professional wellbeing should look like. I will not discuss the issue of empowerment, since I have already talked about it in section 8.4.1.3, where I discuss agency.

Enhancing the lives of social workers

From this study, it is apparent that social work education is doing a good job of enhancing its students with the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, values and principles. These, as I noted earlier, are instrumental in their preparation as professionals and we cannot lose sight of the fact that social work is meant to be a helping profession. Walker and McLean (2013) have helped us understand how the latter can be achieved. In their study of the production of professionals who can contribute towards social transformation through higher education, the two scholars call for the advancement of professional capabilities, which would translate into public-good interventions. However, in this study, I have shown that we

also need to factor in the wellbeing of the professionals in order to promote effective public-good interventions or social transformation. In order to enhance both the wellbeing of social workers as well as their performance as public-good professionals, social work education ought to do more than enhance students with professional knowledge and skills by advancing or expanding the capabilities that were identified by the social workers in this study (see section 8.2.1). The capability for reflexivity is a case in point.

Reflexivity resonates with some of the other capabilities identified, including adaptation, self-care, affiliation and work-life balance. Although these capabilities cannot be collapsed into each other, they involve a strong sense of self-awareness when dealing with otherness; they involve the interaction between an individual and others. Considering this resonance, I suggest that social work education should strongly advance and expand social workers' capability for reflexivity. I agree with Venuleo and Guidi (2014), who suggest that education (in this case both pedagogy and curriculum) should seek to equip students with the ability to deal with otherness, attribute meaning to different life experiences, and to reflexively question those meanings and their implications. One way of doing this is through promoting dialogue within education. As I highlighted above, it is from dialogue that people learn about others and construct new meanings attached to their experiences. This should be coupled with critical thinking (an aspect of reflexivity) which, as Harvey and Knight (1996) suggest, would allow students to:

1. Question established conventions and justify their opinions;
2. Self-assess and be able to decide on what is good; and
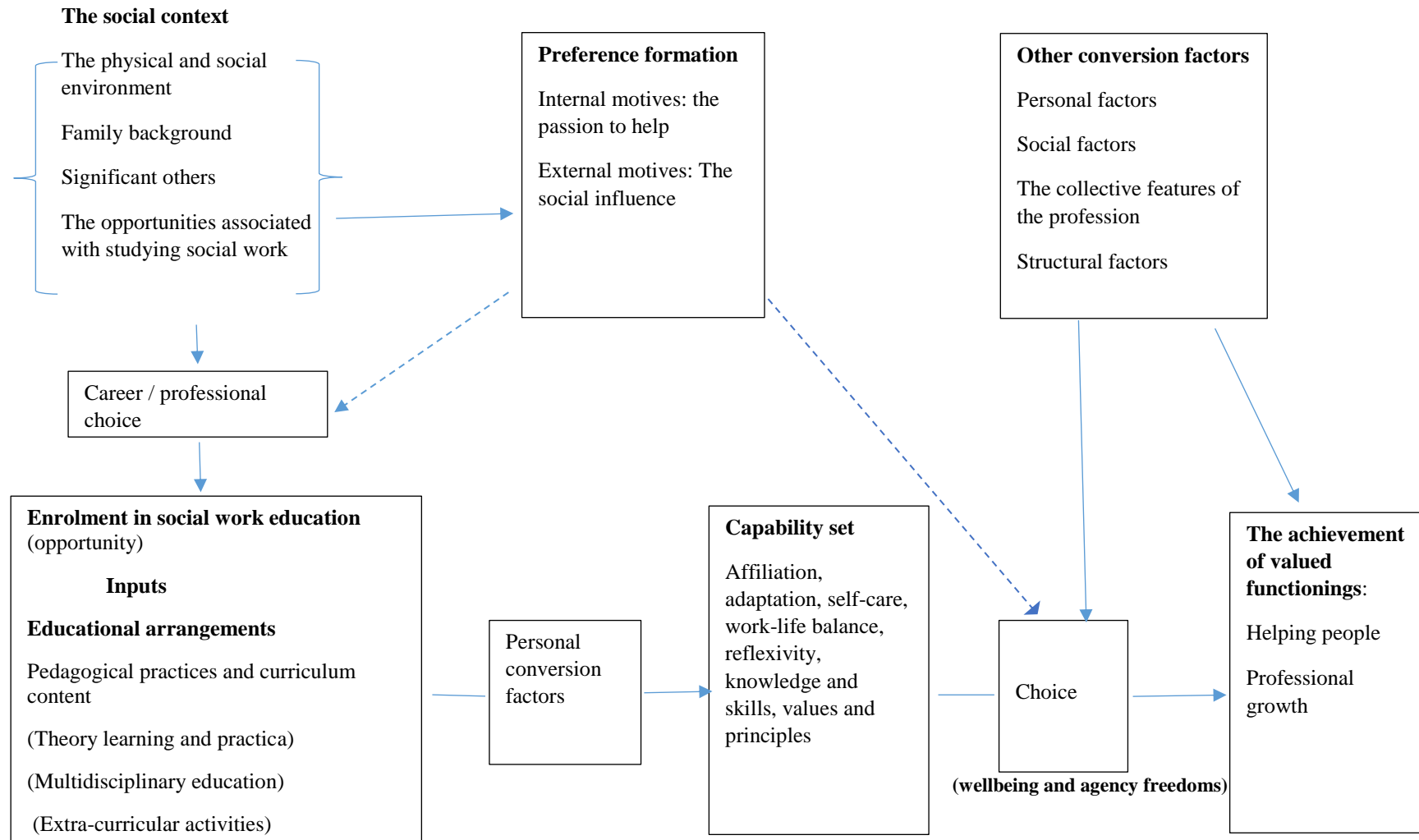3. Challenge preconceptions, both theirs and their peers.

As noted by Deprez and Wood (2013), a critical pedagogy would be helpful in encouraging exploration and critical reflection on human experiences. However, I also would like to make

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it clear that without making efforts to match theory and practice, efforts to enhance students or their wellbeing might be in vain. As I have shown in the previous chapters, one of the challenges confronting social work education is the mismatch between theory and practice (see section 7.1.1.1). This mismatch could be minimised if students have more and better quality practicum exposure than is currently the case. This could give the students an extended opportunity to adapt to the work environment and make sense of what they have learned in the classroom. This also requires the government as well as social service organisations to play a bigger role in the education of social work students by, respectively, creating an enabling environment and providing more and better supervision than is currently done. As Waghid (2002) suggests, engagement or collaboration between universities and social work agencies allows for the sharing of expertise, which in my view will allow the necessary complementarity between theory and practice and, ultimately, will benefit the students.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a capabilities-based theorisation of professional wellbeing. This is summarised in the diagram on the following page. The diagram shows the different socio-contextual factors that influence social workers' preference formation as well as career choices. It also shows that enrolment into social work education is a fertile opportunity that can lead to the expansion of professional wellbeing capabilities. However, different personal factors can either enable or constrain the conversion of social work education into various capabilities. Similarly, social and structural factors as well as some collective features of the profession can enhance or constrain the conversion of capabilities into valued functionings. In fact, those factors can limit the social workers' agency and wellbeing freedoms. The diagram also shows that both internal and external motives can influence one's choices in terms of wellbeing achievement. Presented after the diagram, is my overall conclusion of the study.

Figure 3: Capabilities-based theorisation of professional wellbeing

The social context

The physical and social environment

Family background

Significant others

The opportunities associated with studying social work

Preference formation

Internal motives: the passion to help

External motives: The social influence

Other conversion factors

Personal factors

Social factors

The collective features of the profession

Structural factors

Career / professional choice

Enrolment in social work education (opportunity)

Inputs

Educational arrangements

Pedagogical practices and curriculum content

(Theory learning and practica)

(Multidisciplinary education)

(Extra-curricular activities)

Personal conversion factors

Capability set

Affiliation, adaptation, self-care, work-life balance, reflexivity, knowledge and skills, values and principles

Choice

(wellbeing and agency freedoms)

The achievement of valued functionings:

Helping people

Professional growth

Adapted from Robeyns 2005a, p. 98

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CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

…all research reports (including dissertations) seem to end with a set of conclusions, you cannot finally let go until your concluding chapter is written (Silverman 2005, p. 323)

9.1 Introduction

This chapter ties together the main points made throughout the study. It highlights the key findings for each research question and makes some recommendations on how educationists and policy makers can formulate policies that are sensitive to professional wellbeing and effective public-good interventions of social workers. The chapter also makes recommendations on how social service organisations can intervene with their employees and promote effective practices.

9.2 Rationale of the study: A recap

Drawing from the capability approach, my research argued that social arrangements such as social work education should advance the wellbeing of social workers because it is integral to delivering effective public-good interventions. This research is located within the wide scholarly debate on the private and public benefits of university education. It particularly builds on scholarship which discusses the social role of higher education. Such scholarship includes the work of Walker and McLean (2013), which has highlighted the need to move beyond a neoliberal framework on higher education (which views universities as vehicles for human capital development) to consider the social role of higher education. These scholars posit that although we live in a world dominated by neoliberalism, higher education (in this case, social work education) should seek to produce public-good professionals who can attend

to social problems such as poverty and inequality. This move is especially important in the South African context because, as I have shown in the introductory chapter, the country faces persistent poverty and growing inequality. In such a context, the services of social workers are particularly critical (see Qalinge 2015). Social workers are expected to contribute not only towards economic growth, but to also advance social development. They should move forward the country's agenda of social transformation.

However, scholarly works, both globally and locally have shown that social workers' attempts to advance social wellbeing are hampered by an array of work-related challenges. The challenges, among others, include poor salaries, heavy and unmanageable workloads, lack of proper supervision as well as working in extremely resource-constrained environments. The situation of social workers is worsened by the type of issues they deal with. They work with victims of violence, the terminally ill and the impoverished. All this work is emotionally draining and places a toll on the social workers' wellbeing and how they perform as helpers (see Chapter 3). Using the capability approach as my analytical framework, my study explored the experiences of 25 social workers, to understand how they define wellbeing and how social work education (as a social arrangement) can advance their wellbeing achievements, a state of being which is integral to their effective public-good interventions. In the next section, I give an overview of my research questions and how they have been answered.

9.3 Research questions and their answers: A restatement

As I noted in the introductory chapter, this study critically investigated how social work education can enhance professional wellbeing using the capability approach. The study was guided by the following five questions:

1. How is wellbeing defined by social work students, practising social workers and a selected university department of social work staff?

2. Which capabilities contribute to the wellbeing of social work professionals?

3. In what ways are social work students actively involved in the promotion of their wellbeing, as social workers, through education?

4. What are social work students and practising social workers' aspirations?

5. How is social work education promoting the development, expansion and realisation of professional wellbeing in ways that could culminate in effective public-good practices?

I answered these questions in the four findings-based chapters and the theorisation chapter of the thesis, and what I am attempting here is a brief restatement and summary of these answers.

9.3.1 How is wellbeing defined by social work students, practising social workers and a selected university department of social work staff?

This question is central to my study. In answering it, my starting point was that wellbeing is the ultimate end of development. More importantly, answering this question allowed me to capture a rich, well-informed and contextually relevant definition of professional wellbeing. Drawing from their experiences, social workers offered a definition that goes beyond some of the standard explanations commonly offered by philosophers and welfare economists. These suggest that happiness or utility can be equated to wellbeing. Others conceptualised wellbeing differently, by focusing on resources and income. In these

conceptualisations, wellbeing was likened to the possession of resources and income. Neither of these definitions provided the conceptual breadth and depth to capture the experiences of social workers in South Africa. In contrast, viewed through the capabilities lens, the views offered by the social workers allowed this study to frame wellbeing in terms of the achievement of their multidimensional valued, aspired functionings (see Chapter 5). These include helping people, professional growth, material achievements and personal growth. This work, then, has shown that professional wellbeing is more than stress management or staying healthy, as claimed by some scholars (see Chapter 3). It is about opportunities and having the freedom to convert those opportunities into individuals' valued functionings. It is also about advancing social wellbeing more broadly. The findings presented in Chapter 5 also suggest that there are some tensions and synergies in the achievement of those functionings. For instance, with professional growth, one can effectively help people. At the same time, there can be a tension between being a helper and material achievements.

Evidence presented in this study suggests that social workers have limited freedoms in terms of the achievement of their valued functions. A combination of personal, organisational and structural factors contributes to this. The South African government or the Department of Social Development should therefore strive to eliminate the negative factors that inhibit the achievement of these functionings by social workers. It should seek to address the structural constraints, such as lack of funding and resources, which remain the main sources of the social workers' unfreedoms. This is a challenge for social work organisations as well. Other than identifying their valued functionings, the social workers suggested that in order to lead their valued lives, they also need opportunities (capabilities) such as affiliation, adaptation, self-care, work-life balance, reflexivity, knowledge and skills, as well as values and principles.

9.3.2 Which capabilities contribute to the wellbeing of social work professionals?

This question was intended to capture the different opportunities the social workers should have in order to lead their valued lives. Answering the question also allowed for the examination of the extent to which those capabilities could be achieved by the social workers, in real life. I answered this question in Chapter 5. This chapter showed that social workers valued seven professional wellbeing capabilities: affiliation, adaptation, self-care, work-life balance, reflexivity, knowledge and skills, as well as values and principles (see description in Chapter 5). These opportunities, for the social workers, are the necessary functioning vectors for their wellbeing. Some of these capabilities (for instance, work-life balance and reflexivity or reflexivity and self-care) resonate. However, it should be stressed that these cannot be collapsed into one. A just social work education, as I have noted in Chapter 8, should therefore strive to advance and expand those capabilities. This said, it was quite clear from my findings that although social work education is a fertile opportunity that can lead to the development or expansion of other opportunities, it cannot directly advance some of these capabilities among students. This is because some of the hindrances to the achievement of these opportunities stem from structural problems that should be addressed by government or employers. For instance, as far as access to resources is concerned, what lecturers or universities can do is reinforce the importance of the opportunity to the students and equip students to question the status quo. The responsibility lies with the government and its policy makers to ensure that social service organisations are sufficiently funded. This study has shown that whilst some policies recognise the importance of professional wellbeing, particularly social workers' access to resources, these are not implemented in practice. The government still needs to work on the implementation of its welfare policies.

9.3.3 In what ways are social work students actively involved in the promotion of their wellbeing, as social workers, through education?

I answered this question in Chapter 7. In doing so, I addressed the students' experiences in social work education and how the issues of agency, voice and recognition are or can be advanced in, and through, social work education. My findings have shown that students are involved in various learning activities which can allow their voice to be heard. The activities include writing reflective assignments, module evaluations, tutorials and class discussions. However, what stood out from the findings is that educationists need to do much in terms of responding to the students' reflections and evaluations. Social work education, in my findings, seems to be leaning more towards the creation of a professional identity or the transformation of students into effective helpers, than it is attending to issues of agency for wellbeing achievement. I have argued throughout this work that other than being a transformative process, social work education ought to be a place where individual agency is nurtured. As I have noted in Chapter 7, what is needed within social work education is an interactive learning space, which allows the students to express themselves. I gave recommendations on this in Chapter 8.

9.3.4 What are social work students and practising social workers' aspirations?

Chapters 5 and 6 address this question. These chapters respectively captured the social workers' valued, aspired functionings, and how they can change over time, as well as the extent to which social workers could achieve them in real life. My findings (see Chapter 5) suggest that the major drive behind prospective social workers' enrolment in social work education is their passion to help (76% of the 25 social workers). However, others were influenced by some external factors, which include the fact that they were raised in an environment where social

work activities took place. Alternatively, they were influenced by the people that they interacted with. The majority of social workers, hence aspired, above all, to be effective helpers. However, the findings suggest that such aspirations are sometimes frustrated by, among other things, high caseloads. Moreover, the fact that most social workers (more than 70% of the 18 social workers) work in poorly resourced environments constrains the achievement of their valued functionings. As a result, social workers are forced to adapt their preferences. Again, the Department of Social Development together with other social service organisations should see to it that factors such as lack of resources and the unbalanced social worker-client ratio are addressed[38]. My argument is that addressing these challenges would not only contribute to healthy lives among social workers, but also to social wellbeing.

9.3.5 How is social work education promoting the development, expansion and realisation of professional wellbeing in ways that could culminate in effective public-good practices?

This question was both exploratory and prescriptive. My aim was to learn how social work education at Mopane University relates to the social workers' valued aspirations or functionings. Chapter 7 addressed this question. It discussed how professional wellbeing is advanced in the curriculum and through pedagogical practices. Views from all participant groups and the documents I reviewed suggest that a lot is being done to advance the two professional functionings: helping and professional growth (see Table 13). For example, in preparing students for effective helping, social work education, among other things, is advancing multidisciplinary and transformative learning (see discussion on transformative pedagogy, section 7.2.2.3). In addition to that, the department of social work at Mopane University offers Continued Professional Development courses to practising social workers.

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[38] The lack of resources and unbalanced social worker-client ratio has to do with other policy and political issues in South Africa.

However, as I noted in Chapters 7 and 8, these two (helping and professional growth) are advanced without the conscious view that they are valued wellbeing achievements, but as expected professional functions. The findings suggest that for some educators, although the wellbeing of social workers is important, the fact that they should help takes precedence. This raises the question of whether social workers are the ends or means of development.

The understanding of social workers as the means of development informs how social work education is structured. For instance, the majority of the courses offered seek to prepare social work students to be helpers. Similarly, the transformative pedagogy seeks to prepare them for their helping endeavour. In light of this, this study recommended education for human development and valued lives. It highlighted the importance of a social justice approach to social work education and proposes an education that strives for fair distribution of valued opportunities. A just education, I suggest, recognises the identities and needs of the learners and strives to advance those individuals' valued capabilities and functionings. As I have noted in the introductory chapter, a focus on capabilities means more benefits from social work education, which would include the advancement of wellbeing among social workers, whilst promoting social change (see Walker & Boni 2016; Walker 2012b).

The study's findings were unanimous on what social workers identified as necessary capabilities and what the lecturers think of as necessary opportunities for professional wellbeing. This study, however, did not go as far as exploring how these capabilities can be advanced through social work education. This is an area that can be explored in future research.

9.4 Recommendations for social work services organisations and policy makers

Drawing from the results of this work, this unit outlines some recommendations for social work services organisations and policy makers in South Africa. It suggests the following:

- Working towards improved or conducive work environments for social workers,

- If possible, ensuring adequate staffing and resources,

- Introducing, implementing and safeguarding effective work-life balance policies and practices, for instance, ensuring flexible work schedules for social workers, work arrangements such as maternity and paternity leave among others,

- Ensuring proper and adequate supportive supervision for social workers as well as encouraging all supervisors to undergo training,

- Upgrading reward systems as well as salaries for social workers,

- Opening up opportunities for, and prioritising, continued education or professional development, and

- Promoting informal interactions among social workers.

Similarly, policy makers should consider the following:

- Ensuring the implementation of social welfare policies,

- Lobbying for improved and better funding for social welfare services, and

- Advocating for the advancement of professional wellbeing through education as well as within social service organisations

It should also be noted that as professionals, social workers should press their case for these changes. This would require collective struggle on their part.

9.5 Methodological limitations

As noted in Chapter 4, this study was informed by constructivism. Its aim was to understand and reconstruct the worldview people have on what constitutes the wellbeing of social workers and how it can be advanced through social work education. The constructivist

approach, as I anticipated from the beginning, opened up new and richer interpretations of these two issues. These new interpretations (presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7) were arrived at through in-depth, one-on-one interviews. Nonetheless, my study does not permit for an all-inclusive or absolute definition of wellbeing. The way wellbeing is conceptualised in this work is contextual. I therefore recommend future research on the conceptualisation of professional wellbeing in the global north. This will be helpful, considering the ongoing labour migrations.

Another limitation which deserves mentioning has to do with the research design. The subject of this work (wellbeing) is not only contextual, but also ever changing. In trying to counter for this, I conducted interviews with three groups of social workers (final-year students, practising social workers and lecturers with more than a year of practice) who were at different professional levels. This allowed me to capture the progression of professional wellbeing in the social work domain. However, I believe, for some researchers, their avenues of investigation can draw benefit from a longitudinal study. This is an area that can be explored in future research.

Related to that, is the issue of accuracy (trustworthiness) of research. In trying to boost the accuracy of my findings, I triangulated my data collection methods. I conducted interviews and documents review. This allowed me an in-depth understanding of the case and issues under study, considering that I did not have prolonged contact with the participants. Nevertheless, in some instances, reviewing existing documents or administrative records such as the curriculum may pose a threat to the validity and generalisability of the findings to other institutions. For example, academic documents such as social work curricula, syllabi or reflection assignments, which I used, may be peculiar to the case I studied. In addition, the people who compiled such data may have different interpretations of the contents of the documents from my own, and this might lead to misrepresentation of the information. Therefore, I recommend the use of other

data collection methods in future research, e.g. focus group discussions. This will bring greater clarity to the content of the mentioned documents.

9.6 Conclusion

Overall, this study asked how social work education can promote the wellbeing of social workers and enhance their effectiveness as social service providers. Although this study answered this question using the case of Mopane University in South Africa, it is my hope that similar research will be carried out in different contexts and yield results that will not only enhance professional wellbeing but also bring about social change. It is also my hope that the lessons from this study will benefit educationists, social service organisations and policy makers both in South Africa and in other parts of the world.

A social worker's well-being affects not only the social worker at the individual level; but also directly affects agency and client outcomes… Adequate support is crucial in maintaining social workers' positive well-being (Conway 2016, p. 2).

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	**Questions for 4th Year Social Work Students**
	1. Why did you choose to study social work?
	2. How do you describe your educational experience, so far, as a prospective social worker?
	3. As a social worker, what would you want to achieve/be in order for you to feel that life is going well (wellbeing)?
	4. Can you describe for me your field placement experience?
	a. What are some of the things you appreciated learning during that time, as a social worker?
	b. In what ways are the things you learnt during that time related to the betterment of your own life?
	c. During that field placement, were there any personal, social or environmental factors which inhibited you from living the type of life you wanted?
	d. Did your experience in practice impact your sense of a good life, at that time or in future?
	5. How do you define a good life?
	6. In what ways do you think social work education can enhance that good life (the type of life you value)?
	a. Do you think social work clients or society will benefit from that? In what ways?
	7. Do you think there is a connection between your wellbeing (living well) and the service users' wellbeing?
	8. In what way is your good life linked to effective social work practice?
	9. To what extent do you think what you are learning can lead to the life you would like to live as a social worker?
	10. Which opportunities should have been or were open to you through education, in order to live your desired type of life?
	11. Which abilities or skills would you appreciate developing through education, for you to lead the type of life you value as a social worker?
	12. In what ways could you have been involved in making your education beneficial for your own life?
	13. What are your future life goals and hopes as a social worker?
	14. In what ways are those future goals and hopes related to your sense of life going on well?
	15. Are those future goals in any way linked to the betterment of society or social wellbeing? If so, in what ways?
	16. What should be done in social work education to promote the realisation of your future goals?
	a. In what ways can you be actively involved in that process?
	17. What professional values were you taught as a prospective social worker?
	a. Do you think those are important values for the professionals?
	b. To what extent are you comfortable with those values?
	18. What do you value in life as a prospective social worker?
	19. Learning from your internship experience, to what extent do your own beliefs, values and attitudes align with social work practice?
	a. Do you think it is important to separate them from your work as a social worker?
	b. During field placement did you face any challenges in trying to separate your personal life from the work you were doing?
	c. In what ways should social work education enhance that ability among social work students?
	Questions for Practising Social Workers
	1. Why did you choose to study social work?
	2. How do you describe your experience as a social worker?
	3. How do you define life going well (wellbeing), as a social worker?
	4. What opportunities does your work offer to lead a good life?

5. What are some of the personal factors that hold you back from leading the type of life you value?
6. What are some of the social factors that hold you back from achieving the type of life you value?
7. What other challenges do you face in social work practice?
8. In what ways could social work education have prepared you in dealing with such challenges?
9. In what ways can your own wellbeing be linked to effective social work practice?
10. In what ways can society or service users benefit from your wellbeing, as a professional?
11. What do you value in life as an individual?
12. To what extent do your own beliefs, values and attitudes align with the work you do?
    a. Do you think it is important to separate them from your work as a social worker?
    b. Do you face any challenges in trying to separate your personal life from the work you do?
    c. Do you think social work education should enhance that ability among students? If yes, in what ways should social work education enhance that ability among social work students?
13. From your work experience, what professional values are important for a social worker?
14. Do you feel connected to those professional values?
15. Do social work professional values resonate/align with the type life you would want to lead?
16. To what extent would you say you are leading the type of life you envisioned when you were studying for social work?
17. What were some of the things you hoped to do or be as a social worker?
18. Do you think your educational experience was tailored towards promoting your own good life?
19. What should have been taught in social work education for the betterment of your life as a social worker?
    a. Which skills or abilities would you have appreciated developing (through social work education) for the betterment of your own life as a professional?
    b. In what ways can social work students be involved in identifying the relevant skills and abilities?
20. What should be taught in social work education for effective social work practice?
21. Which qualities do you appreciate having or developing as a social worker?
22. Why are those qualities important?

Questions for Department of Social Work Faculty Members

1. Why did you choose to study social work?
2. What were your hopes and goals when you studied for social work?
3. Do you think you are leading the type of life you hoped for?
4. Why did you choose to be a lecturer?
5. Drawing from your own experience, what type of graduates do you anticipate producing?
6. What are some of the qualities you promote among students?
    a. Why are those qualities/traits important?
7. How do you define professional wellbeing for practising social workers?
8. Do you think professional wellbeing is crucial for effective interventions? If so, in what ways?
9. Do you think professional wellbeing is of any benefit to the society or service users? If so, in what ways?
10. To what extent is social work education attending to the issue of professional wellbeing?
11. In what ways is social work education advancing professional wellbeing among social work graduates?
12. What educational opportunities (skills or abilities) should be promoted for social work, professional wellbeing?
13. In what ways can social work students be actively involved in the promotion of their own wellbeing through education?
14. What professional values are taught in the social work curriculum?
    a. Why are those values taught?
    b. To what extent do you think social work students are comfortable with those values?
15. In what ways are social work values attending to professional wellbeing? Why is it the case?
16. What challenges are mostly encountered by social work professionals?

	17. In what ways is social work education preparing students in dealing with such challenges? In what ways will that be beneficial to social work clients?
	18. To what extent is it a challenge for professionals to separate themselves from their work (reflexivity)?
	a. In what ways is social work education attending to that?
	19. Do you think issues to do with students' future professional goals should be discussed in social work education?
	a. If yes, do you think students can benefit from that? In what ways?
	b. In what ways can that be included in social work education?

APPENDIX B1: CODE BOOK FOR FOURTH-YEAR SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

ABBREV	CODE	DESCRIPTION
M F	MOTIVATING FACTORS	Any motivating factor towards the students' enrolment into social the work programme
SO	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	Any information about other people who influenced the decision to enrol in the social work programme
F	FAMILY	Any information about family
E	EMPLOYMENT	Any information about getting a job or employment / job opportunities
EM	EMOTIONS	Any information about emotions at work or during field practica
GR	GREAT QUOTE	Good quotes from students
SEE	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE	Any descriptive information about the students' educational experiences, theory or the practicum experience
SEUNI/TH	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY/THEORY	Any information about educational experience in university such as classes, courses, modules and learning activities
SE C& F	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION CONTENT AND FOCUS	Any information about social work education's general focus and content, as well as students' suggestions on content and focus
TAs	TEACHING APPROACHES	Any information about teaching approaches, ways of teaching and suggestions
V&R	VOICE AND RECOGNITION	Any information about wanting to be heard and recognised in social work education or practice
SEOUNI/FD	SOCIAL WORK EUCATION OUTSIDE UNVERSITY/FIELD PRACTICUM	Any information about educational experiences outside university or field practica, description, field practicum hours, activities and suggestions
ExCA	EXTRA-CURRICULLAR ACTIVITIES	Other activities done by students for their professional knowledge benefit, but that do not form part of the curriculum
SEILL	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNT	Important knowledge or understanding gained through learning experience, either in practice or class

P/WE	PRACTICE/WORK ENVIRONMENT	Any information about the work / field practicum environment and conditions, e.g. Issues to do with the nature of clients, workload, type of issues and resources
PR	PERSONAL RESPONSES and FEELINGS	Any information about personal responses OR feeling to work and learning experiences
QL	QUALITY OF LIFE	Any information on how students define quality life, including, both personal/individual and professional goals or anticipated achievements
LPP	LINKING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS	Any information about the connection or link between professional goals or anticipated achievements and personal goals or anticipated achievements
LQE	LINKING QUALITY LIFE TO EFFECTIVE HELPING	Any information that explains the link between professional quality life achievement and effective social work
SV	SUPERVISION	Any information about supervision during the field practicum
MY	MONEY	Any information about money
RS	RESOURCES	Any information about resources for personal life and for work
HLP	HELPING	Any information about helping, definition of what it is and what's involved in helping e.g. tools, and the processes involved
FG	FUTURE GOALS	Any information about future goals, professional and personal
LFG& QL	LINKING FUTURE GOALS TO QUALITY LIFE	Any information on the link between future goals and quality life

APPENDIX B2: CODE BOOK FOR PRACTISING SOCIAL WORKERS

ABBREV	CODE	DESCRIPTION
M F	MOTIVATING FACTORS	Any motivating factor towards the social workers' enrolment into the social work programme or practicing social work
SO	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	Any information about other people who influenced the decision to enrol in the social work programme or getting into social work practice
F	FAMILY	Any information about family
E/W	EMPLOYMENT/WORK	Any information about getting a job or employment / work opportunities
PC	PRACTICING CONTEXT	Any information about the practicing context NGO or government institution (DSD) or other institutions
EM	EMOTIONS	Any information about emotions at work
V&B	VALUES AND BELIEFS	Any information about professional and personal values, beliefs and attitudes
GR	GREAT QUOTE	Great quotes from social workers
SEE	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE	Any descriptive information about the social workers' educational experiences, the purpose and components of social work education
SEUNI/TH	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY/THEORY	Any information about educational experience in university such as classes, courses, modules, learning activities
SE C& F	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION CONTENT AND FOCUS	Any information about social work education's general focus and content, as well as suggestions on content and focus

TAs	TEACHING APPROACHES	Any information about teaching approaches, ways of teaching and suggestions
V&R	VOICE AND RECOGNITION	Any information about wanting to be heard and recognised in social work education or practice
SEOUNI/FD	SOCIAL WORK EUCATION OUTSIDE UNVERSITY / FIELD PRACTICUM	Any information about educational experience outside university or field practicum, description, field practicum hours, activities and suggestions
ExCA	EXTRA-CURRICULLAR ACTIVITIES	Other activities done by students for their professional knowledge benefit, but that is not part of the curriculum
P/W E	PRACTICE/WORK EXPERIENCE	Any information about practice or work history, experience, context, activities, challenges, encounters and opportunities
ILL	IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNT	Important knowledge or understanding gained through practice experience
P/WE	PRACTICE/WORK ENVIRONMENT	Any information about the work environment and conditions, e.g. Issues to do with the nature OR type of clients, workload, type of issues and resources
PR	PERSONAL RESPONSES and FEELINGS	Any information about personal responses OR feelings towards practicing, or work-related challenges such as high caseload, lack of support, resources and proper supervision
QL	QUALITY of LIFE	Any information on how social workers define quality of life, necessary tools, determining factors as well as available QL opportunities at work
LQE	LINKING QUALITY OF LIFE TO EFFECTIVE HELPING	Any information that explains the link between professional quality life

		achievement and effective social work
SV	SUPERVISION	Any information about supervision in organisations or of students
MY	MONEY	Any information about money
RS	RESOURCES	Any information about resources for personal life and for work
HLP	HELPING	Any information about helping, definition of what it is and what's involved in helping e.g. tools, activities and the processes involved
FG	FUTURE GOALS	Any information about future goals (extant, achieved and unrealised) professional and personal
LFG& QL	LINKING FUTURE GOALS TO QUALITY OF LIFE	Any information on the link between future goals and quality of life

APPENDIX B3: CODE BOOK FOR LECTURERS \FACULTY MEMBERS

ABBREV	CODE	DESCRIPTION
M F	MOTIVATING FACTORS	Any motivating factor towards one's enrolment in the social work programme or practicing social work
SO	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	Any information about other people who influenced the decision to enrol in the social work programme or getting into social work practice
ED	EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE	Any information about the faculty members' educational experience, year of graduation, institution, etc.
V&A	VALUES AND ATTITUDES	Any information about professional and personal values and attitudes
GR	GREAT QUOTE	Great quotes from faculty members
SE	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION	Any information describing social work education in general, purpose, the state of knowledge, generic vs specialised, accreditation, learning outcomes
SEUNI/TH	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY/THEORY	Any information about educational experience in university such as classes, courses, modules, learning activities
SE C& F	SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION CONTENT AND FOCUS	Any information about social work education's general focus and content, as well as suggestions on content and focus
TAs	TEACHING APPROACHES	Any information about teaching approaches, ways of teaching and suggestions
S V	STUDENT VOICE	Any information about student voice
SEOUNI/FD	SOCIAL WORK EUCATION OUTSIDE UNVERSITY / FIELD PRACTICUM	Any information about educational experience outside university or field practicum, description, field practicum hours, activities and suggestions
SV	SUPERVISION	Any information about supervision in organisations or of students
P/W E	PRACTICE/WORK EXPERIENCE	Any information about practice or work history, experience, context, activities challenges, encounters and opportunities

SC	STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES	Any information about structural challenges at work or in practice
QL	QUALITY of LIFE	Any information on how faculty members define quality of life, necessary tools, determining factors as well as views on how its promoted in and through social work education
LQE	LINKING QUALITY OF LIFE TO EFFECTIVE HELPING	Any information that explains the link between professional quality of life achievement and effective social work
MY	MONEY	Any information about money
RS	RESOURCES	Any information about resources for personal life and for work
HLP	HELPING	Any information about helping, definition of what it is and what's involved in helping e.g. tools, activities and the processes involved

APPENDIX C1: EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING (STUDENTS)

Students	
Bursary opportunity	Provided through the Department of Social Development
Qualification/degree attainment	Obtained after four years

Preparation for practice:
    Theory learning
    Learning different modules
	Attainment of knowledge and skills
	Multidisciplinary type of education
	Learning professional theories, models, values and principles
	Learning soft skills such as time management, communication and problem solving

Practicum exposure	Placement in different organisations:
	   Implementing three social work methods in
	    practice (community, group and casework)
	   Supervision
	   Learning the helping process and activities
	    Learning about professional challenges

Relationship building in and outside university	Relationships with lecturers, field instructors and social service users
Engaging in extra-curricular activities	Attainment of knowledge relevant to the profession
Exposure to different teaching and learning approaches	Lectures, supervision, reflections, discussions, poster presentations
Student involvement and the opportunity to be heard	Module evaluations, student council

APPENDIX C2: EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING (FACULTY MEMBERS)

Faculty Members	
The transformative type of education (curriculum and pedagogy)	Dealing with the personhood and moulding professionals: Fostering professional attributes, attitudes, values and principles Advancing policy and teaching professional code of ethics Promoting continued professional development
Preparing students for practice	Theory learning and practicum: Pushing for the stipulated learning outcomes (according to CHE and SACSSP) Imparting professional knowledge and skills, Teaching different social work methods (group work, community work and case work) Promoting research, involving students Cultivating resilient and reflexive professionals, Promoting self-awareness and healing among students Facilitating the integration of theory and practice Supervision
Advancing student wellbeing, which is integral for professional wellbeing	Promoting healthy lifestyles: Building relationships or affiliation at different levels, in and outside university: *(Student-student, Student-faculty, Department of social work and social service organisations, Students-experienced social workers(field instructors)* Making referrals for counselling and mentoring Fostering life skills through curriculum and Extra-curricular arrangements
Introspective learning	Tutorials, discussions, reflections

APPENDIX C3: EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING (PRACTISING SOCIAL WORKERS)

Practising social workers	
Bursary opportunity	Provided through the Department of Social Development
Qualification	Obtained after four years
Multidisciplinary education	Taking courses from different educational fields
Preparation for practice:	
Theory learning	Learning different models e.g. the strengths perspective
	The attainment of knowledge, life skills such as time management, problem solving, empathy and being open minded through different modules
	Learning about values and policy
Practicum	Placement in different organisations
	Supervision during field practicum/field instruction
	Learning the helping process
Relationships Student support	Individual support sessions with lecturers / student-lecturer affiliation, Department of social work and social service organisations, Students/field instructor relationships
Exposure to different teaching and learning approaches	Lectures, tutorials, discussions

APPENDIX D: MOPANE UNIVERSITY BSW CORE & COMPULSORY MODULES

Year of Study	Compulsory Module	Description of the Module
First Year	**Introduction to social service professions**	Fundamental concepts in respect of social work as a profession are explained, among others what social work includes, the role and place of social work, the methods used to render services to the individual, family, group and community within the South African context. The module provides an image of the historical development and the field/domain of social work within the framework of the social environment. The second part of the module, 'the logic of the discipline' provides an introduction to social work practice perspectives, theories and intervention models as part of the toolkit for the social worker to engage the individual, family, group and community. The focus to emphasise the interconnectedness between human problems, life situations and social conditions.
	Social work with the individual	The module aims to provide students with personal life skills on their way to becoming a social worker, as well as professional knowledge and social work skills on the case work process. This will enable the student to render effective social work services to individuals.
	Social work with communities	This module introduces the student to community work as one of the primary methods of social work. The emphasis is on community work and its contribution to community development. Attention is given to the role of the social worker in the community development process, prerequisites for functioning in a multi-professional team, and project management. After completion of this module, the student will be able to plan and manage a project effectively.
	Social work service rendering context	This module is an introduction to the social work service rendering context, report writing, academic writing, use of academic resources and referencing, general office administration, social security, professional conduct, ethical code, inter disciplinary teamwork, historical overview of social work and the various roles of social workers in the judicial system. Learners are also introduced to welfare agencies in all six fields of service. The purpose is to equip learners with basic knowledge on the context in which social work services are rendered.
Second year		The module aims to provide you with knowledge and skills on the stages and steps of the problem

		Casework intervention models	management model. It further covers the strengths perspective as a theoretical framework for the intervention model. The module will also have an introduction to cultural wealth theory as a theoretical strengthening of the strengths perspective. This will enable a student to get therapeutically involved in the client's living world and to base assistance rendering through the casework method on theory relevant to the client's context.
		Introduction to group work	The objective of the module is to convey basic knowledge on the theoretical framework of social group work, to give an overview of group work intervention and to apply the group work process and report writing skills practically so that the learner will be able to develop an understanding of the nature and application of social group work. The value of the module in Social Group Work for a second year student is that the learners will get the opportunity to integrate theory and practice in simulated situations so that they can be prepared for application of the whole group work process in the clinical module in the third year.
		Welfare law	The purpose of this module is to introduce the learner to welfare legislation and legal procedures in South Africa. The student should be able to understand the content of the most significant welfare laws and use this legislation ethically and accountably in order to improve the quality of life of client systems from a social work perspective.
		Diversity in social work context	The module on diversity in social work is intended to equip learners with the necessary knowledge and skills in order to develop a positive attitude towards diversity and preparing students to be able to work with clients from all diversity. Attention is further given to the different cultural groups in South Africa and their characteristics as potential clients.
		Forms of social issues	The aim of this module is to explore and describe various forms of social problems or issues found in society and to clarify the role and task of the social worker in dealing effectively with these challenges.
		HIV/AIDS prevention and empowerment in SA	This module is meant to provide students with an introduction to HIV & AIDS as an infectious, preventable disease. It focuses on giving basic background information on the body and the disease itself; as well as outlining ways of preventing, counselling, treating and managing HIV infection. The promotion of value-based sexuality education and behaviour change through personal and community empowerment, and life skills training is addressed. Behaviour change is seen as the best method of prevention to curb the spread of the AIDS epidemic. Relevant social, economic, and cultural factors

			influencing the spread of HIV & AIDS and those affected by the disease are considered. The impact of all these factors on South African society is explored. Finally, the legal, ethical, and policy issues relating to HIV & AIDS, as covered by the South African Constitution, are dealt with. The legislation and policies relating to HIV & AIDS focus on the human and social rights of those infected
Third year		**Social work with the child**	The aim of the module is to introduce client-centred and Gestalt play therapy to students so that they are able to assess and therapeutically intervene with children in a social work context. With the completion of the module, students should have a basic theoretical knowledge of child-centered play therapy and Gestalt play therapy, be able to apply their knowledge to assess children, and to therapeutically intervene from the mentioned theories.
		Clinical work: group work	The module deals with the application of the theoretical framework of social group work as set out in SWPG 2614, in terms of the administrative aspects and preparation, goal formulation, phases and structure, programme planning, group work principles and – skills, group dynamics and helping aids and – resources. The application of co-leadership, the Problem Solving Model, planning and execution of six group work sessions are also addressed. The module's purpose is the practical application of growth orientated group work
		Community work practicum	The aim of this module is to offer students the opportunity to implement community work knowledge and skills independently in the practical situation. In order to identify deficiencies and to activate development and growth, practical experience is gained in group context under the guidance of the supervisor/lecturer.
		Statutory interventions	This module deals with statutory intervention with the child and his/her family according to the Children's Act no. 38 of 2005 and the Amended Act no. 41 of 2007. The ecosystems approach is used as conceptual framework and the module is continuously presented within a multi-cultural and multi-professional context. Statutory report writing is also attended to.
		Social work research	SWPR3824 is an introductory module to the process of social work research. The student is enabled to complete a research project of limited scope in the fourth year. Attention is paid to the formulation of the
		Clinical work: casework	

		Social work with families	research problem, research questions, the stating of research goals, the doing of a literature review, research designs, research methodology, ethics, and the writing of a research proposal. The aim of this module is to enable the student to implement the casework process in practice under the guidance of the supervisor. It is expected of the learners to apply the casework process through the utilisation of various techniques and -interventions to the benefit of the client and to compile the necessary documentation. The purpose of this module is to bring the student up to date with family systems therapy so that they are able to assess and do therapeutic intervention with families.
Fourth Year		**Advanced social work theory: Section A** **Advanced social work theory: Section B** **Clinical social work**	The first part of the module deals with the importance of a grief and trauma-informed practice for the social worker by means of focusing on loss and trauma theories and intervention such as the crisis intervention and trauma-counselling model. Different South African issues regarding loss and trauma events are addressed to enable students to connect theory with practice, thereby helping students to address specific client populations' needs. In the second part of the module, the student is familiarised with the concepts of supervision, management and ethics. The student will be orientated of what can be expected from supervision, as well as basic knowledge of administration and/or management related aspects of practice. The social worker is confronted on a regular basis with ethical issues and decision related to the practice. It is important to take note of the ethical codes for social workers with regard to unethical behaviour, as well as how one's own personal experiences and values will influence one's ethical decisions. This module deals with the planning and implementation of group work according to appropriate social work intervention strategies and techniques in a diverse context in connection with pertinent social issues. Adventure based group work as a specific method of group work is discussed and practically experienced. Furthermore, this module aims to identify and describe specific social issues faced by the community that must be targeted as an area of intervention. By applying community resources and strengths, the identified social issue will be addressed through a scientific community intervention process. This module aims to define policy, to analyse aspects that have an influence on policy, and to understand the

	Research	development process in order to develop and implement policy. Fourth-year students do clinical work in case, group and community work under supervision of a field instructor within the context of a welfare institution. The main purpose is to integrate theory and practice through the application of generic social work and different intervention models within a diverse society. Writing of a research report on a selected practice-based social work topic.

APPENDIX E: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences   23-Nov-2016

Dear **Mrs Precious Mseba**

Ethics Clearance: **Social work education and professional wellbeing in South Africa: A capability approach**

Principal Investigator: **Mrs Precious Mseba**
Department: **Centre for Development Support (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/1282**

This ethical clearance number is valid from **23-Nov-2016** to **23-Nov-2021**. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with

your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Petrus Nel

Chairperson: Ethics Committee Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences