RESILIENCE OF SOCIAL AUXILIARY WORKERS: DEFINED BY STRENGTHS AND COPING ABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Resilience has been identified as a protective factor that improves the ability to manage stress, promotes wellbeing and enables individuals to thrive in adverse circumstances. Many social auxiliary workers function independently with sporadic and brief supervision. Considering the stressful work environment that social auxiliary workers must face, it is essential that they be equipped to effectively manage the stressors of social work practice. The study identified how individual, social and environmental factors contribute to the participants' resilience and their ability to thrive in these challenging circumstances. The participants use their interpersonal, intrapersonal and organisational strengths and coping strategies to manage both their positive and challenging work experiences to remain both productive and resilient.

Keywords: coping; intrapersonal strengths; interpersonal strengths; organisational strengths; resilience; social auxiliary work; social work

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

South African society is characterised by vulnerable individuals and communities, which highlights the importance of social services. Social auxiliary workers and social workers function as a team and play a fundamental role in ensuring service delivery in all spheres of society and fields of practice, including government and the public sector (Goliath, 2018). Based on Goliath's (2018) study and the key tasks of social workers and social auxiliary workers (DPSA, 2021a; 2021b), it is evident that social auxiliary workers work directly with the same client system and in the same working environment as social workers and are therefore exposed to the client system and risks associated with social work. The risk factors that social workers are exposed to include staff shortages and excessive workload (McFadden, Mallett, Campbell & Taylor, 2019; Truter, 2014); aggression and violence, poor occupational support, secondary traumatic stress, depression, and compassion fatigue (Truter, 2014); high

levels of stress and burnout (Calitz, Roux & Strydom, 2014; Truter, 2014); a decline in job satisfaction and a need for positive work engagement (Calitz *et al*., 2014); and bureaucratic inefficiencies, escalating service demands, and insufficient support and resources (Bunce *et al*., 2019). Zibengwa (2016) also identifies certain risk factors that social auxiliary workers experience, in addition to the risks entailing in working with social workers, which include barriers to the implementation of legislative frameworks, inadequate infrastructure, and limited opportunities for supervision and guidance. Social auxiliary workers are therefore to some extent exposed to the same risk factors as social workers.

A crucial element of support that social auxiliary workers need in their service delivery function is permanent mandatory supervision from social workers. Although supervision is essential and mandatory, Goliath (2018) and Zibengwa (2016) have both found that social auxiliary workers are not effectively supervised, and they have limited and irregular access to supervision. Goliath (2018) also found that social workers provide supervision to social auxiliary workers without having a good understanding of what the role and expectations of a social auxiliary worker are. This view is supported by Engelbrecht (2010), who found that inadequate supervision is common in South Africa. The shortage of social workers continues to have a detrimental effect on the occupation, as social workers' high workload prevents them from properly supervising social auxiliary workers (Goliath, 2018). Because of these limitations in supervision and the risk factors that social auxiliary workers have to face, it is essential for them to be properly equipped to manage the stressors of social work practice effectively.

The level of resilience of individuals is one contributing factor that helps them to thrive in adverse circumstances (Allan, McKenna & Dominey, 2013; Bunce *et al*., 2019; Kinman & Grant, 2011; Mansfield, Beltman & Price, 2014). Resilience has been found to benefit social workers as it acts as a protective factor that promotes their wellbeing and enhances their ability to manage stress (Kinman & Grant, 2017; Truter & Fouché, 2015; 2021; Truter, Fouché & Theron, 2017a). In the context of this study resilience is also seen as a protective factor that promotes the wellbeing of social auxiliary workers. Although there is significant research on the resilience of social workers (Allan *et al*., 2013; Bunce *et al*., 2019; Dykes, 2016; Huang & Lin, 2013; Kinman & Grant, 2017; Mansfield *et al*., 2014; Truter & Fouché, 2015; 2021; Truter *et al*., 2017a; Whitney, 2017; Wosnitza, Peixoto, Beltman & Mansfield, 2018), there is not much knowledge about the resilience of social auxiliary workers. Research that has been done on social auxiliary workers focuses on them as an occupational group (de Kock, 1999), the supervision of the social auxiliary worker (Goliath, 2018), social auxiliary worker training programmes (Matanda, 2016), and the role of the social auxiliary worker in addressing the needs of children living with HIV/AIDS (Zibengwa, 2016).

Social auxiliary workers are directly involved with and exposed to the client system, working environment and risks associated with social work. It is therefore important that social auxiliary workers adapt and cope with these challenging situations and, in the context of the research study, resilience emerged as a factor that helps social auxiliary workers to cope with the demands of rendering social services. It is on the basis of these observations that the researchers focused on resilient social auxiliary workers and explored their strengths and coping abilities.

This article provides a brief overview of the literature, followed by the research question and an outline of research methodology used. After that the findings are presented, followed by a discussion, the conclusions and recommendations for future research.

SOCIAL AUXILIARY WORK

In 1989 social auxiliary work was defined and included in legislation by way of the Social Work Amendment Act 48 of 1989 (RSA, 1989). By November 1991, social auxiliary workers were mandated to register at the South African Council for Social Work, now known as SACSSP (Lombard & Pruis, 1994). Social work professions in South Africa, including social auxiliary workers, are regulated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) in terms of the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (RSA, 1978). The Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (with the definition of 'social auxiliary worker' inserted by s. 1 (d) of Act 48 of 1989) defines social auxiliary work as "an act or activity practised by a social auxiliary worker under the guidance and control of a social worker and as a supporting service to a social worker to achieve the aims of social work". The main role of the social auxiliary worker is to support the social worker in the roles they have to perform; this means that social auxiliary workers, who work under the supervision of a social worker, are directly involved in social work as a professional service (SACSSP, nd; SACSSP, 2008). Therefore, just like social workers, the objective of all social auxiliary workers' functions and activities is to achieve the aims of social work, namely to improve social functioning, increasing partnerships to enhance relationships, and to enrich society and social environments (Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 2017; Zibengwa, 2016).

Considering the key tasks of social auxiliary workers, resilience in the context of this research study emerged as a factor that helps social auxiliary workers to cope with the demands of rendering social services.

RESILIENCE

Resilience as a concept is relevant across many fields of study, such as those focused on the personal, health, environmental, community, cultural, institutional, economic and infrastructural realms (Southwick *et al.*, 2014; Uleanya & Yu, 2019). Ungar (2019:2) defines resilience as the "capacity of a biopsychosocial system (this can include an individual person, a family, or a community) to use available resources effectively and optimally to ensure continued positive functioning under stress".

The study focuses on the resilience of social auxiliary workers as an outcome of factors within the individual, as described by Ungar (2019), and on the socio-ecological factors that affect their resilience, based on the scales used to determine the participants' level of resilience. Resilience has to do with an individual's ability to regulate emotions, attention and behaviour. A resilient mindset helps individuals to use their capabilities to flourish when faced with challenges by influencing the situation through engagement and using it as an opportunity to grow and find meaning (Whitney, 2017).

Resilience indicators in social auxiliary workers in South Africa

Resilience in social workers, which in the context of this study includes social auxiliary workers, is described as a protective factor that promotes and supports overall wellbeing and enhances stress management. It can thus be viewed as a key skill to survive in the social work profession (Kinman & Grant, 2017). Despite the known stressors that social auxiliary workers are exposed to, some social auxiliary workers thrive in the profession and cope well in their contexts. One contributing factor that helps them cope in adverse circumstances is their level of resilience (Allan *et al*., 2013; Bunce *et al*., 2019; Mansfield *et al*., 2012; Wosnitza *et al*., 2018). Whitney (2017) expresses the view that resilient social workers (in this context including the social auxiliary workers) are proactive with a positive mindset that enables them to flourish and find meaning in the adverse work and circumstances of social work. Being resilient enables social work professionals to understand and approach the adversities that arise with awareness, curiosity and openness. Resilient social work professionals can access courage and creativity, while maintaining a connection with themselves and others to discover new possibilities, solutions and meaning in adversity. Unlike social workers, however, social auxiliary workers' training is significantly less specialised and may not prepare them well enough to face the challenges of social work practice; yet social auxiliary workers are described as productive and able to overcome challenges (Goliath, 2018; Zibengwa, 2016). Smith and Drower (2008) noted that it is essential for social workers as well as social auxiliary workers to take responsibility for themselves to foster and develop resilience by seeking professional help when needed, developing self-awareness through critical self-reflection, and being committed to self-care.

A study conducted by Truter (2014) identified three indicators of resilience in resilient South African designated social workers, namely a value-embedded life, personal strengths and support networks. She noted that these findings were in line with earlier resilience research (Byrne, 2006; Cameron & Brownie, 2010; Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010; Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Kinman & Grant, 2011; Masten & Wright, 2010; Smith & Drower, 2008; Sumsion, 2004; Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Ungar, 2012), where these three indicators were identified as resilience-enhancing processes (Truter, 2014).

A combination of vulnerability and protective factors influences the resilience of social workers and social auxiliary workers based on their personal characteristics and the organisational and political contexts of their profession (Mcfadden *et al*., 2019). In the face of adversity, protective factors can mitigate its impacts (Adamson, Beddoe & Davys, 2014). Studies have associated resilience with protective factors such as continued education and supervision, the intrinsic value of the social work profession, relational skills, peer support, personal commitment, and mutually supportive actions within teams (Adamson *et al*., 2014; Hurley, Alvarez & Buckley, 2015; Hurley & Lin., 2013; McFadden, Campbell & Taylor, 2015; McFadden *et al*., 2019). Although resilience is seen as an important protective factor (Mette *et al*., 2020; van Breda, 2018), it was found in the quantitative phase of this study that only 45,5% of the participants had a high score on both the CD-RISC-25 and ARM-R scales (Crocker, 2022). Considering that social auxiliary workers work alongside and under the supervision of social workers, they are directly involved with and exposed to the same client system and risks

associated with social work. In the light of the discussion above, the author identified the need to explore the strengths and coping abilities of resilient social auxiliary workers and posed the following research question: What do resilient social auxiliary workers view as strengths and coping abilities?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach and design

In order to answer the research question and meet the objectives of the research study, a mixed-method research approach was applied. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in resilience research can help explain local resilience development relevant to culturally and contextually distinct settings, as well as the general nature of the protective processes identified (Ungar, 2012). A sequential explanatory design was chosen to provide the study with an overall understanding of the research problem. A sequential explanatory design is a mixed-method design in which data are collected and analysed in two consecutive phases in one study – the first is the collection of quantitative data and then gathering qualitative data to interpret and clarify the results from the quantitative phase (Bishop, 2015; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). This article focuses on the results of the second (qualitative) phase.

The qualitative data were collected in order to explore and describe the strengths and coping abilities of resilient social auxiliary workers. In qualitative research studies, answers to the "how" and "why" questions of specific topics of interest are sought. These studies are beneficial for gaining an insight into the underlying phenomena of specific populations (Charran, Sorrells & Cooc, 2019). Qualitative research uses observations from quantitative data to develop abstract knowledge that can be generalised beyond the contexts in which it was conducted (Bansal, Smith & Vaara, 2018).

Population and sampling

For the quantitative phase of the study the population was comprised of registered social auxiliary workers working in South Africa. For the second phase, the qualitative phase, the population consisted of those social auxiliary workers who demonstrated high resilience in the first phase of the study. Participants who took part in phase one and who had been identified as being resilient, having a score of at least 70/85 (Resilience Research Centre, 2018) in the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM-R), and a score of at least 83/100 (Davidson, 2018) in the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25), were included in the population of the second phase of the study. Of the 99 participants, 45 met the required score on both scales. The sample for the second phase of the study was selected using simple random sampling, where random numbers of a list of the population were chosen to be included in the sample (Maree, 2016). The participants were selected through random selection using the lottery method (Elfil & Negida, 2017). Members of the population were approached to be included in the sample until data saturation was achieved. After interviewing 20 sample participants, no new information was provided by participants 18, 19 and 20, and the need for further sampling became redundant.

Data collection and data analysis

The data were collected through semi-structured online interviews to gain in-depth information (Bemath, 2017). The interviews were conducted either telephonically or via Zoom/Microsoft Teams to allow for more flexibility and adaptability (Howitt, 2019).

The data from the qualitative phase were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2018; Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The researcher chose thematic analysis to identify how the various elements would connect and reinforce one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed in the data analysis process.

Trustworthiness

The four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were used to make sure that the qualitative data were trustworthy (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021). To improve the credibility of the study, methodological triangulation was employed by using a mixed methodology to answer a single research question (Grinnell & Unrau, 2018). To reduce bias in the study, a co-coder was appointed to assist with the analysis of the data. Within the study, transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the research methodology and research process to ensure that the findings can be applied in different contexts (Phyffer, 2015). The study's transferability was also enhanced by the use of purposive sampling and attaining data saturation. Confirmability was achieved by recording all interviews and transcribing the recordings verbatim. During the study a detailed audit trail was kept, which included raw data, transcribed interviews and data analysis notes to facilitate the process of providing a detailed and in-depth report, and to demonstrate reflexivity (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018). By describing the research process and selecting participants based on specific criteria, a greater degree of dependability was ensured (Haffejee, 2018).

Ethics

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University with ethics clearance number NWU-00451-20-A1. Informed consent was obtained by considering Covid-19 research guidelines as recommended by Greeff (2020). Informed consent, anonymity, beneficence, information management, referral for debriefing and confidentiality were all upheld as ethical principles in this study. The participants had the opportunity to indicate a need for counselling, if necessary, and were able to access a maximum of two free counselling sessions provided by a qualified social worker. Should they have required further counselling, a referral was provided upon request from the participants.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main themes and sub-themes which emerged during the data analysis are discussed and supported with relevant literature. Five themes emerged from this study: (1) Intrapersonal strengths; (2) Interpersonal strengths; (3) Organisational strengths; (4) Coping abilities, as response to professional challenges, and (5) Coping abilities as response to the management of the social auxiliary worker's role.

Table 1: **Summary of Participants**

Code	Gender	Age	Race	Qualification level	Years of work experience	Province	Place of work
P1	Female	29	Coloured	NQF 5	1-5	WC	NGO
P2	Female	26	Coloured	NQF 5	1-5	NC	NGO
P3	Female	33	Black	NQF 5	1-5	EC	NGO
P4	Male	34	Black	NQF 5	1-5	GP	NGO
P5	Female	51	Black	NQF 4	1-5	GP	NGO
P6	Male	35	Black	NQF 4	1-5	LP	GOV
P7	Male	29	Black	NQF 4	1-5	EC	NGO
P8	Female	54	Black	NQF 4	1-5	WC	NGO
P9	Female	37	Coloured	NQF 5	11-15	WC	GOV
P10	Female	36	Black	NQF 4	11-15	LP	GOV
P11	Female	63	Coloured	NQF 5	15+	WC	NGO
P12	Female	54	Indian	NWF 5	15+	GP	NGO
P13	Female	39	Coloured	NQF 5	6-10	WC	GOV
P14	Female	45	Coloured	NQF 4	6-10	WC	NGO
P15	Female	39	Black	NQF 4	6-10	WC	NGO
P16	Female	34	Black	NQF 4	6-10	KZN	NGO
P17	Female	43	Black	NQF 4	6-10	GP	NGO
P18	Female	40	Black	NQF 4	6-10	FS	NGO
P19	Female	61	Black	NQF 4	6-10	GP	NGO
P20	Female	48	Black	NQF 5	6-10	FS	NGO
P21	Female	32	Black	NQF 4	1-5	WC	NGO

Theme 1: Intrapersonal strengths

Intrapersonal strengths are characterised by having a sense of purpose in life, an optimistic outlook on the future and high self-esteem. They are frequently discovered and developed via experiencing and overcoming adversity (Webster & Deng, 2015).

Sub-theme 1.1: Personal strengths

Personal strengths are resilience-enhancing processes among resilient South African designated social workers, according to a study by Truter (2014). Personal strengths such as optimism and positive attitudes were evident in the social auxiliary workers and the way that they approached life.

> *I know what I want. I'm a go-getter. So the moment that I'm in a stressful situation, I turn the situation into a positive thing. My attitude.* (P11)

> *You have to be positive or otherwise you will be a negative person. You won't go further in life. You must always think positive. It helps us keep going, that wake you up every day thinking positively.* (P6)

The participants reported that staying hopeful helped them to remain resilient.

Hope and possibility…hope keeps me going. (P15)

So I think the only thing I do to cope under that [going through a challenge] *is to remind myself that this is a situation that passes by. It's not here to stay. The only thing I have to do if I do come across the situation where I feel like I can't give any more, I always remind myself that there's nothing that doesn't pass. It is a passing thing.* (P7)

In describing their attitude of enduring and to keep going, the participants identified self-determination as a personal strength.

I would think my endurance. Because I have this thing of tomorrow it will go better. Because I am such a person, I will persevere. But for me it is, as I say, I have endurance. (P2)

Problem solving is seen as important aspect of resilience. It includes skills like critical thinking and planning, which are fundamental skills in social work practice (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020). Social auxiliary workers are faced with problems every day and being able to solve those problems effectively is vital (Stanley, Buvaneswari & Arumugam, 2021). Research has found that resilience enables social workers to manage complex problems, which helps improve service delivery to clients (Genç & Buz, 2020). The participants described the following problem-solving approaches as a personal strength:

And if you have a problem do not moan about it, because every problem has a solution … so I am very resourceful … So I have a to-do list, I'm quite organised ... So every day when I come in I know what I'm going to do. (P3)

Problem solving is for me a goal in itself. (P2)

The participants who took part in this research study recognised the necessity of frequently using their personal strengths and abilities to overcome challenges in their employment as social auxiliary workers. Based on participants' comments, the traits of optimism and a positive outlook are significant factors that help people understand obstacles as aspects they must encounter but that they can conquer and learn from. According to a study by Truter (2014), a positive disposition (such as a sense of humour, an optimistic outlook, perceiving difficulties as learning opportunities, learning from mistakes, being open to learning from senior employees, being appreciative, having and providing hope, and focusing on minor victories) and a healthy self-identity (such as self-awareness and confidence, as well as a clear sense of self) are personal strengths. The participants exhibit traits associated with resilient people, such as optimism, tenacity, hope, endurance, independence and problem-solving (Stanley *et al*., 2021).

Sub-theme 1.2: Boundaries

Another crucial skill that helps social workers and social auxiliary workers lower the risk of burnout is the capacity to maintain healthy boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Litam, Ausloos & Harrichand, 2021). Being resilient and able to maintain protection from the potentially distressing emotions of clients and oneself requires a social auxiliary

worker to set and uphold healthy boundaries with regard to work hours, client relationships and their own limitations. This allows them to be empathic while also remaining protected (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020).

The participants identified and described emotional boundaries, as presented below:

> *… you are able to separate yourself, from others … not overstep a boundary of making things personal, especially with clients and with colleagues as well… you want to somehow separate your personal and professional life….* (P15)

Participants talked about creating boundaries between their personal and professional lives, and employing workable solutions to keep a healthy balance.

> *I know my work stays at work. My home issues stay at home.* (P6)

> *I think I know how to balance my work from my personal life, and that I do what I have to do at work and do what I have to do it at home. But I never take my work home …* (P18)

Resilience and the capacity to maintain distinct personal and professional boundaries go hand in hand (Hitchcock, Hughes, McPherson & Whitaker, 2020). The participants' feedback demonstrates their capacity to uphold work-life boundaries and emotional boundaries, which aids in maintaining emotional equilibrium and enhances general well-being and functioning.

Sub-theme 1.3: Self-care

Social auxiliary professionals frequently "use themselves" when working with clients. As stated by Pooler, Wolfer and Freeman (2014), good self-care contributes to a career that is both enduring and fulfilling. It involves attention to and meaningful reflection on oneself, events, life and other factors in addition to simply living a healthy lifestyle. Possessing an attitude of gratitude, seeking out good relationships, and living in the present are some examples of self-care techniques (Cox & Steiner, 2016; Pooler *et al.*, 2014).

Participants reported the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle through physical activities and hobbies as follows:

> *read and watch TV… I think it helps in relieving the stress… I normally wake up and go take a jog. Immediately, if I come back everything is gone… listening to music I like to listen to house music, because I can dance. I know when I'm dancing I get more excited …* (P10)

Participants report that they seek professional help when they feel it is necessary.

> *I actually go for psychological help very often … You make the bad the good… Because when your cup is empty you do more harm to that client than anything else.* (P3)

Participants in the study describe how sharing is beneficial to them and how it improves their wellbeing. Additionally, participants mention that they use positive self-talk to inspire and motivate themselves.

Sharing my experience makes me feel better for many ways. When you share, you're debriefing indirectly ... talking, it does help a lot. (P10)

And talk with someone, it helps. (P20)

The health, happiness and resilience of social work professionals depend on practising self-care. Self-care was highly valued by the participants, and they believed it was necessary for providing quality services. Participant P3's statement, "*If your cup is empty you do more harm to the client*," provides clarity on this matter. Self-care should be personalised, drawing from a variety of practices that have been identified (Masson, 2019). The tactics used by the participants are varied, including living a healthy lifestyle, being aware of oneself, getting professional assistance when necessary, and sharing or talking to fit one's requirements, abilities and resources. Their capacity for initiative, ingenuity, creativity and adaptability increases their alternatives for self-care activities, which in turn increases resilience.

Sub-theme 1.4: Religion

According to research, a social worker's faith, spirituality and religion foster resilience (Oxhandler, Chamiec-Case, Wolfer & Marraccino, 2021). All participants, with the exception of one, had a deep religious commitment and believed that their relationship with God or Allah gave them the fortitude to overcome obstacles. It was also clear that their relationship with God played a role in determining the need for and the incentive to work as a social auxiliary worker, because it required them to assist others as well as carry on with their regular jobs.

Most of the participants reported that they would pray about their clients or interviews. They believed that this helped them to connect with their clients, and ultimately helped them in solving their issues.

I pray, I pray a lot. And that's why I'm saying religion plays a huge role ... So that's where I draw my strength from. (P11)

I'm always praying every day when I wake up. I'm praying that please God assist me to work perfectly without hurting anyone's feelings. Even when we are starting sessions, we pray every day. I don't think that prayer helps a lot, I believe that prayer helps a lot. (P4)

The participants emphasised how crucial it was for them to have a connection with God and to rely on Him every day for the ability to carry on.

Oh, the Lord has come to do miracles for me. And it is only my faith in the Lord that kept me going. Just knowing that I know there is a Father and it will be better if you hope and trust. Just faith of a speck of a small seed is needed, it will be better. (P2)

Well, my religion is my foundation. So I always go back to that. It has helped me through many things personally and professionally. (P15)

The participants' motivation comes from helping others.

But even if it's just that little difference you can make. You're never perfect in your job, but that you do the best you can every day. (P3)

> *You know, everything else goes on your life because you're doing so much for others ...* (P18)

Resilience is said to be enhanced by religion (Nadat & Jacobs, 2021). The participants attributed their capacity to endure misfortune to prayer, finding strength in God and living a life of service to others. The participants frequently chose God when asked to name one crucial aspect that contributed to their resilience. Prayer serves to create resilience and a calming effect in response to stressors, and dependence on God gives a sense of letting go of control and relying on faith. Altruism serves as a motivator and gives people a feeling of purpose in life (Jones, Dorsett, Simpson & Briggs, 2018; Malindi & Theron, 2010; Nadat & Jacobs, 2021; Southwick, Lowthert & Graber, 2016).

Sub-theme 1.5: Sense of purpose

According to some, a career in the social work profession is a calling in which one embraces a fulfilling and deeply meaningful professional life (Newell, 2017) as well as having a feeling of purpose, while working in difficult vocations like social work contributes to people's resilience (Nuttman-Shwartz & Green, 2021). It was clear from the participants' responses that having a passion for social work, liking their jobs and having a positive impact on people kept them working through difficulties.

The participants communicated their passion for helping others and working with people.

> *I'm very passionate about actually working with people.* (P14)

> *So, in terms of what I was also doing, I've never seen it as a job. I've always seen it as a way to contribute or help.* (P19)

Participants in the study frequently described their employment as social auxiliary workers as a vocation rather than a job, and their motivation was to assist others.

> *I think sometimes doing this job for me, I think it's a calling for me because I actually enjoy doing it.* (P4)

> *I would say every time I make a difference, no matter how small, in someone's life. Or I can make a positive change. It's also one of the things that keeps me going and going on ... It makes me feel very good when I can do something good for someone.* (P2)

Workers' resilience and feeling of purpose are increased when they view the social work profession as a calling, which aids in overcoming difficult organisational obstacles (Horvath, 2015; Truter, Theron & Fouché 2017b). The participants claimed that their enthusiasm for helping others, and their view of working as a social auxiliary worker as a calling, gave them a feeling of purpose. In the participants' feedback there was a clear sense of purpose as well as a conviction that bringing about change and assisting others was achievable. The participants frequently hold the belief that they interact with a certain client at a particular moment for a purpose, and that their struggles in the past and previous interactions with clients have prepared them to assist in the present. According to Resnick (2018), possessing a sense of purpose helps to maintain a concern for others, which is important for sustaining resilience. Research studies

have found that, regarding the mental health of those exposed to stressful jobs, including social work, a sense of purpose is viewed as a component of their resilience (Nuttman-Shwartz & Green, 2021). Perceiving social work as a calling increases resilience and helps workers to have a sense of purpose, which helps to overcome adverse organisational challenges (Horvath, 2015; Truter *et al.*, 2017b). The participants' role as social auxiliary workers was fundamentally motivated by their desire to serve others and their capacity to do so.

Theme 2: Interpersonal strengths

Theme 2 will discuss the participants' interpersonal skills in relation to resilience. Kindness and social and emotional intelligence are examples of interpersonal strengths and traits that help people form relationships with others (Liu, Xu, Luo & Li, 2018).

Sub-theme 2.1: Supportive family relationships

All the participants stated that they had close, supportive relationships with their families, and emphasised how crucial these relationships were to their ability to function and overcome obstacles. Despite losing their parents at a young age, four participants had good relationships with their parents before they passed away. The participants also frequently reported having good relationships with their siblings, partners and children. The participants said that the support they received from their families helped them to manage their personal and work lives.

The participants characterised their families' emotional support as encouraging and supportive.

> *I still have a mother. I have a lot of siblings. They're supportive. Just life is right from my side. Especially my husband. He is very supportive of the work thing.* (P6)

> *My daughter is a big support. We share a lot, and I can talk to her.* (P 20)

Some individuals used their family's emotional support as a means of debriefing as well:

> *... when I'm overwhelmed, then they do assist ... They help me to remain calm ... so encouraging.* (P11)

> *Most of the debriefing I'm doing with him* [husband] *at home ... I'll just share and the next morning* I'm *fresh. Fresh and eager to go again.* (P6)

The participants claimed that their families provided them with practical support to help them deal with their stressors:

> *Then I have my mother who supports me in whatever. If I ask for no disturbance then she doesn't disturb me at all. And I have an 11-month-old daughter. So whenever I need to take her to her grandmother they are willing to take her.* (P15)

> *My husband is the main supporter, he is always there. He supports me with the kids. At night when I didn't sleep he was also not sleeping. We doing everything together. So even at home with the chores he assists. We go together we do the shopping.* (P20)

Resilience grows within a family and among its members when they are able to use protective factors to respond positively to and overcome adversity (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009). A

family offers a secure setting where members can learn by discussing their weaknesses and working together to overcome them. It enables generations to work together to deal with obstacles, while fostering closer ties between the members of the family as a whole (Nelson-Becker, 2013). Therefore, it makes sense that the participants rely on strong family ties to assist them in coping with challenges they may encounter, and to receive emotional and practical support in their functioning. During difficult times the family's emotional and practical assistance is crucial, because it promotes resilience as well as mental and physical wellbeing (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009).

Sub-theme 2.2: Mentorship

Participants said they depended on mentors, who were frequently former co-workers or managers, for help and direction.

> *I belong to a group of trauma counsellors. They were there to help me, to console me, to encourage me to see the light and to accept the situation that is beyond my control. And then I was able to cope.* (P12)

> *She's mentoring me and she's teaching me ways to help the clients as well.* (P5)

The participants have developed mentorship relationships with old colleagues or supervisors. A mentor is defined as:

> *a person with experience of a particular situation or problem who offers advice or support to others in a similar position. Mentor means 'a trusted counsellor or guide'. Mentoring is a consciously developed relationship that mixes an informal educative role with personal support and encouragement* (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:336).

The participants' resilience enables them to accumulate alternative resources, in this case external mentors, who provide them with support to overcome challenges, thereby strengthening their resilience (Adamson *et al*., 2014). Therefore, in order to thrive in a strain-inducing environment (challenging work environment) the participants use their personal strengths to seek alternative support, which enables them to remain emotionally stable (resilient) and take advice on how to manage cases, thereby ensuring effective service delivery to their clients.

Sub-theme 2.3: Interpersonal strengths used to facilitate positive client interactions

Social auxiliary workers need to develop a good and helpful relationship with their clients in order to perform services effectively. This calls for a variety of abilities and strategies, including skill, compassion, empathy, unconditional positive regard, sincerity and personal warmth (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2015). Many participants expressed their desire to assist and their willingness to go above and beyond what is required of them in order to help their clients.

> *When you impact on someone's life, whether it's negative or positive, they never forget you. So that it is why it's very important for us that whenever we try to interact with people, we make sure that whatever we leave them with, it's the positive thoughts about us. To say, 'If it wasn't for this person, I wouldn't be here', 'If it wasn't for this*

person I wouldn't be pushing', you know. I want to help and I've done everything possible to make sure that I give the help that is needed. (P5)

Participants cited their capacity for empathy as a crucial skill.

It's understanding the client. Listening and having empathy with them and their situation ... (P12)

I'm a person who tends to put my feet in another person's shoes. And I tend to feel, I tend to feel, like, how that person is actually feeling. (P14)

I think I have to put myself into their shoes. (P6)

Participants acknowledged that developing relationships with their clients was facilitated by their ability to listen to them.

I think I made time to listen to what they want, what they went through, to help them realise that they have potential in life. (P12)

... think my experience has taught me that you should always listen. Listening is something very good. (P2)

Many participants stressed the significance of treating clients with compassion while interacting with them.

You're not judging this client, like you understand. (P19)

Yes, our non-judgmental attitude says a lot ... The moment that the client comes with their issues and then you start to judge them, clients won't trust you. But then the moment when they come and then you show them that I understand. Though you might not know exactly how they feel because you've never been there but then the moment you say 'I understand what you are going through' the client becomes at ease. (P11)

The study emphasises the value of interpersonal strengths in the helpful relationship in social work. When working with clients, the participants are able to be kind and sympathetic, demonstrate empathy, listen actively and adopt a non-judgmental attitude. These are all essential abilities for creating a successful helping relationship in the profession of social work (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2015). Effective interpersonal skills are crucial in building a trusting relationship between the social auxiliary worker and the client in order for the client to accept change (Rollins, 2020; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2015). By focusing on giving their clients the chance to be heard in a non-judgmental setting where they can experience empathy, compassion and care, the participants reported how they were able to use their interpersonal strengths to develop a trusting helping connection with their clients.

Theme 3: Organisational strengths

The personal resources of resilience that are available within the framework of an organisation are referred to as organisational strengths (Stander, Mostert & De Beer, 2014).

Sub-theme 3.1: Organisational support structure

Organisational support has been shown to promote worker effectiveness and lower occupational risk factors, including burnout, in the field of social work (Liat, 2012). According to Raeymaeckers and Dierckx (2013), a supportive workplace depends on teamwork, supportive leadership and giving employees a voice in decision-making. These supportive aspects are evident in the comments below.

The participants described effective teamwork and its benefits as follows:

> *Especially with your team and work together, the one cannot actually function without the other*. (P19)

> *Trust and teamwork. Trust amongst the colleagues*. (P7)

The participants said that having supportive management helped them deal with the demands and difficulties of their workplace.

> *I spoke with my HR manager, regarding it ... Yes, she helped me manage it ... My other colleagues and my supervisor we talk about personal life and whatever, and I think it helps in one's life ... And my manager was also like a lot involved in the case.* (P13)

> *And sometimes you have to go on a one-on-one with the manager and we talk about our difficulties or challenges*. (P20)

Even while organisational support has been demonstrated to be a key component of resilience, organisational practices, including a heavy caseload and unreasonable performance expectations, can weaken or jeopardise resilience (Rose & Palattiyil, 2021). Rose and Palattiyil (2021) recommend an organisational strategy and culture that promote emotional support and wellbeing, foster peer interactions, encourage asking for help and recognise limitations, and build resilience to counteract negative practices. The participants' feedback can be connected to Rose and Palattiyil's suggestions and sheds light on the beneficial effects of an organisation's support system on participants' resilience.

Sub-theme 3.2: Effective supervision

Formal supervision is closely related to resilience and emotional support in the practice of social work (Rogers, 2001; Rose & Palattiyil, 2020). Improved job satisfaction, staff retention, wellbeing and resilience are all benefits of effective supervision. Therefore, it should be viewed as being crucial to the practice of social work (McFadden, 2018). Supervision of social auxiliary workers is structured according to the same model of supervision for social workers and must fulfil the three functions of supervision: the supportive function, educational function and administrative function (Armour, 2018; Dan, 2017; DSD & SACSSP, 2012; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; van Breda, 2018; Vetfuti, Goliath & Perumal, 2019). Neglect of these functions results in deteriorating staff development (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2014). The participants agreed that having good supervision helped them to be more resilient and made their work easier and more enjoyable.

The participants reported the following regarding the administrative function of supervision:

And I could not write a report to save my life. Then she [supervisor] *makes a bunch of red marks. And today I'm probably writing one of the best reports.* (P3)

But just after I write the report, then she [supervisor] *asked me about the challenges that I faced during home visits. And I tell her and then she helps me and advises me sometimes.* (P8)

It was clear from the participants' responses that supportive supervision assisted them in overcoming obstacles at work.

I get an awful lot of support. 100%. We get debriefing. She [supervisor] *arranges for our debriefing sessions because she can see we really need it.* (P2)

I would say the support that I'm getting also helps. The help that I'm getting from our supervisor … And then when they allow us to speak about the certain things that we have used to overcome, whatever that we have overcome, I think that's the thing that makes it easier. (P11)

The following feedback from participants addressed the educational function of supervision:

I actually excelled very well, because I had a very good social worker [supervisor] *who taught me, like, what we did. And who guided me very well. I think he understood what it meant to be a social auxiliary worker. He also understood what his duty is, in terms of actually teaching, you know.* (P14)

I've got a good supervisor that has, in the past, managed to put me in trainings that are meant for social workers and things like that. (P15)

The feedback from the participants provides clarity on the finding that resilient behaviour is boosted by efficient supervision. Since a workplace helps build and strengthen both individual and organisational resilience through supportive services such as supervision, the connection between a supervisor and supervisee is frequently illustrative of the nature of the organisational culture. Therefore, a supportive workplace promotes resilient behaviour, which in turn raises resilience levels (Priolo Filho, Goldfarb, Zibetti, & Aznar-Blefari, 2020). According to the participants, efficient and effective service delivery is made possible by effective supervision, since it fosters professional development, which in turn benefits clients. According to research by Egan, Maidment and Connolly (2017), supervision enhances professional abilities and results in satisfied clients. Participants can reflect on their practice and talk about its effects on a platform made available by supportive and efficient supervision. It has been discovered by Egan *et al.* (2017) that discussions during supervision will aid supervisees in making connections between theory and practice, exploring resources for social work practice and learning from mistakes. A relationship of trust serves as the basis for good supervision, because it creates a safe space for workers to talk about their work, learn, get advice, become more productive and love their jobs. The participants gained from the candid engagements with their supervisor, which boosted their resilience.

Theme 4: Coping abilities as response to professional challenges

Lazarus and Folkman (1984:152) describe coping as "constantly shifting cognitive and behavioural efforts necessary to manage, master, diminish, or accept a difficult person-environment interaction." Coping is the process of facing and overcoming a particular stressor. It can either be dysfunctional and harmful, or constructive and advantageous (Rice & Liu, 2016).

Two forms of coping are typically distinguished: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Riley & Park, 2014). Problem-focused coping refers to actions taken to control, reduce or eliminate the issue, such as making plans or requesting assistance (Schoenmakers, van Tilburg & Fokkema, 2015; van der Hallen, Jongerling & Godor, 2020). Emotion-focused coping concentrates on the feelings brought on by the circumstance. It seeks to handle and get rid of bad emotions, and it could involve self-care or meditation (Schoenmakers *et al*., 2015; van der Hallen *et al*., 2020). Another kind of coping is avoidance, which involves disengaging and denying the stressor, or engagement, which involves accepting and managing the stressor (Schoenmakers *et al*., 2015).

According to research (Harzer & Ruch, 2015), coping strategies depend heavily on one's strengths. Thus, the interpersonal and organisational strengths noted in Themes 1 to 3 and the coping mechanisms mentioned in Theme 4 are comparable. A study by Lian and Tam (2014) identified seven types of coping resources: health and energy, material resources, problem-solving skills, positive attitudes, social skills, and social support; they also examined the relationship between strengths and coping abilities.

The coping abilities employed by the participants will be discussed in sub-themes 4.1 and 4.2.

Sub-theme 4.1: Problem solving coping abilities

Problem-focused coping is described as the way an individual handles stressful situations (Le, Snodgrass, Fenzel, & Tran, 2021). This sub-theme will discuss the participants' use of problem-focused coping to manage the challenges and stressors regarding their work environment as well as their role as social auxiliary workers.

Several of the participants indicated that they experienced challenging circumstances at their workplace. They actively engaged in the situation with the intention of finding a solution and making an adjustment. The participants tried their best to use their own problem-solving abilities before actively seeking aid to help them cope with challenging circumstances at work.

> *Because I will say the way we work now, if I have a difficult case, I will ask for guidance*. (P2)

> *I will just ask them I need to do this and I need help with one, two, three*. (P9)

Several participants made the observation that it was frequently challenging to emotionally distance oneself from a client to avoid becoming overly connected or overly attached. Participant P15 stated that she made the decision to work in a different practice area since she used to become emotionally susceptible when performing child protection work, because she had children. This move helped her maintain an emotional distance from her clients. She came

up with a solution to the issue in order to deal with the stressors, but doing so required self-awareness and self-reflection.

> *I've chosen to not work in the field of child protection. I've got a little daughter of three years old, and it's I think it's just a bit close to home for me. And I know that it's a bit of a weakness when it comes to myself. Not that I'm not able to separate myself, but I feel more vulnerable when I'm working with the abused child. With the neglected or abandoned child. So I feel more comfortable working with the kids in conflict with the law because I can be more strict with them and get my message across to them, better.* (P15)

The participants stated that, because of unfilled vacancies within the organisation, or because they were working alone at a satellite office, there were instances when they would work without supervision or a social worker. They took a direct approach to the situation and handled issues on their own.

> *Then I sit in an office and then there is no social worker for three months, but that is not a problem. Because I've been here one year now, so I just do a Form 2.* (P3)

> *I do the work, I'm alone and then after I just tell her, "I've done this". And then I'll show her the copy of the letter that I have written. For me she said "No, it's fine if you write". She didn't see anything wrong.* (P6)

Five participants (P 1, 4, 7, 11, and 12) responded to the difficulty of finding a job by volunteering in order to obtain experience. In this way they could one day find permanent employment, become a qualified social worker, or establish their own non-governmental organisation (NGO). Hence they would actively try to solve the issue as they confronted it.

> *I'll open my own NGO. I will carry on to volunteer, gain experience, move from one environment to the other to gain different experience. Because now I have experience on trauma, counselling, victim empowerment and substance abuse. So I want to learn something else like working with children and working with elderly people.* (P11)

The participants noted several problem-focused coping skills that enabled them to manage, adapt to and overcome the stressors of a challenging work environment. Tsaur, Ku and Luoh (2016) confirm that problem-focused coping is a proactive strategy to alleviate work stressors through coping strategies such as problem-solving, resources development and self-enhancement through training, which help foster positive emotions and reduce stress. The participants in this study described the strategies as effective to cope with a challenging work environment. By practising these strategies, the participants learned how to use their resilience-enabling skills to overcome challenges at work.

Sub-theme 4.2: Emotion-focused coping abilities

Emotion-focused coping within a difficult work environment concentrates on minimising the feelings generated by the workplace (van den Brande, Baillien, De Witte & Godderis,

2020). Employees who practise emotion-focused coping can concentrate on the positives, which allows them to concentrate on achieving their objectives (Tsaur *et al*., 2016).

Participant P1 reacted to noticing the inefficiency of her colleagues by avoiding the situation. Disengaging herself in this way aided her in acclimatising to her new workplace.

> *... my first day ... when I saw how ineffective they were and everyone was busy on their phones then I learned that too. Because if I say something I'm going to cause terrible conflict ... so I just keep quiet now.* (P1)

> *Because of my age, I don't know. I think it's as young ones ... But I do work with them ... I think I have to put myself into their shoes. So even if I'm uncomfortable. For a teenager. Because they like to lie, they won't tell you straight. But I know how to overcome with them.* (P6)

Le *et al*. (2021) found that a person could change their emotional response to a stressful situation by using emotion-focused coping techniques. Emotion-focused coping is often employed when individuals feel a situation is uncontrollable (van den Brande *et al*., 2020). The participants found that emotion-coping appeared to be effective in helping them manage their emotions evoked by stressors, yet it was also ineffective in the sense that it could be seen as a delaying factor in addressing their challenges. It is aimed at avoiding the situation and dealing with it (Lee *et al*., 2017) Research has found that emotion-focused coping can have a negative impact and lead to increased levels of anxiety and depersonalisation (Van den Brande *et al*., 2020). By using only emotion-focused coping, an individual may lose their problem-solving skills and become passive (Chang, 2012).

The participants were all able, however, to use both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping in facing their challenges. The participants' emotion-focused coping was fixed on becoming self-aware of their emotions in a situation to be able to manage their emotions effectively when responding to or addressing the problem.

Theme 5: Coping abilities as response to the management of the social auxiliary worker's role

Social auxiliary work is defined in the Social Service Professions Act, 1978 (RSA, 1978) as: "An act or activity practised by a social auxiliary worker under the guidance and control of a social worker and as a supporting service to a social worker to achieve the aims of social work". A social auxiliary worker's primary responsibility is to support social workers, with the legal requirement that they do so under the direction and supervision of a social worker. According to Goliath (2018), social workers lack the knowledge and training necessary to comprehend management concepts, which makes it difficult for them to supervise social auxiliary workers. The data derived from the interviews supported this idea. Many believed that social workers' inability to successfully utilise and manage social auxiliary workers was a consequence of their lack of understanding of the position of a social auxiliary worker.

Sub-theme 5.1: Problem-focused coping

Problem-focused coping is defined as the way that someone responds to challenging circumstances. In problem-focused coping, the aim is to resolve the stressful situation or event or to change the source of the stress (Carroll, 2013). It includes all the actions taken to modify or eliminate the sources of stress by altering the person-environment relationship and managing stressful situations (Schoenmakers *et al.,* 2015). This sub-theme will focus on how participants employ problem-focused coping to deal with the pressures and stressors associated with managing their roles as social auxiliary workers.

The participants would utilise their own initiative to gather the necessary information if they were not given any direction.

> *They* [social workers] *didn't want to help, I would have to go on Google for things that they already know. And they didn't want to come on board.* (P20)

Participants provided accounts of poor social worker management. In order to provide their clients with the finest services possible, they overcame this obstacle by being forceful, developing themselves, setting up clear professional limits and tackling the difficulty head-on.

> *So I have to tell the manager it was unacceptable.* (P1)

> *I understand that as social auxiliary workers we have limits. There's some things that we just can't do … you find that probably a social worker expects you to do that … you know that you cannot do it and it becomes a problem … it's not nice having to remind your superior that my job title is actually one, two, three and four. You know. And for some reason you have to actually remind them, because you're trying to protect your job.* (P14)

The participants use their experience and knowledge to push through the difficulties of working outside the scope of practice by completing the tasks required of them. Because their purpose is to aid the client, they perform tasks for which they rarely receive recognition, while continuing to provide the finest level of assistance. In addition, the participants will mentor freshly qualified social workers by applying their expertise and experience. The participants must be confident in their abilities if they are to be able to direct social workers.

> *Testifying at court, even doing mediation training ... because there is a lack of social workers ... we are then used ... we can't really report on what we are doing because we are not supposed to be doing it in the first place ... I've had to guide social ... You are only an auxiliary worker, but it doesn't come with only being auxiliary worker, it comes with the 14 years' experience that I've had.* (P15)

The participants described how they intentionally approached problems or challenges they faced in terms of their role as social auxiliary workers with the aim of solving and overcoming the problems. Lee *et al*. (2017) confirm that individuals who use problem-focused coping face their problems by trying to solve or resolve them. Overcoming problems or challenges requires planning before taking action (Leipold, Munz, & Michéle-Malkowsky, 2019). The participants

noted that they would focus on planning ahead to reduce the stress, should their workload increase unexpectedly. Research has found that a stressful/challenging work environment can be managed more effectively by confronting those who cause a strained situation, thereby implementing problem-focused coping methods (Muazzam, Anjum, & Visvizi, 2020). The study's finding is in line with other research results, as direct conflict management and assertiveness have been described by the participants as being effective ways of helping them manage and address tension at work. It is evident from the participants' feedback that they employed strategies that were direct but respectful in order to develop and maintain healthy relationships with their colleagues. Research shows that actively engaging in problem-focused coping strategies, like the participants do, brings about positive adjustment and is therefore indicative of resilience (McKay, Skues & Williams, 2017).

Sub-theme 5.2: Emotion-focused coping

The goal of emotion-focused coping strategies, which are frequently viewed as avoidant coping techniques, is to get rid of unpleasant emotions brought on by stress (Le *et al*., 2021). The study examined how the participants employed emotion-focused coping to control their emotional reactions to the stress caused by their duties as social auxiliary workers.

Participant P10 responded to the way social workers handled her duties as a social auxiliary worker in an emotionally centred manner, reflecting on the circumstance without attempting to address the stressor.

> *They* [social workers] *won't even give you work to do. You'll be sleeping there the whole day, not knowing what to do. Or they'll only give you when they feel like and say, 'I can't do this anymore, it's a challenge' and then they will put you under pressure. So mostly you can't do it right because you're under pressure. But it has helped me because I am able to work under pressure now, because of that ... Yes. And if it's a lot of work that's getting to me, I never get to experience a lot of work, because what I do, I prepare my way beforehand. So it doesn't pile up. So I feel like it discourages me in different ways. To a point where I'm just thinking, OK, is it really worth it? And why did I even take the course in the first place.* (P 10)

The participants cited being undermined, mistreated, insulted and undervalued by social workers as among their main challenges. The methods that the participants used to deal with this challenge are described below.

> *I think many social auxiliary workers feel that they are not given the recognition that they should be given. That they are not respected in the way that they should be respected. But I think when you've worked in a field, for as long as I have for 14 years, you've managed to somehow root yourself into and build an opinion on something.* (P15).

Judging by this response, Participant P15 is emotionally grounded, confident in her talents and able to carry on despite not being treated with the respect she merits.

Participant P1 teaches herself to speak up in appropriate situations for the benefit of her clients as a response to being disrespected and improperly managed. This does not diminish the feelings she has when she is mistreated or undermined, but it does make it easier for her to carry on with her work.

> *I think an auxiliary worker is seen as someone who has to make it very comfortable for the social worker. If coffee is needed the social auxiliary worker must get it. What does the floor look like, then it is the social auxiliary worker who has to sweep it. It's condescending. And what makes it different for me, I'm old and the social workers are spring chickens. It was a challenge to get myself to the place … it is just how it is … I brought myself to the place where I must speak without you asking me. But mostly I will wait until they ask what I think then I will give my opinion. Sometimes I think I should just talk now, I'm not going to be able to pray tonight if I do not talk now.* (P1)

The participants discussed a number of difficulties they face as a result of how social auxiliary workers are mismanaged. The response from the participants demonstrates that they are able to assess a situation and apply the right coping strategy to manage it effectively. One of the major traits of resilience is the capacity for problem-solving. Research has shown that problem-focused coping reduces job stresses more effectively than emotion-focused coping, which is avoidant and increases stress and anxiety (Chang, 2012; Le *et al*., 2021; Lee *et al*., 2017; van den Brande *et al*., 2020). However, the study has discovered that participants employ both their emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies to support one another. The participants' emotional intelligence and effective problem-solving abilities, both of which are linked to resilience (Çam & Büyükbayram, 2015), are the only factors that make this possible.

LIMITATIONS

There is little knowledge and research on the resilience of social auxiliary workers and hence the literature on specifically the resilience of social workers had to be consulted for the study.

The individual interviews with social auxiliary workers were difficult to schedule because of the participants' busy schedules. It was necessary to reschedule appointments on several occasions, and some scheduled interviews were cancelled and could not be rescheduled.

The inclusion of social workers who supervise resilient social auxiliary workers would have provided additional information about and insight into resilience-promoting factors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study illuminated several aspects that influence social auxiliary workers' resilience. Resilience is a factor that helps to promote social auxiliary workers' ability to cope and overcome life and work stressors, while enhancing their ability to render effective services. Resilience can therefore be viewed as a core skill in social work practice.

Social workers, supervisors and organisations should work together in strengthening social auxiliary workers' resilience. Social auxiliary workers capacitated with resilience-enhancing skills and techniques will be beneficial for their own wellbeing as well as for the social workers they support, the organisation that employs them and the client system they serve. The valuable

role of social auxiliary workers is evident, and with effective management they can help South African communities become resilient and thrive.

The following recommendations based on the research findings are aimed at improving social auxiliary workers' resilience. In addition, the findings may also serve as a basis for future research and to identify ways to help address the challenges.

- It is recommended that policies are developed that address the role of social auxiliary workers and provide practical guidelines about how they should be managed.

- Training and continuous professional development (CPD) activities should be developed that focus specifically on social auxiliary work intervention.

- Social workers should be trained on how to deal with the role of social auxiliary workers and how to manage social auxiliary workers effectively.

- Social auxiliary workers should attend training that focuses on helping them to be assertive and confident in their role and in their responses to negative treatment from colleagues.

- Training should focus on making social work practitioners aware of the importance of resilience in their work and how they can practically enhance their resilience.

- Resilience-enhancing skills should be included in the social auxiliary work curriculum.

- Future research could explore the factors that reduce resilience in social workers.

- Research to determine whether resilience-enhancing programmes in South African social work organisations are implemented.

- Research on social auxiliary workers who were identified as having low levels of resilience could be undertaken to discover why their resilience level was low.

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