READINESS FOR PRACTICE OF NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS: EXPERIENCES OF SUPERVISORS AT SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

by

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DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

The readiness of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) for practice appears to be a growing area of research, however, there is little focus on the professional identities of NQSWs, and a lack of relevant literature on the readiness of NQSWs within a South African context. Global research indicates that NQSWs are being prepared in some skills and competencies, however, that they do lack skills and competencies in other regards. Readiness is a concept that is interpreted differently amongst various entities, and thus, it is impossible to satisfy all individuals' expectations as to what constitutes an NQSW that is ready for practice. NQSWs enter a difficult working environment and experience stress and anxiety as they are new in the profession, posing additional needs and challenges when they are not fully ready for practice. Supervisors are in an ideal position to identify how NQSWs handle this transition into the workplace and whether there are specific tasks or challenges that they struggle with when entering practice. With little insight into this phenomenon within the South African context, it is difficult to understand how NQSWs can be better prepared and assisted in transitioning from being a student to a professional and enhancing their readiness for practice. In light of this, the researcher's study aimed to gain an understanding of supervisors' experiences of newly qualified social workers' readiness for practice at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa.

This research followed a qualitative approach with the intent of obtaining insight and understanding into the experiences of social work supervisors on the readiness of NQSWs for practice. Descriptive and exploratory research designs were employed to gain a deeper understanding into the subjective experiences of social work supervisors on the readiness of NQSWs for practice, as there is a lack of research on this topic within a South African context. Social work supervisors as research participants were recruited through both purposive and snowball sampling methods. Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study with the researcher utilising semi-structured interviews via telephonic phone calls when collecting data. The researcher utilised a thematic content analysis approach when analysing the data that was collected during the interviews. Within this research, there are two literature chapters. The first chapter described and explained the global and local context of NQSWs within the realm of the developmental theory of professional identity. The second literature chapter analysed contemporary international and South African research on the readiness (both covert and overt) of NQSWs for practice. These chapters provided the foundation for chapter four which

presented the empirical study. Within this, the researcher presented the data that was collected from research participants and analysed their relative narratives against existing global and local research. These results enabled the researcher to draw relevant conclusions and recommendations which were presented in chapter five of this research. The main conclusions that the researcher was able to deduce from the findings was that readiness is a concept understood differently and thus an NQSW will never be seen as 'ready' by all individuals in society, due to their variations in perceptiveness as to what constitutes as 'ready'. As a result, supervisors deem different competencies as necessary for NQSWs to have when entering practice. NQSWs appear to both have, and lack, specific competencies dependent on the Higher Education Institution (HEI) that they attended and, as a consequence, which competencies they focused on enhancing throughout their social work training. Specialised supervision can enhance NQSWs' readiness for practice and enable them to transition better into the profession, however, supervisors are not always able to provide this more intensive and supportive style of supervision to NQSWs due to their own workloads. HEIs are not preparing NQSWs sufficiently for the realities of practice. Consequently, vast differences in the social work training offered at HEIs are observed in South Africa - supervisors are aware of these differences, which influence their decision as to whether they would employ an NQSW. Ensuring the readiness of NQSWs for practice should, however, not only be the responsibility of one sole entity, but rather, should consist of a collaborative approach shared amongst HEIs, supervisors, social service organisations, social work governing and statutory organisations and NQSWs.

OPSOMMING

Die gereedheid van nuut gekwalifiseerde maatskaplike werkers (NGMWs) vir die praktyk blyk 'n groeiende navorsingsgebied te wees, maar daar is min fokus op die professionele identiteit van NGMWs en 'n gebrek aan relevante literatuur oor die gereedheid van NGMWs binne 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Wêreldwye navorsing dui aan dat NGMWs in sommige vaardighede en vermoëns voorberei word, maar dat hulle nie oor ander vaardighede en vermoëns beskik nie. Gereedheid is 'n konsep wat tussen verskillende entiteite verskillend geïnterpreteer word, en dit is dus onmoontlik om aan alle individue se verwagtinge te voldoen oor hoe 'n NGMW wat gereed is en praktiseer moet lyk. NGMWs betree 'n moeilike werksomgewing en ervaar spanning en angs, aangesien dat hulle nuut in die beroep is, wat ekstra behoeftes en uitdagings bied as hulle nie heeltemal gereed is vir die praktyk nie. Supervisors is in 'n ideale posisie om te identifiseer hoe NGMWs hierdie oorgang na die werkplek hanteer en of daar spesifieke take of uitdagings is waarmee hulle sukkel wanneer hulle die praktyk betree. Met min insig in hierdie verskynsel binne 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks, is dit moeilik om te verstaan hoe NGMWs voorberei en bygestaan kan word in die oorgang van 'n student na 'n professionele persoon en om hul gereedheid vir praktyk te verbeter. In die lig hiervan, was die navorser se studie daarop gemik om begrip te kry van supervisors se ervarings van die nuut gekwalifiseerde maatskaplike werkers se gereedheid vir praktyk by maatskaplike diensorganisasies in die Wes-Kaap, Suid Afrika.

Hierdie navorsing het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg met die doel om insig en begrip te verkry van die ervarings van maatskaplike werk supervisors oor die gereedheid van NGMWs vir praktyk. Verkennende en beskrywende navorsingsontwerpe is gebruik om 'n diepgaande begrip te verkry van die subjektiewe ervarings van maatskaplike werk supervisors oor die gereedheid van NGMWs vir die praktyk, aangesien daar 'n gebrek aan navorsing oor hierdie onderwerp binne 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks is. Supervisors as navorsingsdeelnemers is gewerf deur middel van doelgerigte en sneeubalsteekproefmetodes. Onderhoude was met vyftien deelnemers uitgever vir hierdie studie. Die navorser het van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude via telefoniese oproepe gebruik gemaak vir die insameling van data. Die navorser het 'n tematiese inhoudsanalise gebruik vir die ontleding van die data wat vanuit onderhoude ingesamel is. Hierdie navorsing het twee literatuurhoofstukke. Die eerste hoofstuk beskryf en verduidelik die wêreldwye en plaaslike konteks van NGMWs binne die area van die ontwikkelingsteorie van professionele identiteit. In die tweede literatuurhoofstuk word

hedendaagse internasionale en Suid-Afrikaanse navorsing oor die gereedheid (beide kovert en overt) van NGMWs vir die praktyk ontleed. Hierdie hoofstukke het die grondslag gelê vir hoofstuk vier waarin die empiriese studie aangebied word. Hier het die navorser die data wat ingesamel is, voorgestel en narratiewe ontleed aan die hand van bestaande globale en plaaslike navorsing. Hierdie resultate het die navorser in staat gestel om relevante gevolgtrekkings en aanbevelings te maak wat in hoofstuk vyf van hierdie navorsing aangebied word. Die belangrikste gevolgtrekkings wat die navorser uit die bevindinge kon aflei, is dat gereedheid 'n konsep is wat verskillend verstaan word, en 'n NGMW sal dus nooit deur alle individue in die samelewing as 'gereed' beskou word nie, vanweë hul variasies in waarneming ten opsigte van wat as 'gereed' beskou word. As gevolg hiervan verlang supervisors verskillende bevoegdhede wat nodig is vir die NGMW's tydens die aanvang van hulle praktyk. NGMWs beskik oor spesifieke vaardighede wat afhang van die hoër onderwysinstelling (HOI) wat hulle bygewoon het, en watter vaardighede daardie instellings op gefokus het tydens hul opleiding in maatskaplike werk. Gespesialiseerde supervisie kan NGMWs se gereedheid vir die praktyk verbeter en hulle in staat stel om die professie beter te betreë, maar supervisors is nie altyd in staat om hierdie meer intensiewe en ondersteunende styl van supervisie aan NGMW's te verskaf nie, weens hul eie werkladings. HOIs berei NGMWs nie genoegsaam voor vir die werklikheid van die praktyk nie. Daar is groot verskille in die maatskaplikewerk-opleiding wat by HOIs in Suid-Afrika aangebied word waarvan supervisors bewus is, wat hulle beïnvloed in hul besluit of hulle 'n NGMW sal aanstel. Die versekering van die gereedheid van NGMWs vir die praktyk behoort nie slegs die verantwoordelikheid van een enkele entiteit te wees nie, maar moet eerder bestaan uit 'n gesamentlike benadering tussen HOIs, supervisors, maatskaplike diensorganisasies, maatskaplikewerk-bestuurs- en statutêre organisasies en NGMWs.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH
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1.1   PRELIMINARY STUDY AND RATIONALE

The readiness of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) for practice at social service organisations in both the government and private sector has been debated by many scholars in the field of social work around the world for years (Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2014; Howard, Johnston & Agllias, 2015; Welch, Lerpiniere & Young, 2014). South Africa has a large number of social work graduates entering the social work profession each year, however, also has high 'brain drain', burnout and dropout rates of NQSWs (Engelbrecht, 2006; Kheswa, 2019; Ntsoane, 2017). Nevertheless, there is still a lack of recent available statistics regarding the amount of NQSWs leaving the profession in South Africa. However, this is a challenge faced by many countries, as research recently conducted in the United Kingdom suggested that 39% of the social workers interviewed were planning to leave the field shortly, due to increased levels of stress, high number of caseloads and adverse work environments (YouGov, 2020). This begs the following questions: How ready are NQSWs to enter the profession of social work in South Africa?; Are there any incongruencies between their expectations and the realities of the work field?; Could better preparation of NQSWs contribute to lower burnout, dropout and 'brain drain' rates? (compare Gallop, 2018).

An NQSW is a social worker who has been working for less than two years in the field of social work (Cloete, 2012; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Pretorius, 2020). 'Readiness' or 'preparedness' within the context of this study can be defined as an appraisal of an NQSW's capacity for professional practice (Nathaniel, 2018). It is thus important to note that the term 'readiness' is subjective and dependent on both NQSWs and supervisors' expectations and, therefore, can be interpreted differently (Nathaniel, 2018). Readiness can be analysed and explained as consisting of covert and overt competencies also known as foundational and functional competencies respectively (Parker, 2017). Covert competencies are competencies that involve inherent knowledge and skills such as intellectual competencies, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, practical knowledge, values and attributes (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Parker, 2017). Overt competencies are those that can be observed such as report writing, administration, other procedures and day-to-day tasks that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) curricula prepare

NQSWs for (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Parker, 2017). Global research has found that although there are some areas in practice that NQSWs are ready for, there are several other areas that need more attention, consequently resulting in NQSWs not being sufficiently prepared for immediate effective practice once graduating and entering the field of social work (Children's Workforce Development Council Research Team, 2009; Grant *et al.*, 2014; De Jager, 2013). Within these aforementioned studies, there are recurring covert and overt themes, including: NQSWs not being ready to work within the statutory work field – specifically in court (Grant *et al.*, 2014; De Jager, 2013; Mathias-Williams & Thomas, 2002); as well as lacking confidence to work in this field (Ballantyne, Beddoe, Hay, Maidment, Walker & Merriman, 2019; CWDC Research Team, 2009; Welch *et al.*, 2014); NQSWs having difficulty in being assertive, dealing with aggression and managing conflict with service users (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Tham & Lynch, 2017); and NQSWs expecting to receive more supervision and training that is not only focused on caseloads and service users, but rather that of personal development (Grant, 2017; Manthorpe, Moriarty, Stevens, Hussein & Sharpe, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014).

From the aforementioned exposition, it is evident that the challenge in reviewing existing international literature on the readiness of NQSWs is applying it to the South African context, due to various reasons, including: the relevancy of comparing the social work profession amongst developed and developing countries; as well as the differences in curriculum and training that NQSWs have according to the norms and standards of the social work governing bodies amongst different countries. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) have drawn up Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training which offers all HEIs around the world guidelines on what is expected of them when presenting social work education (International Federation of Social Workers & International Associations of Schools of Social Work, 2020). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa has formulated qualification norms and standards for the Bachelor of Social Work degree which serves as a guideline to the social work curricula taught at South African universities (Council on Higher Education, 2015). Although these norms and standards regulated by the CHE have only been recently implemented, a similar curriculum framework determined exit-level outcomes of social work graduates previously in South Africa (compare De Jager, 2013).

These curricular frameworks in HEIs in South Africa, and around the world, appear to be effective in attributes to preparing NQSWs in providing interventions, their assessment and

report writing skills and values (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Grant *et al.*, 2014). However, although such standards are effective in regulating South African social work curricula, it is important to acknowledge that different social work training institutions have different points of academic departure and focus within these guidelines, making it impossible to assure that all degree programmes are emphasising relevant context-specific essential topics for the work field in the same way (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Hunt, Tregurtha, Kuruvila, Lowe & Smith, 2016). Even in the presence of guiding norms and standards, degree programmes need to be assessed in order to determine whether they have sufficiently prepared NQSWs in developing the necessary covert and overt competencies and attributes needed to deal with the strenuous challenges, tasks and roles of the job once graduating and entering the work field (Parker, 2017).

This is because NQSWs' first year of working in the field can be extremely taxing as it is much more challenging than what they were exposed to throughout their degree (Grant *et al.*, 2014; Hunt *et al.*, 2016; De Jager, 2013). As lack of confidence appears to be an issue highlighted by both supervisors and NQSWs in empirical research (De Jager, 2013; Walker, 2014) another factor that needs to be considered is that of the professional identity of NQSWs. Professional identity is a concept that has originally been established from the work of Erikson (1968) and looks (within the domain of social work) at what level of competency or developmental stage a social worker might be at with regard to motivation, autonomy and awareness (Engelbrecht, 2019a). When entering practice, NQSWs move from a student identity to the beginner level of their professional identity (Walker, 2014). NQSWs might have expectations with what they require to assist in the development of their identity, such as: receiving frequent supervision for guidance due to their inexperience, and being presented with opportunities that allow for further professional development (Grant *et al.*, 2014; Manthorpe *et al.*, 2014). If these expectations are not met, it might lead to feelings of anxiousness and ill-preparedness, possibly contributing to NQSWs not feeling ready for practice in the work field. NQSWs also see supervision as a great source of information and support and have identified that being offered constructive feedback can assist in the development of their practice competence and professional identity (Cloete, 2012; Roulston, Cleak & Vreugdenhil, 2018). Therefore, it is essential that NQSWs receive thorough training, induction, and supervision in order to assist them with their emotional and professional transition into the work field (Department of Social Development, 2007; Parker, 2017). These expectations are not always being met, not as a result of supervisors not wanting to assist NQSWs in new job roles, but rather, due to the shortage of social workers in South

Africa, resulting in supervisors having high caseloads and not having the time to attend to NQSWs needs (Nathaniel, 2018; Roulston *et al.*, 2018; Welch *et al.*, 2014).

With social work being an established profession, and there being a growing need for social workers to address increasing complex social problems – for example, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic - it is important to look into how social workers can be fully prepared to these demands and how educators and supervisors can observe and identify that NQSWs are 'ready' (YouGov, 2020). Even though previous international research has pointed to supervisors experiencing that NQSWs are not entirely ready to work in the field, it is vital to acknowledge what is appropriate to expect from NQSWs in a specific context, due to the difficulty, volatility and complexness that comes with working in the field of social work (Welch *et al.*, 2014).

Unpreparedness is not uncommon when observing all newly qualified graduates entering their respective work fields in diverse professional groups (Ballantyne, Beddoe, Hay, Maidment & Walker, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Howard *et al.*, 2015). Ultimately, specifically in social work as a profession that responds to challenges on all levels of society (Engelbrecht, 2019a), NQSWs, Higher Education Institutions, supervisors, social work governing and statutory organisations, and social service organisations all need to collaborate and have a shared approach in creating curricula and work environments that prepare NQSWs not only to be professionally and emotionally ready for practice, but also that allow for continuous learning and growing opportunities to the benefit of the individuals, groups and communities they render services to (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2017; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Welch *et al.*, 2014).

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current local and international social work experience is that NQSWs are to some extent ready to enter the workforce, however, that improvement is needed with regards to certain competencies and attributes in order for NQSWs to be more prepared for the contemporary realities of the profession in practice (compare De Jager, 2013). Evidence within this regard is lacking within a South African context, thus highlighting the need for this subject matter to be studied further (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Pretorius, 2020). Social Work curricula at HEIs is just one aspect that needs to be reviewed when analysing the readiness of NQSWs. Both covert and overt readiness (compare Parker, 2017) are essential in terms of content that is learnt, the genericity of graduate attributes, emotional resilience that is instilled and the incorporation of contemporary issues, are all aspects that need to be considered (Craig, Dentato, Messinger

& McInroy, 2014; Shergill, 2018; Tham & Lynch, 2017). However, it is not only the role of HEIs to ensure that NQSWs are ready for social work practice; and not only should degree programmes have more input from practitioners (Mathias-Williams & Thomas, 2002), but supervisors of NQSWs at social service organisations should also play an imperative role in preparing NQSWs through the continuous provision of affective and supportive supervision, managing a conducive work environment, and conducting relevant induction and training programmes towards a strong professional identity (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Grant, 2017; Shergill, 2018; Welch *et al.*, 2014).

However, in the South African context, only anecdotal empirical evidence is available regarding the practice readiness of NQSWs, for instance, De Jager (2013) only refers to the reflections of NQSWs on their preparedness, rather than the views of supervisors or employers, and Cloete (2012) only focuses on the features of incorporating mentoring into supervision to assist and support NQSWs in their new roles. No specific empirical evidence is thus available about the experiences of South African supervisors at social service organisations with respect to the readiness of NQSWs for practice (compare Howard *et al.*, 2015; Manthorpe *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Within the context of the South African changing psycho-social, socio-economic and bio-social environments, inter alia brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, it would thus be essential to empirically investigate the experiences of South African supervisors at social service organisations with respect to the readiness of NQSWs for practice. These supervisors are experiencing NQSWs on a day-to-day basis on all aspects of their social work service rendering. By investigating these experiences of supervisors with the aim to pose relevant recommendations for practice on different levels, better preparation of NQSWs will assist in effective social service delivery. It will also contribute to the retention of social workers within the profession, specifically in South Africa, because they would be better equipped to deal with the demands and challenges that arise from working in a demanding and challenging profession and environment (Gallop, 2018).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

Are newly qualified social workers ready for practice, based on the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa?

Possible sub-questions included:

- How do supervisors define an NQSW being 'ready' to practice?

- What are supervisors' experiences of NQSWs being ready for practice in the work field?

- What specific expectations with regards to attributes and competencies do supervisors look for when hiring an NQSW? Which competencies do they think NQSWs have, and which do you think they lack?

- Do supervisors think that regular supervision sessions with NQSWs could positively influence NQSWs readiness for practice? Why do they think so?

- Do supervisors think that HEIs are preparing NQSWs sufficiently enough to be ready for practice?

- What would supervisors recommend to enhance the readiness of NQSWs?

1.4 GOAL

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of supervisors' experiences of newly qualified social workers' readiness for practice at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were stipulated in order to meet the goal of the study:

1. To describe and explain the global and local context of NQSWs within the realm of the developmental theory of professional identity.

2. To analyse contemporary international and South African research on the readiness (both covert and overt) of NQSWs for practice.

3. To empirically investigate the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape regarding the readiness of NQSWs for practice.

4. To make conclusions and recommendations to Higher Education Institutions, NQSWs, supervisors of NQSWs and social service organisations regarding the preparation of NQSWs to be ready for practice.

1.6   CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The following concepts are defined for the purpose of understanding the goal of this study:

1.6.1   Social work

"Social work 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." (International Federation of Social Workers & International Associations of Schools of Social Work, 2014).

1.6.2   Newly qualified social worker

A social worker is a qualified individual who is registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) to be able to deliver social work services in accordance with the *Social Service Professions Act No.110 of 1978* (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). For the purpose of this study, a newly qualified social worker is a social worker who has been working for less than two years in the field of social work (Cloete, 2012; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Pretorius, 2020).

1.6.3   Supervisor

"A social work supervisor is a social worker with the required experience and qualifications to whom authority is delegated to supervise social work practitioners." (DSD & SACSSP, 2012:9). A supervisor can take on many roles – some of which include: educator; supporter; expert; motivator; advocate; and enabler – to fulfil administrative, supportive and educational functions when providing supervision to a social worker to encourage effective and ethical service delivery (Engelbrecht, 2019a; DSD & SACSSP, 2012).

1.6.4   Supervision

"The brief of supervision of social workers is a mandated formal arrangement by an agency supervision policy, which entails the execution of supportive, educational, and administrative functions by a designated authoritative and trained supervisor, with the ultimate goal to render the best possible services to the user system. Supervision is operationalised by means of

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structured, interactional supervision sessions; directed by adult education principles in a cyclical process with associated tasks, methods, and activities according to a predetermined time-span; based on appropriate theories, perspectives, and practice models; and guided by distinct values and ethical conduct. The scope of supervision is determined by a professional, constructive supervisor-supervisee relationship, context of the work environment, and resultant roles, which the supervisor has to fulfil." (Engelbrecht, 2019b:318).

1.6.5 Social service organisation

Social service organisations offer social services, which can be described as a spectrum of services and initiatives offered by both private and government organisations to individuals, families, groups and communities who require specific assistance (Rankin & Engelbrecht, 2019).

1.6.6 Professional identity

Professional identity involves obtaining a specialised and distinctive body of knowledge; having an understanding of social work values and competencies and ensuring that these are implemented and reflected in service delivery; and being able to grow one's own personal sense of being a social worker (Wiles, 2013). Professional identity consists of various components, including: attributes and values; beliefs and ethics; skills and competencies; the impact of the work environment; and group and personal identity (Fitzgerald, 2020).

1.7 THEORETICAL POINT OF DEPARTURE

The theoretical framework that informed this research was that of the developmental theory of professional identity, which is based on Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory and stages of psychosocial development. The psychosocial theory discusses how individuals' identities are formed throughout specific developmental phases in their life – such as adolescence or adulthood (Erikson, 1968). According to this theory, the selection of an occupation or career path is vital to achieving a sense of identity whilst individuals are adolescents, slowly moving to adulthood (Chávez, 2016; Sokol, 2009). A professional identity can already begin to form while students are placed at organisations; however, there is more rapid development once graduates are no longer students and become NQSWs in a specific position and context in an organisation (Moorhead, 2019; Moorhead, Bell & Bowles, 2016; Walker, 2014). There is an inherent need to develop a professional identity and this is accompanied by both feelings of

anxiousness and excitement. Moorhead (2019) indicates the desire NQSWs have to build their own professional identity with the support of their supervisors once entering the profession. This highlights the relationship between the developmental theory of professional identity and supervision.

According to Cloete (2012), Engelbrecht (2019a), Pretorius (2020) and Engelbrecht and Ncube (2021), in the context of South Africa, social workers are being promoted to supervisors without functioning on an advanced professional identity level, and thus, in many cases, are unable to provide the support, guidance and continual development opportunities that NQSWs need. Studies have shown a strong correlation between receiving quality supervision and the enhancement of the professional identity (Roulston *et al.*, 2018; Shlomo, Levy & Itzhaky, 2012), emphasising the importance of exploring whether this is a reality in daily practice, and if not, if this could contribute towards improved readiness of NQSWs. Research has also shown that reduced levels of professional identity - specifically in social work – are significant and associated with low job satisfaction and increased intention to leave the profession (Jiang, Wang, Chui & Xu, 2019). Although not a topic that has extensive research with regards to the readiness of NQSWs - the development of a professional identity is vital in NQSWs confidently conducting effective social services and remaining in the profession. Therefore, highlighting the relationship professional identity has to the readiness of NQSWs, and the need to have addressed and described this theory whilst conducting this research in a South African context (compare Engelbrecht, 2019a; Pretorius, 2020; and Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021).

1.8   LITERATURE STUDY

The literature review was conducted from March 2021 to June 2021. The researcher made use of various online search engines, including Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis Journals, Social Work Journal, and SUNScholar Research Repository, to find relevant peer-reviewed articles, books, theses and resources to complete her literature review. These search engines provided access to both local research – Engelbrecht and Ncube (2021), Pretorius (2020), Alpaslan (2019), Cloete (2012), Skhosana (2020), Joseph (2017), Janse van Rensburg (2009), De Jager (2013) and Parker (2017) – and international research – Ballantyne, Beddoe, Hay, Maidment and Walker (2017), Ballantyne, Beddoe, Hay, Maidment, Walker and Merriman (2019), Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Research Team (2009), Grant, Sheridan and Webb (2014), Grant, Sheridan and Webb (2017), Howard *et al*. (2015), Hussein, Moriarty, Stevens, Sharpe and Manthorpe (2014), McSweeney and Williams

(2019), Moorhead (2019), Tham and Lynch (2019), and Welch, Lerpiniere and Young (2014) – to name a few. This literature review enabled the researcher to gain great insight into the current local and global views on the readiness of NQSWs, and guided her in the development of her interview questionnaire. This allowed the researcher to effectively analyse her data against the backdrop of existing research, and thus draw informed conclusions and recommendations.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following section elaborates on the research methodology that was followed and allowed for the research to be executed both effectively and ethically, and will address the following: the research approach and design, the sample that participated in the study, the instrument that was utilised for data collection and the methods in which data analysis occurred.

1.9.1 Research approach

A qualitative approach was utilised for the purpose of this study. Qualitative research can be defined as research that seeks to address and answer questions about the specific nature of phenomena such as human beliefs, behaviours and experiences (Fouché, 2021a; Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Qualitative research is often utilised as a research approach in the field of social work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach allowed the researcher to identify common themes from supervisors' experiences and gain an understanding based on their descriptions, attitudes and the meaning that they ascribed to specific experiences with NQSWs (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). This research was guided by both deductive reasoning – where specific ideas and hypotheses regarding the study were formulated prior to the study, by the researcher conducting a thorough literature review and analysing other existing information on the topic – and inductive reasoning – as once the empirical study had been conducted, inferences were drawn to formulate general deductions and conclusions, thus, rather described and understood as opposed to having explained or predicted the readiness of NQSWs (Fouché, 2021a; Walker, 2014). This approach was appropriate for the purpose of this study as the experiences and recommendations of supervisors were explored, interpreted and analysed against existing research, which allowed the researcher to draw conclusions regarding the readiness of NQSWs in South Africa based on the participants' subjective descriptions.

1.9.2 Research design

The researcher utilised two research design methods: exploratory and descriptive research. These two methods are often utilised together as they complement one another and are frequently integrated in the field of research (Fouché, 2021b; Strydom, 2013). Exploratory research is often utilised as a method for qualitative studies and is a design that adds new knowledge into a field where there is a lack of it, rather than only confirming existing knowledge or hypotheses (Fouché, 2021b; Swedberg, 2020). With this method, it was essential that the researcher remained flexible and unbiased while investigating and analysing all obtained information (Strydom, 2013). This research design was applicable to this study as the readiness of NQSWs in a South African context is an under-studied topic, and thus, the data that was obtained from this research added new, informative and valuable information to the field of social work.

Descriptive research can be described as a thorough analysis of distinct experiences encountered by individuals, groups or communities (Doyle, McCabe, Keogh, Brady & McCann, 2020; Lambert & Lambert, 2013). This design seeks to study participants or phenomena in its' natural state without any interference (Lambert & Lambert, 2013; Nassaji, 2015). This design is ideal for qualitative research as it acknowledges the subjective nature of individuals or phenomena (Bradshaw, Atkinson & Doody, 2017; Doyle *et al.*, 2020) and therefore was appropriate for this study, as it allowed emphasis to be placed on understanding supervisors' of NQSWs subjective experiences. Descriptive research is also utilised as a design when there is a lack of existing information related to the research topic or when the topic is relatively new to the field and needs to be comprehensively studied (Doyle *et al.*, 2020; Tripodi & Bender, 2010). With exploratory research focusing on 'what' questions and descriptive research focusing on 'why' and 'how' questions, these were utilised while interviewing supervisors to gain insight into their experiences of the readiness of NQSWs and the factors that contribute both positively and negatively towards NQSWs' readiness (Fouché, 2021b).

1.9.3 Sample

A sample can be described as a small subset of an entire group of individuals, objects or situations that are representative of a larger population and are of interest to the researcher (Mujere, 2016). The researcher identified and drew her sample – supervisors of NQSWs – from the Western Cape, who are a subset of, and represent supervisors of NQSWs in South Africa.

The objective of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is considered to be valuable, to assist in the goal of data saturation (Doyle *et al.*, 2020; Lambert & Lambert, 2013). Saturation is reached when no new information is obtained from interviewing research participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The researcher utilised two non-probability sampling methods, including purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Non-probability sampling utilises non-random, subjective procedures to decide which components will or will not be included in the sample and, therefore, not all individuals in the population will have an equal opportunity to be chosen as a participant (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016; Tripodi & Bender, 2010). This was chosen for this study as the researcher was limited to the number of supervisors she could recruit to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is utilised when a researcher identifies research participants they believe have the best knowledge and insight regarding the phenomenon being explored and studied (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, *et al.*, 2014; Strydom, 2021). This method was utilised whilst selecting supervisors at social service organisations - as many NQSWs start their first jobs at social service organisations - and was desirable as these supervisors had relatable experiences on the readiness of NQSWs. Snowball sampling is a method that utilises research participants to recommend other possible participants that they feel could contribute valuable information to the study, allowing for growth in the sample size (Oppong, 2013; Strydom, 2021; Taherdoost, 2016). This method was utilised by supervisors making the researcher aware of supervisors at other organisations who they felt had relative experiences about the readiness of NQSWs which could contribute meaningful information to the study, and met the criteria for inclusion.

The criteria for inclusion for this study were as follows:

- The participant had to be a social worker registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP);

- The participant had past or current experience as a social work supervisor at their relative social service organisation;

- The participant had to have supervised a social worker who has worked in the field for less than two years (as stipulated by the definition of a newly qualified social worker);

- The participant has to have been employed by a social service organisation in the Western Cape.

The researcher contacted social work supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape who were a part of her professional network via phone calls and emails, which depended on whichever communication suited the potential research participant and was most effective. This was done to identify whether they would be willing to participate in the study. The researcher only interviewed supervisors in the Western Cape as she needed to demarcate the study geographically. The focus was not to generalise findings, but rather add valuable information to the field, as there were only 15 participants in the study. In addition to this, the researcher utilised snowball sampling which enabled her to ask these social work supervisors whether they could contact supervisors in their professional networks who met the criteria and seemed appropriate for the study and have them contact the researcher if they were willing to participate in the research. The researcher repeated the process as mentioned above until 15 participants were recruited. All participants were emailed an informed consent form which they read before agreeing to participate in the study voluntarily. The researcher aimed to interview 15 research participants as she believed that this would allow for data saturation; however, the total number of participants was flexible, as it was dependent on the attainment of data saturation.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher conducted the interviews via telephonic phone calls for safety and health measures. Telephonic interviews were preferable as they allowed for more flexibility in the schedule of interviewing participants as well as incurred fewer costs as the researcher did not have to drive to meet any participants, thus making it an effective and efficient method (Doyle *et al.*, 2020; Farooq & de Villiers, 2017; Geyser, 2021). Therefore, there were no costs for the research participants. During these phone calls, the interview was recorded with a cellular phone – with the participant's permission – which allowed the researcher to transcribe, identify themes and analyse the data effectively. This was a safe method to ensure the privacy of research participants as recordings were safely stored on a password-protected cellular phone, and were downloaded in addition to a password-protected computer and stored in the cloud. The researcher also utilised field notes, which recorded the researcher's thoughts, impressions and contextual information during the interviews, which allowed for not only the recording to be relied on for valuable information (Geyser, 2021; Pacheco-Vega, 2019).

Interviews took place after working hours and were based on supervisors' personal experiences and therefore, the researcher did not need to obtain any organisational permission to conduct

the study with research participants, as they participated in their personal capacity as a professional social worker and not as a representative of an organisation.

1.9.4   Instrument for data collection

The researcher utilised semi-structured interviews as a method for data collection. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher had a set of established questions based on themes generated from the literature chapters. These questions were linked with the initial research question of the study. However, these were used as a guide rather than a rigorous set of questions, which allowed the researcher and participants flexibility in asking and answering open-ended questions, as new themes could be explored as they arose during the interview (Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015; Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Various themes were addressed during the study, including broader biographical themes, such as: how long the supervisor has been a supervisor for; the type of social service organisation that he/she works/has worked at; and the amount of NQSWs he or she supervises / has supervised (see annexure 1). Thereafter, more specific themes related to the readiness of NQSWs were explored, some of which were: the expectations that supervisors have of NQSWs when entering the profession; the covert and overt competencies that NQSWs are expected to have in order to do their jobs and those that they lack; and the recommendations that they had towards enhancing readiness (see annexure 1). Sub-themes were explored and analysed within these themes, to acknowledge recurring themes amongst participants and guide the interview process. Data collection took place from June to August 2021.

1.9.5   Data analysis

The researcher believed that data saturation would be reached once interviews had been conducted with 15 participants. Immediately after each interview, the researcher utilised the cellular recording to transcribe the interview, whilst the interview was still clear in the researcher's mind. The researcher utilised a two-fold approach where the data was first transcribed during the data collection phase and was analysed only after completing all interviews. This assisted the researcher in managing the large amount of data effectively. Transcription followed a denaturalised approach in which the focus was on the informational content of what participants were saying, and all non-verbal cues, accents or other sounds were left out from the transcription to make it more comprehensible (compare Mero-Jaffe, 2011). The researcher utilised the typed-out transcriptions to highlight, make notes, colour code, and

identify and categorise themes to reduce the data to what was relevant to the study (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021). The information that was obtained via categorisation allowed the researcher to identify connections and descriptions of phenomena.

The researcher made use of thematic content analysis, which is a qualitative descriptive method of analysing, interpreting and understanding obtained qualitative data with the purpose and intent of finding linkages, themes and patterns of significance amongst the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Crowe *et al.*, 2015; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Crowe *et al.* (2015), the researcher utilised this analysis following a six-phase process including: familiarisation with the data by reviewing transcripts several times; developing initial codes by examining the data; searching for recurring themes by compiling related ideas; reviewing themes to ensure their relatability and necessity to the study; naming and generating definitions for each theme; and presenting a final report of the data. The data was thereafter presented in the research report. It was displayed in tables, and participants' quotations were referred to anonymously, which allowed for the findings to be analysed and compared to other existing literature on the readiness of NQSWs as identified in the literature review.

This data analysis consisted of another critical step: data verification to ensure that the data of the qualitative study was represented accurately. The following aspects based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) seminal concept of trustworthiness and its related criteria allowed for data verification and trustworthiness to take place:

1.9.5.1 *Transferability*

Transferability can be described as the extent to which the findings of the researcher's qualitative study can be generalised or transferred from a specific situation to the context of another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, Norris, White, *et al.*, 2017; Schurink *et al.*, 2021). The researcher achieved this by describing the exact research methodology, steps and protocols that were followed while researching the readiness of NQSWs by interviewing their supervisors and ensuring that data saturation was achieved.

1.9.5.2 *Credibility*

Credibility refers to ensuring the authentic identification, interpretation, description, and representation of respondents' original views within the researcher's study (Anney, 2014;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Credibility was confirmed by ensuring that supervisors' narratives were reflected appropriately in the research report through member-checking. Member checking is a process of involving research participants after finalising the data analysis to work through a summary of the themes that were identified from the research and to ask for their feedback (Cope, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This allowed participants to confirm the conclusions and interpretations that the researcher drew from their narratives, increasing credibility.

1.9.5.3 *Dependability*

Dependability refers to the researcher's ability to ensure that all research processes and procedures have been followed through in a logical, clearly documented and audited manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schurink *et al.*, 2021). This was achieved through the researcher confirming all steps of the research process and findings with her supervisor (Anney, 2014).

1.9.5.4 *Confirmability*

Confirmability can be explained as the researcher's ability to remain objective and unbiased, as well as have the findings of their study be reflected and confirmed if studied by another researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schurink *et al.*, 2021). Confirmability was attained through the researcher explaining how she drew her interpretations from the research participants' answers, by quoting their answers in the research report to indicate how conclusions were drawn from their statements (Cope, 2014).

The researcher was also aware of the impact that she could have on the study in terms of bias – as she is a newly qualified social worker. The researcher practised reflexivity – which can be described as the awareness a researcher has about the way he or she may potentially influence the research process (Dodgson, 2019; Haynes, 2012) – through compiling a reflexivity report that is attached to the final research report – see annexure 4 – to ensure credibility and transparency for all readers and participants.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Discussing the limitations of a study allows the researcher to identify weaknesses within the research process that could affect the conclusions and results (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). The first limitation was a lack of South African research on the readiness of NQSWs for practice. This lack of local research made it difficult to assume and apply international contexts to the

South African context. However, the researcher was able to find several South African sources that studied other aspects of NQSWs and social work and refer to them in an attempt to contextualise the environment that NQSWs are entering in South Africa. The second limitation of this study was that the researcher only investigated the readiness of NQSWs from the Western Cape in South Africa. The sample size was small, consisting of 15 participants, and only drawn from one province in South Africa, the Western Cape, thus not making it possible to generalise findings. However, as the research was qualitative, it was not the goal to generalise findings, but rather to gain insight into supervisors' experiences, which could assist in guiding the goals of future studies. Furthermore, the manner in which the research was conducted, and all steps and procedures, were extensively described, which will also allow for this research to be appropriately adjusted to other parts of South Africa if necessary.

1.11 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

The researcher was aware of the importance that the study was completed in an ethical manner. Ethics can be described as a set of moral assumptions that are widely agreed upon by all individuals which offer norms, rules, precedents and expectations regarding the most correct and professional manner in which the researcher should act with all parties who are involved in the research process (Johnson & Yanca, 2010; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The researcher submitted her research proposal to the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) to obtain approval to conduct the research. Thereafter, the proposal was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) to obtain further and final approval – see annexure 3. The research was considered low risk as the participants were adults, and the researcher collected information that was not personal or sensitive, but rather that of the participants' opinions. The following ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the entire research process:

Confidentiality: Confidentiality refers to the act of ensuring that an individual's information will be kept private by restricting others from accessing their personal information (Coffelt, 2018; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The researcher ensured that interview transcriptions and data were stored on a password-protected computer, and stored on the researcher's private cloud storage system to ensure that no information was lost. Audio recordings were stored on a password protected cellular phone and deleted once transcribed, to ensure the confidentiality of research participants through authorised access only.

Anonymity: Anonymity can be described as the process of ensuring that no individual is aware of a research participant's identity (Coffelt, 2018; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). Although this was not wholly attained due to the researcher and her supervisor being aware of participants' identities, the researcher ensured that when quotations or participants' statements were referred to in the research report, that all participants' identities remained anonymous (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The researcher also explained to all participants that only she and her supervisor would have knowledge of their identity, when she discussed components of the informed consent form with them.

Informed Consent: Informed consent refers to the consent that a research participant will give to the researcher to interview them and use his or her information, once being informed of the research process and his or her rights throughout the research process (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021; Sugiura, Wiles & Pope, 2017). The researcher made use of an informed consent form (see annexure 2), which she discussed with the research participants and addressed factors such as confidentiality, anonymity, the participant's right to leave the process at any point, and other information pertaining to the research process. Once explained, and still willing, the participants signed the form, which provided the researcher with permission to interview the participant. These forms were sent electronically to participants who returned them electronically after having signed them.

Non-maleficence: Avoidance of harm implies that it is the ethical obligation of a researcher to ensure that a subject, participant, or anyone in the research process should not be harmed in any manner – including both physical and emotional – throughout the research process (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). The researcher was aware that research participants could experience some emotional discomfort while discussing their experiences. Therefore, the researcher ensured that research participants were aware that they could leave the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable continuing. However, since this research was regarded as a low risk, the discomfort to talk about the supervision of NQSWs was the only risk and emotional content was minimal.

Debriefing: Debriefing can be described as the process through which a researcher debriefs the participant during a session after the interview or study to discuss the participant's experience of the research process and identify how mistakes can be rectified for the rest of the research process (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). Such sessions should be completed in an emotionally supportive environment. After each interview, the researcher conducted a short debriefing

session to ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the interview procedures. The researcher also offered the services of an external social worker in private practice to offer debriefing to research participants should they require it at no additional expense. This service was not necessary as no participant made use of it.

1.12 PRESENTATION

The researcher attempted to abide with a predetermined time frame throughout the entire research process. This research consists of six chapters. Chapter one presents an introduction to the study by describing the rationale, goals and objectives of the research, and provides a detailed description of the research methodology that was followed. Chapters two and three are both chapters in which existing literature was reviewed. Chapter two describes and explains the global and local context of NQSWs within the realm of the developmental theory of professional identity, whilst chapter three analyses contemporary international and South African research on the readiness of NQSWs for practice. Chapter four contains the empirical study, which aimed to investigate the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations regarding the readiness of NQSWs for practice and presents and analyses this obtained data in relation to the findings discussed in the literature review. Chapter five addresses the conclusions that have been drawn from the data analysis and the recommendations that have been made to HEIs, NQSWs, supervisors of NQSWs and social service organisations regarding their role in ensuring that NQSWs are ready for practice.

CHAPTER TWO

NQSWs AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL
THEORY OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first objective of this research is to explain the global and local context of NQSWs within the realm of the developmental theory of professional identity. The following chapter will divulge into the theoretical underpinnings of professional identity whilst considering and describing why and how the relative conceptual frameworks play an influential role in the readiness of NQSWs. This chapter will explore: the local and global context of NQSWs; Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development and in particular how he explored and described identity development; the developmental theory of professional identity and its influence on NQSWs; the concept of professional identity and its relation to both the supervision of NQSWs and the need for its inclusion in South African HEI curriculums to assist in the successful preparation of NQSWs for practice, with regards to the current local and global context. The researcher will substantiate with existing literature the relativity of needing to understand and recognise the significance of professional identity and its relation to the readiness of NQSWs.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING NQSWS WITHIN A GLOBAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

The current global context for NQSWs appears to consist of both a challenging and demanding work environment (Hunt *et al.*, 2016, Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Ntsoane, 2017; Shergill, 2018; Wilson, 2013a). With increased professional expectations and requirements in meeting specific targets, NQSWs are faced with the internal struggle of "Should I implement all the necessary steps, procedures, considerations and theories that I have learnt throughout my degree to ensure that the root of the issue is addressed and that my service user is dealt with holistically?" or, "Should I deliver the most time-efficient services to assist my service user in dealing only with their presented issue so that I can move onto helping the next service user?". Essentially, NQSWs grapple with the decision of whether their focus should be on the quality of services produced or the quantity of services provided as a result of their extremely high workloads (Wirth, Mette, Prill, Harth & Nienhaus, 2019). Furthermore, NQSWs are struggling to receive supervision that is not only managerial-focused, but also that which considers supportive and

education functions, which will not only assist NQSWs better with this transitioning phase (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Kheswa, 2019; Walker, 2014), but also with their professional growth and development as a social worker. This is only the tip of the iceberg when beginning to illustrate the strenuous working environment that NQSWs are entering, both globally and locally, upon graduating from an HEI.

2.2.1 Global context of NQSWs

Global literature has found that NQSWs often feel as if they are left to fend for themselves in the field and manage complex cases or challenges on their own (Tham & Lynch, 2017), that supervision or mentoring does not occur regularly (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019) and that it only serves the purpose of discussing service users and cases rather than allowing NQSWs to reflect on their feelings and experiences (Grant, 2017; Walker, 2014). NQSWs have acknowledged that they do not have enough time or receive enough support to consider and take up training opportunities that will further their learning and enhance their professional capabilities (Grant, 2017), and feel as if their HEIs have deserted them upon receiving their degree (Gallop, 2018). There is difficulty in managing extremely high caseloads (Wirth *et al.*, 2019; Barck-Holst, Nilsonne, Åkerstedt & Hellgren, 2021; Shergill, 2018; Yu, Moulding, Buchanan & Hand, 2016), which tend to be a significant jump from the number of cases NQSWs managed whilst completing their degree. A lack of available resources (Malka *et al.*, 2020), organisational requirements and difficult cases (Welch *et al.*, 2014; Zeng, Cheung, Leung & He, 2016), and physical working conditions (Freund & Guez, 2018) have also been identified as stressors that NQSWs face, as well as insufficient remuneration in some countries around the world such as South Africa (Joseph, 2017; Kheswa, 2019; Skhosana, 2020), China (Zeng *et al.*, 2016) and the UK (YouGov, 2020). NQSWs and social workers who have been in the profession for a long time put up with these systemic and organisational difficulties, such as decreased financial resources and having limited power in changing service users' situations, as it is simply 'part of the job' and not in their control (Wirth *et al.*, 2019).

Supervisors' of NQSWs express that they are worried about NQSWs' ability to cope with the stressors that come with the job (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019). They recognise that they do not expect NQSWs to know everything immediately (Welch *et al.*, 2014); however, they do expect NQSWs to be able to refer clients, write reports, keep updated records, have their work be informed by theory and involve themselves in their ongoing professional development (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2017). In the CWDC Research Team findings' (2009), three-quarters of

supervisors felt that the Bachelor of Social Work degree only prepares NQSWs partially for their professional role, and other supervisors have also established that NQSWs are ill-prepared to work in the profession (Welch *et al.*, 2014). Supervisors have certain expectations of NQSWs who have recently graduated, however, they also recognise the challenges the degree has in thoroughly preparing NQSWs holistically for their job role in a challenging profession.

From a global context, it can be deduced that the NQSWs feel intimidated by the work environment they are entering, and that many challenges such as lack of resources and high caseloads continue throughout a social worker's entire profession. The preparation of NQSWs is not meeting the expectations of NQSWs or supervisors, which proves challenging in a difficult profession that requires specific skills and competencies to ensure effective service delivery. This emphasises the importance of further investigating this topic to ensure that the future of social work is in the hands of theoretically-, emotionally- and mentally prepared NQSWs, who on all these levels can effectively cope with the strenuous working environment.

2.2.2 South African context of NQSWs

Upon reviewing literature, the context of NQSWs in South Africa appears to share similarities with other countries, however, also appears to present even more challenges. In 2007, the National Department of Social Development in South Africa developed the Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers (Department of Social Development, 2007) in response to the vast number of social workers either leaving the profession entirely or finding social work opportunities overseas where they have the opportunity to earn more, the profession is more respected and there are available resources to effectively assist various service users (Department of Social Development, 2007). South African social workers were and still are tired of the poor working conditions, low pay, the limitations in available resources and the challenges that they face whilst working in this field and are overstretched whilst attempting to meet their job demands (Calitz, Roux & Strydom, 2014; Joseph, 2017; Kheswa, 2019). This has resulted in a shortage of both social workers and supervisors, which has led to even higher caseloads for NQSWs entering the profession, resulting in a poorer quality in service delivery (Calitz *et al.*, 2014; Cloete, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2006; Parker, 2017).

It is thus necessary to investigate whether NQSWs are prepared for this challenging field, to identify what more can be done to ensure that they are aware of the difficult profession that they are entering, and how their expectations can be managed to be more realistic in knowing

what their job entails, upon exiting the more 'protected' environment of completing practical placement requirements throughout their degree (Beddoe, Ballantyne, Maidment, Hay & Walker, 2020; Nunev, 2014). The challenges that NQSWs face are discussed below.

2.2.2.1 Challenges for NQSWs

NQSWs have the difficulty of starting their professional career by working in stressful and demanding work environments. Work-related sources of stress for NQSWs include: large workloads, displeasing salaries and the extensiveness of service user-related issues and challenges (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Skhosana, 2020). The working environments of social work organisations', especially non-governmental organisations, appear to be insufficient as they are marked by a lack of available and adequate resources – some of these resources being basic supplies such as stationery, desks, chairs or computers, and other resources required for daily service delivery such as transport (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Joseph, 2017; Kheswa, 2019; Pretorius, 2020, Skhosana, 2020). Janse van Rensburg (2009) emphasised that the lack of resources to ensure effective service delivery is a source of anxiety and could result in NQSWs feeling discontent in their profession.

High caseloads, as identified by participants of Pretorius' (2020) and Joseph's (2017) studies, also contribute to increased levels of stress, and as a result, NQSWs feeling overwhelmed, which negatively affects their professional identity development. NQSWs are burdened with administration and struggle to manage this on top of working in the field with service users (Pretorius, 2020; Skhosana, 2020). In South Africa, it is recommended that social workers do not have more than 60 cases at any point in time (Earle, 2008), however, the reality is that social workers are struggling with between 110 to 400 cases at any given time (Baldauf, 2007; Pretorius, 2020). Calitz *et al.* (2014:163) acknowledged that these elevated levels of job-related stress could lead to "... burnout, impaired performance, poor mental health, impaired cognitive functioning, decreased concentration and health-related problems for social workers.", as well as result in social workers considering leaving the profession altogether. Additionally, there is the issue of feeling unsafe and vulnerable during practice (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Joseph, 2017), which was highlighted by one of Pretorius' (2020) research participants who described that they had been physically assaulted during a bid to deliver services to a service user. Participants of this study also spoke of the lack of hygienic or healthy working conditions, especially apparent in informal settlements, which is a personal health concern for NQSWs (Pretorius, 2020).

A mitigating factor affecting the work environment of NQSWs is that of the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in not only personal difficulties for some social workers, but also organisational challenges due to the increased number of service users requiring services and organisational constraints (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). During this period in which NQSWs entered the job market, they struggled with the stress of finding a job in a tough economic climate, and those who had already been employed were not confident in ensuring that their employment would be guaranteed during a period of many organisations and companies retrenching individuals due to financial difficulties (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021).

Social work in its current form is not facilitating productivity or job satisfaction amongst NQSWs, and with the lack of available support (Skhosana, 2020), it is unlikely that student social workers will transition smoothly into NQSWs.

2.2.2.2   *Supervision of NQSWs*

Receiving meaningful supervision from a supportive and qualified supervisor is crucial in ensuring a smooth transition period for NQSWs entering the field for the first time (Bruno & Dell'Aversana, 2018; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). However, in a South African context, this is not always the reality for many NQSWs. NQSWs have expressed that they do not have frequent supervision sessions, which, as a result, enhances their feelings of anxiousness and ill-preparedness (De Jager, 2013). Cloete (2012), Joseph (2017) and Pretorius (2020) acknowledge the reality in the lack of supervision for NQSWs, however, reiterate that this is a result of supervisors having many other responsibilities and high volumes of work which leaves little to no time for them to provide meaningful supervision sessions effectively. Many supervisors are not prepared for their role with any form of formal training and as a result, do not have the necessary experience, skills and competencies to effectively provide supervision for NQSWs (Cloete, 2012, Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021, Engelbrecht, 2019a). The implications of this are that the absence of significant supervision and sufficiently prepared supervisors could result in NQSWs having low levels of job satisfaction, experiencing burnout, and finding themselves struggling with the daily challenges of working in the profession (Cloete, 2012).

Cloete (2012), Engelbrecht and Ncube (2021) and Pretorius (2020) identified that supervisors place most emphasis on the administrative aspect of supervision and the least emphasis on the supportive function of supervision, which is critical for NQSWs to have during this transitional period (Walker, 2014). Supervisors are conscious of the necessity for NQSWs to receive more

support, however, they focus on administrative functions due to their role demands and time restrictions (Moorhead, Bell, Jones-Mutton, Boetto & Bailey, 2019). Contradictorily, Janse van Rensburg (2009) found that NQSWs were satisfied with the content and standard of their supervision sessions; however, when looking at the year of his study, may highlight how the challenges, administrative requirements and expectations of supervisors have increased over the past ten years, resulting in unmanageable workloads.

It is evident that the context of the social work profession both locally and globally is characterised by challenges, difficulties and demands that NQSWs need to be entirely prepared for. Social workers in South Africa are displeased and exhausted with their working conditions (Joseph, 2017), both in and out of the office. Professional identity development could be a key component in contributing towards mitigating the challenges of burnout, dropout, and immigration of social workers to other countries, and assist in the improved preparation of NQSWs entering this difficult and taxing profession. Professional identity is thus a concept that should be further explored due to the positive influence it can have on the retention of social workers in the country and in the profession.

2.3   ERIK ERIKSON'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Erik Erikson is a pioneer in both the fields of psychology and social work. His introduction of the expression 'identity-crisis' and theories related to the development and formation of identity have been both compelling and notable in these aforementioned fields (Benson & Bundick, 2020; Branje & Koper, 2018; Maree, 2021). Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development is of particular interest for the purpose of this study, due to the manner in which individuals who experience 'identity-crisis' is explored and its relation to the developmental theory of professional identity.

2.3.1   Theoretical underpinnings

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory proposed that as individuals evolve and develop physically, mentally and emotionally throughout their lifetimes, that they are likely to experience eight developmental anticipated and conflictual stages (Darling-Fisher, 2019; Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018; Sokol, 2009). Erikson (1968) suggested that at each of these stages, it was necessary for an individual to resolve the arising conflict, which would contribute towards individual growth, development and well-being (Branje & Koper, 2018; Darling-Fisher, 2019).

He described the stages as the following (Maree, 2021:5):

1. Basic trust versus mistrust
2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt
3. Initiative versus guilt
4. Industry versus inferiority
5. Identity versus role confusion
6. Intimacy versus isolation
7. Generativity versus stagnation
8. Ego integrity versus despair

This conceptual framework proposed that all individuals, upon reaching each one of these stages, will go through life experiencing and be confronted by intra- and interpersonal challenges (Erikson, 1980). These challenges could be either personal or career-focused, and if not settled, they could have adverse effects on individuals' ambitions, aspirations and goals, and consequently would affect that individual's satisfaction and fulfilment in both their personal and professional lives (Maree, 2021). This theory acknowledges the influence that social, cultural and environmental factors could have on each stage, as well as how they could facilitate the growth of and, either negatively or positively contribute towards an individual's development (Bishop, 2013; Dunkel & Harbke, 2017; Erikson, 1968). It is important to note that Erik Erikson did not provide insight into the estimated age groups that each stage could take place at during an individual's lifetime, and that other theorists have drawn conclusions and estimates as to what age groups each stage relates to the most. Nevertheless, one should be cautious of this, as these stages are spread across an individual's entire lifetime, and there is no limit as to when these conflicts could arise or be resolved during an individual's life (Branje & Koper, 2018; Syed & McLean, 2018).

2.3.2 Identity versus role confusion

The stage of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory that is particularly of interest for the purpose of this study is that of 'Identity versus role confusion'. Researchers have categorised this stage as adolescents growing into young adults, who need support and guidance in their identity development to help them secure 'a sense of self' and establish their place in society (Branje & Koper, 2018; Maree, 2021; Sokol, 2009; Syed & McLean, 2018; Waltereit, Uhlmann, Ehrlich, Roessner, 2020). Erik Erikson described identity as involving not only an individual, but also

the people with whom they engage with (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018). It is vital that an individual manages and addresses this developmental stage to facilitate identity development, otherwise 'role confusion' will occur, resulting in individuals' feeling lost and confused about their place and purpose in society (Sokol, 2009). Furthermore, it is important to understand that an individual's identity is never achieved or accomplished at a certain point in their lifetime, and rather involves a process of continually evolving and transforming (Bolin, Crews, Countryman-Roswurm & Grant, 2014; Brott & Myers, 1999; Erikson, 1968; Moorhead *et al.*, 2019; Syed & McLean, 2018). Existing studies have suggested that there are significant internal and external factors across an individual's pre-adult stages (generally categorised as stages 1-5) that together have a great influence on the development of an occupational identity upon developing into an adult (Chávez, 2016). Erikson (1968) believed that forming an identity was one of adolescents' most critical tasks to accomplish.

Associating with a career or profession is an obstacle that most individuals come face-to-face with when evolving and transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (Chávez, 2016; Erikson, 1968). Individuals who are unable to select a suitable profession, carry out an accomplished profession or develop a professional identity, will negatively impact their occupational-related transitions (Erikson, 1964; Maree, 2021). This transition and developmental process can be facilitated with the guidance and encouragement of mentor relationships, who are able to provide individuals with opportunities to experience success, through completing progressively more challenging tasks and responsibilities, and providing them with constructive feedback (Maree, 2021; Pittman & Foubert, 2016). Authors Hunt, Tregurtha, Kuruvila, Lowe and Smith (2016), Moorhead (2019), Shergill (2018), and Tham and Lynch (2019) have elucidated that the transitional period that NQSWs go through upon entering the work field can be a challenging time that requires support. It is thus necessary to draw attention to the process of an individual shifting their identity as a student towards identifying as an NQSW. This process should be guided and supported by social work supervisors as it comes with much more responsibility, professionalism and ownership than the prior.

2.4 DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The developmental theory of professional identity was derived from psychologist and psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson's, work. In the context of social work, this theory was developed in relation to supervision and the function thereof (Kaufman & Schwartz, 2004). It focuses on the developmental stages of a supervisee's professional identity and categorises this according

to a beginner, intermediate or advanced level (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Stoltenberg, Mcneil and Delworth (1998) proposed a developmental model for supervision that considered different components of a supervisee's motivation, autonomy and awareness based on these levels. The developmental stages considering these three aspects are described in the table below (Engelbrecht, 2019a:161):

Table 2.1.   Developmental stages of professional identity in supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019a:161)

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Motivation		
Motivation for supervision is mainly driven by high anxiety levels owing to the need to gain skills and experience.	Fluctuating motivation for supervision owing to practice realities, demands and complexity of work.	Stable motivation for supervision owing to established professional identity.
Autonomy		
Is dependent on supervision in order to fulfil work requirements.	Is ambivalent about the need for supervision and confidence to fulfil work requirements.	Is self-confident and self-directive in work requirements and know when to seek supervision.
Awareness		
Limited awareness of work-related strengths and challenges and may rely on external sources to provide opportunities for continuing education.	Identify work-related strengths and challenges, and opportunities for continuing education.	Aware of work-related strengths and challenges and take ownership of continuing education.

Upon reviewing this table, it is evident that there are significant differences in supervisees' motivation, autonomy and awareness based on whether they function on a beginner, intermediate or advanced level. As per descriptions in the table above, one can derive that NQSWs function on a beginner stage of professional identity as they are new in the field of social work and often feel stressed and anxious (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Moorhead, 2019). NQSWs are willing to learn, however, they are reliant on supervision to meet their needs of learning about the organisation that they are now working for and are continually seeking opportunities for furthering their skill development until they become more comfortable with their new professional identity as a social worker (Kaufman & Schwartz, 2004). Bolin *et al.* (2014) emphasise the importance of identifying what level of professional identity an NQSW is on in order to enable and facilitate further professional development. According to

Engelbrecht (2019a), specifically within a South African context, and as a result of neoliberalism – for example, increased caseloads and reduced costs – social workers are promoted to supervisors before they have reached an advanced level of professional identity. Consequently, supervisors are unable to meet the needs of NQSWs and assist them in developing their professional identity, as a result of not being ready in terms of motivation, autonomy and awareness to offer this kind of support and guidance. This negatively impacts the development of NQSWs' professional identities, resulting in NQSWs not functioning effectively within their new job roles. Thus, they feel ill-prepared and lost once starting their position within a social service organisation, which, as highlighted by neoliberal tendencies, already poses many challenges for social workers.

Another theory that looks at the development of professional identity is that of Friedman and Kaslow (1986). They developed a model that describes six stages in the supervisory process of developing the professional identity of training psychotherapists (whom they recognise consist of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers). These stages can be described as follows (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986:31-32):

1. Stage 1: Excitement and anticipatory anxiety
2. Stage 2: Dependency and identification
3. Stage 3: Activity and continued dependency
4. Stage 4: Exuberance and taking charge
5. Stage 5: Identity and independence
6. Stage 6: Calm and collegiality

Friedman and Kaslow (1968) stated that it is the role of the supervisor to effectively assess the professional identity of a supervisee and utilise this evaluation to guide and contribute to the process of supervisees' professional development based on their observed skills and competencies. The stages as stipulated by Friedman and Kaslow (1986) can be illustrated as follows:

Stage 1 is marked by supervisees' anxiousness and enthusiasm towards the opportunity to finally practise psychotherapy (or social work) in the 'real world', and as a result, supervisors should be empathic, understanding, and responsive towards these feelings of their supervisee during supervision discussions.

Stage 2 focuses on the lack of confidence and organisation-specific experience that the supervisee has when working with their first case, which results in the supervisee being dependent on the supervisor to guide and instruct them. During this stage, the supervisor's task is to assist the supervisee in anticipating and organising new experiences, and ensuring that cases assigned to the supervisee are appropriate for their level of experience.

Stage 3 emphasises the supervisee acknowledging that they are starting to be taken seriously within their professional capacity and move to a more active and independent role within their working environment. During this stage, the supervisor's responsibility is to enhance the supervisee's self-esteem through acknowledging the work that they do, by having supervision sessions focused on related theoretical work and by being affectively present when a supervisee experiences a work-related crisis.

Stage 4 is reached once a supervisee truly feels as if they are a respected therapist and leans towards a certain conceptual orientation, whilst supervision sessions are more service user-focused, and the supervisor begins to fulfil the role of a consultant. The ability of the supervisee to move from being dependent to being independent highlights the growth and development of their professional identity.

Stage 5 highlights the supervisee's desire to minimise most input from their supervisor in order to enhance and solidify their professional competence and identity. The supervisor's role is to allow the supervisee freedom in completing their daily work tasks and functions, however, still maintain authority in having the final say on the manner in which services are delivered to clients.

By Stage 6, the supervisee has a sense of composure and calmness, and they partake in more risk-taking behaviour due to increased confidence and a rooted professional identity. The supervisee is aware of what they seek from sessions with their supervisor and what their strengths are. Supervisees independently look for challenges or opportunities that will contribute towards their professional learning.

As explained by Friedman and Kaslow (1986), this process acknowledges the development of the professional identity of a novice therapist which can be directly related to that of an NQSW. It also provides insight into how – with the assistance of appropriate supervision and a receptive and aware supervisor – during the process of professional identity development, an NQSW can become a competent and independent practitioner ready to face challenges that may arise in the

work field, and show responsibility in their learning and growth as a social worker. Moreover, this acknowledges the significance of professional identity development in ensuring the readiness of NQSWs in practice to manage the challenges that come with the profession effectively.

2.5   PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF SOCIAL WORKERS

As noted thus far during this chapter, it is crucial to analyse professional identity when divulging into the readiness of NQSWs. The concept of professional identity is an under-researched topic in social work (Moorhead, 2019; Moorhead, Bell & Bowles, 2016; Pullen, Sansfaçon & Crête, 2016; Webb, 2015) as well as other professions such as teaching and health-related careers (Bridges, 2018; Izadinia, 2014). Although literature on the professional identity of social workers is growing, research that currently exists appears to focus more on the development of professional identities amongst social work students rather than that of NQSWs (Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003; Scott, 2018; Wong & Pearson, 2007).

Professional identity is a critical concept in the field of social work as existing research has identified that a decreased sense of professional identity can lead to low job satisfaction (Jiang, Wang, Chui & Xu, 2019; Pittman & Foubert, 2016) and that low job satisfaction can result in social workers leaving the profession (Hussein *et al.*, 2014; Kheswa, 2019; Malka, Kaspi-Baruch & Segev, 2020), which with growing socio-economic challenges, more so in the context of COVID-19 (and the long-lasting effects of the pandemic) are less than desirable. Asquith, Clark and Waterhouse (2005) concur with this through recognising that a lack of professional identity amongst social workers, even more so when facing challenges that arise from the profession, can negatively impact the retention and employment of social workers, their comprehension of the field's ethics and values and can result in decreased enthusiasm or meaning that they may find from working in the field. A strong sense of professional identity can also have a positive impact, as asserted by Holter (2018), who found that social work students who graduate with a strong sense of professional identity have the ability to practice effectively and efficiently by offering services to various individuals, groups and communities who are struggling with social issues, in attainment of the social work mission of promoting and working towards social justice for all people. Beddoe, Davys and Adamson (2013) also identified a positive relationship between professional identity and resilience in social workers. These reasons explain the necessity in exploring the development of professional identity amongst NQSWs and why it is important that the process of identity development is facilitated

to ensure effective service delivery to all service users. Although professional identity is not the primary focus of this study, it is a core component, foundation, point of departure and undergirding in determining the success of NQSWs' readiness for practice.

Despite the brief definition that has been provided for professional identity in chapter one, upon studying various authors' work, it has been noted that there is a lack of consensus or clear general understanding over what professional identity truly means (Duan, Li & Kong, 2021; Fitzgerald, 2020; Mackay & Zufferey, 2015; Wong & Pearson, 2007). Brott and Myers (1999) elucidate that professional identity development is a continual process that: initially commences whilst a student is studying to become a social worker; continues to progress as an NQSW starts their career; and perpetually evolves as a social worker associates more with their occupation over time. Various definitions have been brought about which address personal, professional and environmental components of professional identity by several authors such as:

> [Professional identity consists of] *"... actions and behaviours, knowledge and skills, values, beliefs and ethics, context and socialization, and group and personal identity."* (Fitzgerald, 2020:470).

> *"Having a professional identity requires being a member of an established profession"* (Pittman & Foubert, 2016:14).

> *"Professional identity not only has symbolic value to social workers, but also has value in practice: it informs action and at the same time is reinforced or transformed by the practices themselves."* (Lévesque, Negura, Gaucher & Molgat, 2019:3).

According to Gibson, Dollarhide and Moss (2010), professional identity has been recently defined around three components, including: characterising and classifying oneself as professional; assimilating one's skills, expertise and conduct as a professional; and awareness of one's connection to a professional community.

It is evident that the concept of professional identity is multifaceted and consists of many components (Pullen *et al.*, 2016; Shergill, 2018, Wiles, 2017). Harrison and Healy (2016) recognise this by stating that professional identity is influenced by the interconnectedness of several components, including personal, organisational, educational, relational, political and economic entities. Studies show that professional identity is not a topic that is extensively divulged within national and global social work curricula (Canavan, 2009; Hassler, 2021; Moorhead *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, other professions, the public, social work students and

social workers, struggle to comprehend and describe what precisely it is that social workers do (Freund, Cohen, Blit-Cohen & Dehan, 2017; Lévesque *et al.*, 2019). There is also an absence of a clearly defined concept of professional identity within the programmes and courses offered by HEIs (Moorhead *et al.*, 2019). This assists in conceding why NQSWs struggle with the development of their professional identities - as they and their supervisors do not know what exactly it entails, nor how it should be addressed and facilitated.

The necessity for understanding the role and function of social workers is vital in the development of professional identity (Bolin *et al.*, 2014) and the inability to define this has negatively affected this development (Holter, 2018), as social workers cannot identify who they are nor their place in their field, organisation, and society. There are several reasons for the existence of this issue. The first reason is that amongst different entities, including fellow social workers, employers, academics, professionals, the public and politicians, there are various perceptions over the nature and the function of social workers across different practice settings (Scholar, McLaughlin, McCaughan & Coleman, 2014; Skhosana, 2020). The roles of social workers have changed and adapted throughout time to respond to the changing needs of individuals, groups and communities (Bolin *et al.*, 2014). Misconceptions have been made by stakeholders due to negative connotations and associations that are associated with the job-title 'social worker' (Joseph, 2017), such as "child snatchers" or "saviours and punishers" (Lévesque *et al.*, 2019:12-11) as well as negative press attention that social workers have received – such as the death of Baby P in the United Kingdom (UK) during 2007 (Warner, 2014). Wong and Pearson (2007) found that social work students in China would not always introduce themselves to service users as 'social workers' due to their misconception or lack of understanding that the public had on their professional role. This view was further confirmed by Gibson *et al.* (2010), in which their research participants identified that the public has a negative outlook on counselling – which is often a service offered by social workers – due to being uneducated regarding what it is that counsellors do, as well as a result of 'counselling' being a forbidden topic that society does not openly talk about.

The possible misunderstandings or views that people have of social workers are also due to the vast array of social work services offered by different social service organisations, as there is a lack of a collective view of what constitutes the social work profession (Howard *et al.*, 2015). Gilbert (1977) also associated the inability to understand social workers' roles as a result of employing theories from other occupational fields and generalising them to fit the social work

profession, and as a result of the heterogeneousness of the profession. Social workers working in multidisciplinary settings have identified the negative impact this has had on their professional identity, caused by having to establish their professional identity within hierarchical structures (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016; Beddoe, 2011). They have also expressed that their identity is not taken seriously by other professionals due to the existing misconceptions over their role within the organisation (Moran, Jacobs, Bunn & Bifulco, 2007; Wiles, 2013). Scholar *et al.* (2014) corroborate with this, however, they also acknowledge that it is the responsibility of social workers in the profession to clearly define, advocate and promote the interpretation and perception of social work's identity.

Another factor influencing the lack of professional identity of NQSWs and the lack of clear conception, is the generalisation of social workers' job titles and descriptions. For example, youth worker, community worker or child welfare worker, which focuses on a category (or specialisation) in social work as opposed to describing social workers' skilled role or professional capacity, which consequently results in NQSWs having a very narrow mindset about their role and professional identity (Harrison & Healy, 2016; Wiles, 2013). These various factors have resulted in the confusion in, and at times, the stigma associated with the roles of social workers in society, ultimately negatively influencing social workers in confidently recognising and associating with their profession and seeking out opportunities to develop their professional identity.

Professional councils such as the SACSSP (South African Council for Social Service Professions) and international professional associations such as the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) and IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work), and existing policy documents such as the SACSSP *Code of Ethics* (SACSSP, 2008) for social workers, offer guidelines which clarify core values and describe appropriate professional behaviour and ethical conduct that should be carried out by social workers. However, if an organisation's value system and practices do not align with those as stipulated by councils, professional associations and legislation, this could result in little to no importance being placed on developing NQSWs professional identities (Harrison & Healy, 2016). Lévesque *et al.* (2019) elaborate on this further in identifying that professional identity is inhibited from developing in institutional settings, such as health care settings, due to the limitations imposed by those institutions, which restrict the implementation of core social work values into practice. This is concerning as the confusion caused by this dissonance could result

in NQSWs being uncertain and unconfident in the manner in which they should deliver services, and negatively impact the quality of service delivery. Considering all this existing confusion and misinterpretation over social workers' roles and their professional identity, it is possible to recognise how NQSWs would struggle with the development of their professional identity upon entering the field, which in turn, impacts their feelings of readiness, competence, and confidence in effective and efficient service delivery, on top of working in a challenging environment.

The transition to becoming a social worker is both difficult and confronting (Moorhead, 2019). During NQSWs first year of working in the profession, they are not only confronted with the need to develop their identity, but are required to do so whilst progressing through a period of transition, adaption, and development (Erikson, 1968; Moorhead *et al.*, 2016; Walker, 2014). Authors Bolin *et al.* (2014) utilised Mead's (1962) theory of self-development to describe this period as the preparatory stage in which NQSWs have an inadequate established sense of self and look to others – such as more experienced social workers, fellow colleagues and supervisors – to mimic and learn appropriate behaviours and practices in the profession. The identification of this by Bolin *et al.* (2014) recognises the importance many authors have placed on supervisors offering meaningful supervision or mentors offering constructive feedback in order to assist in the development of professional identity (Cruess, Cruess & Steinert, 2019; Holter, 2018; Levy, Shlomo & Itzhaky, 2014; Moorhead, 2019; Moorhead *et al.*, 2016; Pullen *et al.*, 2016; Roulston, Cleak & Vreugdenhil, 2018). Moorhead *et al.* (2019) found that professional identity is a topic and area that goes unnoticed if not brought up during discussions within supervision sessions. Pullen *et al.* (2016) coincide with this by acknowledging that professional identity is established via a feedback process. The limitation of existing research is that it often focuses on the development of student social workers' professional identity, rather than those of NQSWs who have only recently entered the field. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that the professional identity of an NQSW continues to develop after they have graduated from an HEI (Pullen *et al.*, 2016), once they have entered the profession, and does so throughout the entirety of their career.

2.5.1 Theoretical frameworks for supervision and professional identity

As illustrated from what has been reviewed thus far in both theoretical frameworks and existing literature, there is a significant emphasis brought forward on the relationship between the development of professional identity and the supervision of NQSWs. Levy *et al.* (2014)

examined the process of inputs, throughputs, and outputs contributing towards the professional identity of social work students. Findings of this study showed that satisfaction with supervision as an input, and empathetic concern and personal values as throughputs, are positively associated with the output of enhancing professional identity (Levy *et al.*, 2014). They go on to clarify that satisfaction with supervision entails the amount a supervisee is satisfied with their supervisor's competence, abilities, insight and comprehension, and highlight the importance of supervisors having the capability to respond to their supervisee's needs (Levy *et al.*, 2014). Levy *et al.* (2014) recommended that supervisors also focus on developing students' empathetic ability and personal values – as throughputs - to assist in professional identity development. This research emphasises what was stipulated by Engelbrecht (2019a), which is the importance of not promoting social workers to supervisors before they are at an advanced level in their own professional identity development or are ready to fulfil the functions of a supervisor, which includes actively assisting NQSWs in developing their professional identity.

Gibson *et al.* (2010) briefly describe a feedback process followed by an intrapersonal process that occurs within social workers and allows for the formation of a professional identity by utilising the work underpinned by Auxier *et al*. (2003) and Brott and Myers (1999). During the first stage of this process, social work students rely on supervisors, lecturers and departmental staff members as resources for both conceptual and experiential learning, as well as to receive feedback and be assessed accordingly during their degree programmes (Auxier *et al*., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson *et al.*, 2010). During the second stage, NQSWs interact with authoritative individuals, such as supervisors and managers, to reflect and discuss their professional progress and skill acquisition in practice (Auxier *et al*., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson *et al.*, 2010). Throughout this period, NQSWs internalise the feedback they receive and begin the process of utilising a self-reflective evaluation on themselves, based on the evaluation they have received. In the final stage, which can occur whilst a social worker is still an NQSW, or after they are no longer classified as 'newly qualified', they are able to self-reflect, assess and evaluate themselves and merge what they have learnt during their graduate programme with their experiences, to contribute towards the growth of their professional identity (Auxier *et al*., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson *et al.*, 2010). These authors encapsulate the crucial role of supervision by identifying that professional identity is strengthened through the process of conducting useful assessments and marked by an NQSW moving from being dependent on external evaluation to internal and reflective evaluation.

2.5.1.1 *Professional identity and supervision*

Supervision has both a beneficial and vital role in assisting with the development of professional identity amongst social workers (Hafford-Letchfield & Engelbrecht, 2018) at all stages of their development – being a student, an NQSW and throughout their professional career. Supervision has shown that it creates an environment that allows NQSWs to demonstrate reflection, awareness and understanding, which are all necessary for the formation of professional identity (Nunev, 2014). It also provides social workers with an opportunity to identify with the values of the profession, which positively contributes towards the development of professional identity (Nunev, 2014). Similarly, Kaufman and Schwartz (2004) highlight the significance of the activity of mentoring by supervisors, which in turn can facilitate professional identity formation and contribute positively towards satisfaction and fulfilment in an NQSW's career and identity. NQSWs who are content and satisfied with the supervision sessions they attend by meeting with their supervisor, are provided with the opportunity to enhance and escalate their skills and competencies (Levy *et al.*, 2014). Moorhead *et al.* (2019) concur with this in finding that the influence of NQSWs experiencing purposeful relationships with their supervisors, enhances and contributes positively towards the growth and advancement of their professional identities. Nonetheless, despite literature recognising the benefits of supervision contributing to professional identity development, studies have found that this is not always the reality in practice (Moorhead *et al.*, 2016; Moorhead *et al.*, 2019; Pullen e*t al.*, 2016).

Moorhead *et al.* (2016) assert that supervision does not take place frequently enough, and consequently, does not provide NQSWs with the chance to reflect upon, nor grow, their professional identity. As identified earlier, another mitigating factor is that of neoliberalism which has had a challenging effect on social work due to resulting in increased caseloads and performance measures, and asserting reduced costs (Pullen *et al.*, 2016). With the difficulty in obtaining resources and the increased demands on social workers, it is taxing for supervisors to constantly provide NQSWs with the support and guidance that they need in order to critically reflect on their professional identity (Moorhead *et al.*, 2019), as they do not have the time or availability for it. Pullen *et al.* (2016) suggest the development of a 'mentorship programme' for NQSWs, which could assist supervisors in sharing supervisory tasks with a fellow colleague who acts as a mentor to an NQSW, and thus allows for more supervision sessions to take place, to focus on the development of professional identity.

In Moorhead's (2019:6) research, an NQSW referred to themself as a "baby social worker" – which they were able to elaborate on by explaining that this term creates the image that NQSWs require nurturing support and guidance whilst they are 'finding their feet' in an environment that is new and foreign to them. Findings of this study displayed that NQSWS need ongoing support as a component of supervision relationships during this transitional period as this will allow for reflection and discussions regarding professional identity (Moorhead, 2019). Bruno and Dell'Aversana's (2018) findings coincide with this as they found that the practice of reflecting on one's own professional identity will not only assist social workers in dealing with elaborate job-related challenges, but also assist social work graduates in ensuring a smoother transition upon graduating from university and entering the field of practice. They further recognise that social work is an extremely stressful and straining profession, which requires social workers to reflect on their daily experiences to manage the stress that arises from working in the field (Bruno & Dell'Aversana, 2018), which can be done during supervision sessions. Roulston *et al.* (2018) reiterate this by emphasising that when student social workers receive helpful feedback and critique, that this is positively related to evolving their professional identity and competence in the social work profession.

It is evident that supervision is a key component of professional identity development once NQSWs have started their first job. However, professional identity should not be a new term for NQSWs entering their first job. Rather, it should be a continuation of what has been addressed regarding professional identity whilst they were still students, in their social work curriculum and practice placements.

2.5.2   Professional identity in HEIs and the Bachelor of Social Work curriculum

The Council for Higher Education Qualification Standard for Social Work – which was reviewed and presented to both the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) and the SACSSP – believes that upon graduating from university, social workers should personify and exemplify an established social work professional identity (Council on Higher Education, 2015). Bruno and Dell'Aversana (2018) findings also indicated that it was believed that curricula should automatically influence the expansion of students' professional identities, without the need to truly explore and understand it. Despite HEIs expecting professional identity to automatically emerge through completion of the social work degree programme, this is hugely contested by the current absence of knowledge and insight as to what a social work professional identity is. Additionally, in the SACSSP *Code of Ethics*, a

code that prescribes the ethical and professional manner in which a social worker should conduct services in, the term 'professional identity' is not discussed nor mentioned once (SACSSP, 2008). This draws attention to the lack of emphasis that is placed on this topic in the field of social work in South Africa, once a student has graduated, obtained their social work degree and registered with the SACSSP, as well as the lack of knowledge or insight that is obtained regarding this topic whilst students are still obtaining their degree.

Within the Council on Higher Education (2015:9-12) Qualification Standard for Bachelor of Social Work in South Africa, it is stipulated that there are nine core components that contribute to the development of the social work professional identity and that need to be addressed during the completion of a Bachelor of Social Work degree in South Africa, namely:

1. The development and consolidation of a professional identity as a social worker
2. Application of core values and principles of social work
3. Holistic assessment and intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities
4. Demonstrated competence in the use of codes of ethics vis-à-vis the moral impulse
5. Working with a range of diversities
6. Ability to undertake research
7. Knowledge, practice skills and theories
8. Policy and legislation
9. Writing and communication of professional knowledge

Within these components, more descriptive standards are described as to what should be explored and understood by a social work graduate upon completion of the Bachelor of Social Work degree from a South African HEI. However, there is a lack of a clear conception or definition of what a professional identity is, alluding towards HEIs assuming that all learning outcomes achieved during the degree programme will automatically contribute to the development of a professional identity, without the need to divulge into the concept extensively. Although a social work qualification obtained at a university aids somewhat in the development of professional identity, Moorhead *et al.* (2019) assert that there is a lack of a clear definition of professional identity within curricula. Mackay and Zufferey (2015) concur with this in elaborating that educators and lecturers teaching social work modules at HEIs clarify and explain professional identity in conflicting and opposing ways. As shown by current literature analysis, the lack of further exploration into this concept is concerning owing to what a lack of

professional identity of NQSWs can result in. NQSWs are expected to be 'finished products' upon graduating who instantly have the ability to work effectively with little available resources and a lack of consistent support (Moorhead *et al.*, 2016). Bruno & Dell'Aversana (2018) elaborate that it is essential for social work students to already begin reflecting on their professional identity, as it will allow them to be more prepared for the change when moving from being a student to an NQSW. The concept of professional identity should be a topic that is extensively divulged into within social work curricula, as this will enable NQSWs to be active participants in advocating and seeking guidance in their new roles to develop their professional identities, because of their awareness of the importance thereof. Wiles (2013) and Scholar *et al.* (2014) emphasise that degree programmes play a vital role in contributing positively towards the development of professional identity. Although Pullen *et al.* (2016:777) agree with this, they state that other factors also play a critical role in this development, including "... initial training, recognition, support and personal identity". Jiang *et al.* (2019) recognise the impact professional identity can have on social workers leaving the profession for good and, therefore, state that the strength of a professional identity suggests the effectiveness of social work degree programmes in fully preparing NQSWs for the realities of the profession, that can sometimes be marked by challenging working environments and complex issues. The evolution of professional identity should be a core component that is included and addressed in all professional training programmes (Cruess *et al*., 2019).

With many researchers conceding the need to critically address social workers' professional identity during tertiary education, it is evident that a change or revision of social work curricula needs to take place. Scholar *et al.* (2014) acknowledge the role degree programmes have in advancing professional identity amongst student social workers, however, cautions that more input is needed from HEIs regarding the preparation of social workers, and if not, that this could lead to adverse results for the development of professional identity amongst NQSWs. Furthermore, Alpaslan (2019), within a South African context, concurs with this in identifying that social work theory and practice are two interconnected entities and, therefore, collaboration between both HEIs and social workers (supervisors and employers) in the field is required to inform the establishment of social work curriculum and content. Moorhead (2019) and Cleak (2019) coincide with this view by elucidating that ensuring an integrated approach to curriculum development is necessary in contributing towards the effective development of a professional identity. This highlights the positive impact on professional identity development

that including educators and social work practitioners could have if they are included and their views are considered, in advancing the social work curriculum in South Africa.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Professional identity is a concept that has been debated and analysed for many decades, which has resulted in many theories, models and processes arising in attempts to describe how professional identity can develop most effectively in the social work profession. As highlighted throughout this chapter, the development of professional identity is a critical contributing factor towards job satisfaction and on the intention of NQSWs to stay in the difficult profession both locally and globally. An established professional identity also contributes to enhancing readiness and the confidence of NQSWs to be able to effectively deliver services to all service users and deal with job-related challenges. The advantages of focusing on NQSWs' professional identity development is exacerbated even further with regular evaluative and supportive supervision sessions, However, as a result of global neoliberal discourses, there is often difficulty in ensuring that these necessary supervision sessions occur regularly or meet the needs of NQSWs. Although progressing professional identity is an aim of HEIs as per instruction of qualification standards, the generalised approach is resulting in uncertainty amongst NQSWs over who they are, what they do and where they fit in within organisations, communities, and society at large. Professional identity is a concept that needs to be conceptualised and defined more explicitly in order for NQSWs to be able to successfully identify with their profession and adapt and adjust to the field of social work. This will enable NQSWs to effectively manage the challenges and complexities that will arise in practice, upon graduating from their relative degree programmes.

Therefore, professional identity may be regarded as the theoretical foundation and point of departure to analyse the readiness of NQSWs for practice, which will be covered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE READINESS OF NQSWS FOR PRACTICE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The second objective of this research is to analyse contemporary international and South African research on the readiness (both covert and overt) of NQSWs for practice. The readiness of NQSWs is not an unfamiliar topic and has been debated globally with opposing views on how well NQSWs are prepared or ready to enter practice (Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2017; Hunt *et al.*, 2016), however literature within a South African context appears to be lacking, thus illustrating the need to review global literature. The following chapter will review local and global literature and refer to both local and global contexts of the readiness of NQSWs. This will be done as NQSWs can be recognised as a homogenous group of social workers, as identified from international research (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). After attending a social work programme presented by an HEI, there is the expectation that students will graduate as NQSWs both prepared and ready for practice (Moorhead *et al.*, 2016). However, with different ideas surrounding what constitutes a 'ready' NQSW, and how well NQSWs are prepared to undertake specific roles and tasks in the profession, this proves challenging. This underpins the need to review literature in order to see the similarities and differences in current perceptions over what a ready-for-practice NQSW should look like. This chapter will divulge into: the concept of readiness; covert and overt competencies of NQSWs; the role of the social work curriculum in contributing towards readiness; and the views of various systems, both locally and globally, on the readiness of NQSWs. It is essential to recognise that multiple systems should be involved in ensuring the readiness of NQSWs as well as the continuation of their learning and development once entering the profession, including NQSWs, HEIs and educators, employers, supervisors and social workers in the field (Clapton, 2013; Howard *et al.*, 2015). The researcher will thus substantiate, with existing literature, competencies that different entities find desirable in contributing to NQSWs being ready for practice, and how different systems can contribute to the development or enhancement of these competencies.

3.2 THE CONCEPT OF 'READINESS'

It appears that the issue of employers being discontent with the readiness of graduates is a global phenomenon that has been noted in various fields (Winterton & Turner, 2019). Readiness as a

concept needs to be reviewed and analysed due to the various meanings and perceptions that individuals have as to what makes a graduate 'ready' to enter their profession. 'Readiness' and 'preparedness' are two terms that have been used interchangeably (Grant *et al.*, 2014). However, McSweeney and Williams (2019) distinguish the two by defining readiness as graduates' opinions on whether they feel that they have the necessary capabilities to practise in their defined role, and preparedness as their perspectives on how well their educational training contributed towards enhancing their readiness. Thus, there are currently several comprehensions of the concept 'readiness for practice', however, due to the lack of a specific definition, the phrase remains mostly unclear and understood in various ways (Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2017; Nathaniel, 2018; Wolff, Pesut & Regan, 2010). For the purpose of this research, the term 'readiness' will be used.

The incongruence as to what a ready NQSW looks like, has led to different expectations of NQSWs, and inconsistencies in the NQSWs that are produced from social work programmes, compared to the NQSWs that employers' and supervisors seek in the field. Winterton and Turner (2019) highlight this in acknowledging that there are differences in perspectives between the education field and work field as to what 'readiness' consists of. They also point out that the term 'employability' can be used to measure work readiness (Winterton & Turner, 2019), thus making it critical to consider supervisors' views on what makes a graduate more employable when reviewing readiness (Alpaslan, 2019). Furthermore, government entities tend to place more pressure on HEIs to develop practice-ready social workers, by showing favouritism towards the views of employers on what skills are necessary for NQSWs to be deemed as 'ready' (Winterton & Turner, 2019). Nevertheless, the tactic behind this might be to shift the focus on the faults of HEIs rather than have systemic issues of unemployed graduates entering the volatile economy brought to light (Winterton & Turner, 2019).

It is vital to look at the linguistic component of the term 'readiness', which Nathaniel (2018) elucidates through describing the concept of circular reasoning. Circular reasoning can be explained as the process through which individuals categorise characteristics and traits through observing specific ways in which individuals conduct themselves (Nathaniel, 2018). They provide the example in which a ready NQSW is evaluated in terms of their competencies, explaining that an individual who possesses specific capabilities is seen as 'ready for practice' because someone who is deemed ready should possess those specific capabilities (Nathaniel, 2018). The latter author describes that the way the term 'readiness' is understood or what

'readiness' should be characterised by, is subjective, and thus through the process of circular reasoning is formed.

Individuals need to be realistic in acknowledging that it is impossible to develop a blueprint of what 'ready' looks like (Nathaniel, 2018). This notion allows us to understand the goal of HEIs in developing generic curricula to allow a wide range of skills that can be applied in different contexts in the broad spectrum of social work (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Matsouka & Mihail, 2016; Tham & Lynch, 2019). For this reason, NQSWs who are ready for practice need to be flexible in meeting 'readiness' requirements for different settings. The different interpretations of what 'ready' may look like can be confusing, however, for the purpose of this study, competencies will be identified, in which an NQSW who displays specific competencies can be deemed as an NQSW being ready to practice in the profession (Austin, 2019; Howard *et al.*, 2015; Nathaniel, 2018).

3.3   SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES

The term 'competence' is multi-faceted and has been used and defined in many different ways (Austin, 2019; Gamble, 2011; Glaesser, 2019; Iovu & Lazăr, 2021). Even with the existence of several definitions and the different approaches (within American and British contexts) used to explain the concept, the context in which it is used will guide which definition is most appropriate (Garavan & McGuire, 2001; Hoffmann, 1999). A few of the definitions that are the most applicable to this research are those of:

> *"... one who demonstrates competence in a role can work at that job at an acceptable level equivalent to peers."* (Austin, 2019:2).

> "[Competency refers to] *... the underlying attributes of individuals that would be required in order to demonstrate competent behaviour. Knowledge, skill, attitude or other personal attributes have been referred to in this way of defining the term."* (Hoffmann, 1999:284).

> This is further explained by Cardy and Selvarajan (2006:236), who state that competencies can be described as individuals' capabilities and that *"... a job may require the performance of a particular task which, to do well, requires specific employee knowledge, skills, or abilities."*

Within a South African context, Parker (2017: 64) postulates that "… Competence can thus be understood as a combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills that are critical to the … job and

affect a major part of the job". This definition encapsulates the thrust of the expounded definitions of Austin (2019), Hoffmann (1999) and Cardy and Selvarajan (2006) and will be used as a conceptualisation for this research.

Hence, by looking at these definitions, it will be concluded by describing competencies, within the context of an NQSW, as capabilities, abilities, attitudes, attributes, skills and knowledge that an NQSW should possess to work in the social work profession (compare Applewhite, Kao & Pritzker, 2018; Boyatsiz, 2008; Gamble, 2011). There is a consensus that for NQSWs to be considered as competent, they need to have the necessary skill set that is required to manage and work with both emotions and interpersonal relationships effectively and professionally, due to the complex challenges presented in the profession (Sheppard & Charles, 2017). However, it has also been noted that there are various perceptions between employers and educators as to what specific competencies graduates should have acquired by the time they enter their relative profession, which can result in disagreement (Hodges, Martimianakis, McNaughton & Whitehead, 2014; Winterton & Turner, 2019). HEIs need to ensure that the competencies that they are addressing and teaching throughout social work programmes are in accordance with the competencies required by NQSWs, employers and supervisors in the field (Gamble, 2011; Matsouka & Mihail, 2016).

As briefly discussed in chapter one, competencies can either be covert or overt, also known as foundational or functional, respectively (Parker, 2017). Competencies can also consist of a combination of both soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills are those skills that make an individual more employable, such as attributes and good interpersonal skills, whereas hard skills are more technical abilities that can be taught, such as report writing and specialised social work-related knowledge (Matsouka & Mihail, 2016; Stewart, Wall & Marciniec, 2016). For an NQSW to be deemed 'ready' it is essential for them to possess both covert and overt competencies. Thus, both overt and covert knowledge, skills, attitudes, and attributes that employers find desirable and expect NQSWs to have upon entering the social work profession to be able to perform in their position or role competently most effectively, will be reviewed. The discussion that will follow is by no means exhaustive, and merely serves as generic examples of covert and overt competencies, as a detailed discussion about competencies needed in social work, and in specific contexts, is not possible within the ambit of this study.

3.3.1 Covert Competencies

There is little existing literature on the competencies of social workers, even less so for that of NQSWs. Covert competencies can be defined as intrinsic competencies that are not as visible and are difficult to measure, however, they can be described as inherent capabilities that an individual may have, for example, cultural humility, emotional intelligence (EI), decision-making, critical thinking, understanding legislation, social work knowledge, skills and values, and self-reflection (Parker, 2017).

3.3.1.1 *Cultural humility*

Cultural humility and cultural competence share similarities, however, as of recent, there has been more support in shifting to the use of cultural humility in place of cultural competence (Jani, Osteen & Shipe, 2016). Cultural competence proposes that an individual's learning and understanding is limited, displaces any experiences other individuals might have had, and suggests that cultural competence can be fully achieved, whereas cultural humility encourages individuals to continually learn throughout their lifetime and emphasises becoming more self-aware (Melendres, 2020; NASW, 2015a). Cultural humility is essential in building a trusting relationship with both service users and colleagues. According to the standards stipulated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) within a North American context, a social worker should possess and consistently grow their cross-cultural knowledge and:

> *"Social workers shall possess and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding that is inclusive of, but not limited to, the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions such as race and ethnicity; immigration and refugee status; tribal groups; religion and spirituality; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; social class; and mental or physical abilities of various cultural groups."* (National Association of Social Workers, 2015a:4).

Although it is unrealistic to expect NQSWs to have an expansive knowledge of all existing cultures (Melendres, 2020) and cultural competence can never truly be achieved due to the ever-changing nature of culture (Jani *et al.* 2016), the NASW stipulates that cultural competence can be pursued by:

> *"Cultural competence requires social workers to examine their own cultural backgrounds and identities while seeking out the necessary knowledge, skills, and values*

that can enhance the delivery of services to people with varying cultural experiences associated with their race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability" (NASW, 2015b:65).

This is applicable within a South African context, as South Africa is a country that is rich in multiple cultures. With the existence of many diverse cultures, it is crucial for NQSWs to be proficient in anti-discriminatory practice and in practising cultural humility, as it is a given that they will be working with service users and colleagues who are diverse in race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, social class and culture. Although this is not a measurable attribute, it is desirable by supervisors and employers for NQSWs to be aware of cultural differences and how this impacts their practice, and be able to display their awareness of this. Unfortunately, learning cultural humility or competence is not always the reality in social work education or practice, as indicated by social work educators and students from Ballantyne *et al.*'s *(*2019) research in New Zealand, who emphasised the importance of the growing diversity within Aotearoa, requiring students to be taught about cross-cultural practice and cultural humility, however, that this was not being fully addressed within their social work curriculum.

3.3.1.2   *Emotional Intelligence*

Emotional intelligence has been described as an individuals' cognitive capacity and skill to discern, recognise and understand their own emotions as well as other groups and individuals' (Kong, Zhao & You, 2012; Serrat, 2017). Social work is a profession that deals with many challenges and complexities, such as trauma and abuse, often characterised by heightened emotions that are shared and discussed within professional relationships with service users (Shergill, 2018; Stanley, Mettilda & Meenakshi, 2020; Stanley & Mettilda, 2020). Essential components of EI that have been identified are that of empathy and reflective thinking. Empathy can be defined as:

> *"... [a] cognitive and emotional understanding of another's experience, resulting in an emotional response that is congruent with a view that others are worthy of compassion and respect and have intrinsic worth."* (Barnett & Mann, 2013:23).

It is the ability of an NQSW to place themselves in someone else's world and perceive how they experience and understand life events and emotions. Empathy is both valuable to service users and NQSWs as it assists in the development of the professional relationship as well as contributes positively towards delivering client-centred services (Stanley *et al.*, 2020).

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Reflective thinking allows NQSWs to gain insight and awareness into their cognitive appraisals (Yilmaz & Keser, 2016) by examining, analysing and considering what should or could be done either before or after the completion of a task (Ghanizadeh, 2017). Reflective practice is an activity that enables NQSWs to reflect and critically look back on their experiences, decision-making, reasoning, attitudes and values that directly affect their service delivery (Jude & Regan, 2010). Reflective thinking is highly beneficial to NQSWs as it not only will assist them in dealing with challenging cases and the complex demands in the profession (Bruno & Dell'Aversano, 2018; Wilson, 2013b), but also positively contributes to effective decision-making (Wilson, 2013b). Social workers in the profession have expressed that the ability to display and practice reflexivity is essential in contributing towards the readiness of NQSWs (Howard *et al.*, 2015). Shergill (2018) and Grant, Kinman and Alexander (2014) motivate the need for HEIs to ensure that their social work curriculum encapsulates an emotional curriculum, that assists students in the building of the competencies that are the foundation for emotional intelligence and emotional resilience. This will positively contribute to NQSWs personal well-being, and strengthen their direct practice with service users (Shergill, 2018). Both HEIs and supervisors can contribute to the development of empathy and reflective thinking by promoting the importance thereof to ensure continuous growth and development amongst students, NQSWs and social workers throughout their careers.

3.3.1.3 *Social work knowledge, skills and values*

Competence is often displayed by the skills, knowledge and values that NQSWs accumulate throughout their social work programme (Kirwan & Mc Guckin, 2014). Social work is a specialised field with an extensive amount of knowledge, skills and values. Social work knowledge includes all theoretical components addressed during the social work courses, such as, legislation, policies, guidelines to service delivery with different service users, theories, models and perspectives. Social work skills account for the skills necessary for professional, effective service delivery and necessary task completion, including communication (verbal and non-verbal), active listening, decision-making, coordination, time management, organisational skills and critical thinking. In the field of social work, especially when it comes to child protection services, there is no fail-proof method that will always ensure a perfect outcome, which is precisely why critical thinking, as a skill, is crucial to ensuring that all decisions are reached in a careful and well-thought-out manner (Samsonsen & Turney, 2017). Employers

have recognised that the knowledge of specific skills or approaches makes NQSWs more employable (Alpaslan, 2019).

There are global professional social work principles, also known as values, that should always be promoted and used to guide all service delivery in social work practice. These are as follows:

1. Recognition of the Inherent Dignity of Humanity
2. Promoting Human Rights
3. Promoting Social Justice
4. Promoting the Right to Self-Determination
5. Promoting the Right to Participation
6. Respect for Confidentiality and Privacy
7. Treating People as Whole Persons
8. Ethical Use of Technology and Social Media
9. Professional Integrity

(IFSW, 2018)

These competencies cannot be visibly observed, however, they should be utilised to guide all of NQSWs interactions, practice and reasoning, which supervisors will easily be able to recognise within supervision sessions, upon discussing and reflecting with NQSWs about their thought processes, interactions and service user experiences.

3.3.2 Overt Competencies

Overt competencies are more observable and technical capabilities such as report writing, managing difficult service users, conducting assessments, working directly with service users, and working cohesively within a team with fellow colleagues and employees. Many of these competencies are guided by covert competencies and are rather the result of implementing inherent attributes, for example, using empathy to guide interactions with service users, thus recognising both covert and overt competencies interrelatedness (Iovu & Lazăr, 2021).

3.3.2.1 Writing skills

Writing is a significant component of the social work profession as every interaction, discussion, assessment and decision is recorded to ensure that there is a record of all necessary details and decisions, in order to protect both NQSWs and service users. Writing skills are needed to write case notes and case records, grant applications, care plans, reports and

assessments (Cronley & Kilgore, 2016; Taylor, 2008). These skills are usually developed throughout the degree or social work programme by students writing reports, essays, reflective pieces and portfolios to be evaluated, assessed and marked by educators (Taylor, 2008; Thomas, Schuster & Fuller, 2016). Rai and Lillis (2013) found that social work students had not been specifically taught professional writing, however, learnt some skills through written and reflective assignments and found value in this. Although report writing might seem simple, specific skills are required for this, including using correct spelling and grammar, writing coherently, correctly structuring sentences, and using appropriate tenses and field-related terminology (Welch *et al.*, 2014). Upon reviewing literature, it has been noted that the writing skills of social workers and social work students are declining (Alpaslan, 2019; Alter & Adkins, 2001; Bates, Immins, Parker, Keen, Rutter, Brown & Zsigo, 2010; Welch *et al.*, 2014). This is an aspect that social work students can easily be taught and learn before emerging as an NQSW, and should be heavily emphasised by HEI's during degree programmes.

3.3.2.2 *Conducting assessments*

Assessment plays a critical role in determining positive outcomes for different service users (Samsonsen & Turney, 2017). Assessment can be described as "… a process occurring between a social worker and client in which information is gathered, analysed, and synthesised to provide a concise picture of the client and his and her needs and strengths." (Evans, 2017:188). NQSWs need to conduct holistic assessments to gather as much information as possible considering all aspects of a service user's life, including biological, psychological, geographical, historical, social and economic information. By effectively obtaining a vast amount of information, an NQSW will be able to understand service users and the challenges that they face better, which in turn will allow them to design effective interventions and make informed decisions that are most suited for the specific service user. Risk assessment is a type of assessment that requires a social worker to identify risk of a specific service user, and should consider all factors mentioned above as well as all strengths, protective factors and resilience to assist in recognising the existence of possible risk to guide further intervention (Schwalbe, 2017:277). There are various types of assessments that need to be conducted on a regular basis in the profession, thus, the need for NQSWs to be proficient in this skill.

3.3.2.3   Working directly with service users

Effective intervention is reliant on the competency of an NQSW to establish a trusting relationship with a service user (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2016). Working directly with service users involves implementing social work skills, knowledge and values to ensure that interactions remain professional and allow for the provision of a comfortable environment in which service users feel safe to speak freely and openly without any judgement. All the competencies mentioned above are determinants of how successful interactions with service users will be, thus emphasising the interrelatedness of covert and overt competencies. This competency also directly relates to working with hostile or aggressive service users, and at times requiring NQSWs to be assertive. It has been indicated that this is an area where NQSWs do not feel confident (McSweeney & Williams, 2019). This highlights the need for HEIs to address this issue, as employers expect NQSWs to have the necessary expertise to effectively work directly with different service users (Yu *et al.*, 2016), often guided by interpersonal skills (Howard *et al.*, 2015).

3.3.2.4   Teamwork

Working well within a team is a competency that is desired in most professions and requires interpersonal skills to be done effectively. Social workers often work in multi-disciplinary teams where they need to work hard to feel heard (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016), and therefore, need to manage any negative emotions to ensure that service users are dealt with most effectively. NQSWs need to g*et al*ong with colleagues as this will not only assist in a smoother transition into an organisation but also allow for a more conducive, productive and supportive working environment. Teamwork has been recognised by employers as a highly valuable competency (Pang, Wong, Leung & Coombes, 2019), especially for those who work within multi-disciplinary teams such as health care teams (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016). A large emphasis has been placed by employers and supervisors on the role of teamwork in social work, more specifically, the need for contributing insight and value to a team, building healthy relationships with colleagues and forming coalitions and networks both within the organisation and with other systems outside the organisation (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2016; Howard *et al.*, 2015).

3.3.3 Social media and online competencies

Social media and online service delivery is a new area of social work that needs to be explored and further studied, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic, with the rise in services being delivered to service users online (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Byrne & Kirwan, 2019; Reamer, 2013). Even though the use of technology has been liberating in allowing for effective and efficient service delivery, there are considerations that need to be taken with an online presence (Byrne & Kirwan, 2019; Kirwan & Mc Guckin, 2014). Service users may see online services as an opportunity to interact with NQSWs via social media platforms, however, the level of appropriateness and other ethical issues need to be considered, such as: the blurring of professional boundaries; service users having access to personal and private information; and both service users' and NQSWs' confidentiality (Kirwan & Mc Guckin, 2014; Reamer, 2013). With this, new competencies are required to effectively work within this field of social work professionally and ethically (Byrne & Kirwan, 2019), such as the competency to convey empathy over a digital platform (Blakemore & Agllias, 2020). Therefore, it is critical that HEIs and employing organisations ensure that clearly stipulated ethical protocols and social media policies are addressed in the curriculum and in the workplace to ensure that NQSWs show readiness with this regard and navigate this field of social work successfully (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Reamer, 2013).

3.4 HEIs AND THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM

Reviewing existing curricula and educational outcomes within social work education has progressively been done against the backdrop of the readiness of social work graduates to work in the profession (Howard *et al.*, 2015). This has been done in an attempt to identify whether social work programmes are sufficiently addressing all that is required from social work practice (Applewhite *et al.*, 2018). Both employing organisations and HEIs should play a role in ensuring that the curricula offered at HEIs addresses and develops the necessary skills required by employers for NQSWs (Applewhite *et al.*, 2018; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2017; Matsouka & Mihail, 2016). The most fundamental objective of social work curricula should be to ensure the expansion and growth of competence that enables NQSWs to utilise knowledge instilled in them to guide their client-centred principles that will allow for the most successful intervention with service users (Stanley & Mettilda, 2020). Supervisors do not have the time to train NQSWs in the field, therefore, HEIs need to prepare NQSWs generically as much as possible before they enter practice (Welch *et al.*, 2014).

3.4.1 Bachelor of Social Work in South Africa

The current Bachelor of Social Work programme in South Africa consists of a four-year degree that meets both theoretical and practical outcomes. The SACSSP (2020) stipulates that the South African Bachelor of Social Work degree consists of a minimum of 480 credits, with at least 50% of the credits coming from social work modules. The knowledge that is built on throughout the four years increases in complexity over time (SACSSP, 2020), and other modules that are taken alongside social work from various disciplines include psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, computer literacy and academic literacy (Council on Higher Education, 2015).

The Bachelor of Social Work degree requirements, as stipulated by the SACSSP (2020), ensures the following: that literature is substantially from the South African context and not primarily from other areas; that curricula content addresses theories related to social work practice; that curricula are consistently updated and reviewed to consider new research and changes in the field and profession; and that the opinions of supervisors and practice placement organisations are asked for and considered when updating the social work curriculum. Furthermore, it also states that: there should be a clear link between all theory and practice completed during the degree; students will participate in at least 700 hours of practice experience at various practice placements throughout the course of the degree; students will be placed at different organisations each year of their degree; all students will complete their placement under the guidance of a supervisor; supervisors will be provided with training in order to effectively supervise the students that they are allocated; supervisors should be given the opportunity to offer suggestions on the current Bachelor of Social Work degree, including, but not limited to, theory and the course curriculum, the preparation of students for the social work profession, community projects and recommendations for practice placements (SACSSP, 2020).

The Council of Higher Education (2015) explains that the current Bachelor of Social Work degree in South Africa prepares graduates either for further studying or to enter the profession ready to work in various fields of social work. It is critical that the degree does not remain stagnant and that it is continuously changed and updated to address contemporary issues and recognise the impact of historical influences on current societal change. The South African Bachelor of Social Work programme has been developed to be generic in order to address the social work profession in various contexts, provide insight into the complexness of the field to

enable graduates to be proficient in critical thinking, and allow for the exchange of knowledge and competencies upon entering different working environments (Council of Higher Education, 2015).

3.4.2 Social work education

The genericity of the social work degree is not only an approach taken in South Africa but also other countries such as Sweden (Tham & Lynch, 2019), Ireland (McSweeney & Williams, 2019) and Scotland (Grant, 2017). This approach has been controversial and critiqued by both NQSWs and supervisors. NQSW respondents of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Research Team's (2009) research in the UK, felt that they knew from the beginning of their degree which area of social work they wished to specialise in, and thus, contended that a more concentrated area of knowledge would have contributed towards them feeling confident upon entering the profession, rather than a feeling like a beginner or amateur. Contradictorily, educators from Ballantyne *et al.*'s (2019) research in New Zealand, and HEI respondents from the CWDC Research Team's (2009) study, strongly supported the generic approach that is taken with the social work degree and saw it is as beneficial to NQSWs. Furthermore, there is a significant focus on statutory work in South Africa, rather than other fields of social work practice, as a result of statutory work being one of the largest social work sectors and in demand for social workers (Strydom, Spolander, Engelbrecht & Martin, 2017). The downfall of this is that other specialised areas, such as social workers working in health settings, are not as deeply divulged into during theoretical courses. This concurs with Grant *et al.*'s (2014) findings from Scotland, who found that although some of the participants from their research expressed that their HEI had prepared them well in recognising the interrelationship between health and social needs, almost a third of participants identified that they had not been well prepared for this particular field of social work practice. However, it has been acknowledged both in international and local contexts that it is unrealistic of employers to expect a three- or four-year generic degree to fully prepare NQSWs to be able to work in specialised areas of social work (compare CWDC Research Team, 2009; Engelbrecht, Ornellas, Strydom, Slabbert, Zimba, Khosa & Cornelissen-Nordien, 2021; McSweeney & Williams, 2019).

Many HEIs around the world offering social work programmes may design and develop their curriculum in future in accordance with the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW & IASSW, 2020) alongside their own national standards, however, there are still differences in the structure and content of social work education when comparing curricula globally (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Yu *et al.*, 2016).

This is evident in the findings of the CWDC Research Team (2009), which found that twenty-two out of forty-seven employers had specifically tried to select NQSWs from particular universities, whilst looking to employ NQSWs. Alpaslan's (2019) South African findings concur with this in which employers were able to identify that NQSWs specifically from the University of South Africa (UNISA) were not fully prepared for practice, thus emphasising the role a reputation of university plays in the employment of NQSWs. This brings forward the issue of the inconsistency in the different curricula and field practice placement experiences, resulting in employers employing NQSWs from particular universities rather than others, placing the NQSWs from the latter a step behind everyone else in being recognised as 'less prepared' (compare Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2019). With differences in the structure and delivery of social work curricula across the globe, the social work programmes should be constantly reviewed and analysed against existing social work curricula across the world (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2016; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, an issue that has been brought forward is that of lecturers who have been out of the profession for an extended period and are no longer 'in touch' with contemporary issues that many NQSWs deal with in the 21ˢᵗ century (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Shergill, 2018), for example, working with a vulnerable group such as LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) service users (Craig, Dentato, Messinger & McInroy, 2014). The result of this is that these topics are not extensively divulged into, which in turn, ineffectively prepares NQSWs in learning how to sensitively and professionally deal with specific service users and their related challenges (Davis, Harris, Engelbrecht & Lum, 2019).

The importance of quality social work field practice placements has been reiterated by students, NQSWs, educators and supervisors all over the world (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Clarke, Kirwan & Byrne, 2012; Frost, Staffan & Campanini, 2013; Joubert, 2020; McSweeny & Williams, 2019; Ornellas, Spolander, Engelbrecht, Sicora, Pervova, Martínez-Román, Law, Shajahan, Das Dores Guerreiro, Casanova, Garcia, Acar, Martin, & Strydom, 2019). However, without students having much of a role in choosing where they are placed, there is the possibility that they could not be placed in a specialisation of social work that they are interested in or where they require specialised experience in (CWDC Research Team, 2009). A participant of the

CWDC Research Team's (2009) research in the UK identified that their HEI gave them the option to identify three preferences of where they would like to be placed, however, noted that some of their peers did not get one of their preferences, which meant gaining experience in an area that they had no interest in ever working in. This has resulted in NQSWs having difficulty finding jobs in the field they would prefer to work in, as many employers often look for NQSWs who have had experience in that specific field during their practice placements (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Alpaslan, 2019). NQSWs who have been exposed to a specific field during their practice education field placements, is a determinant that contributes significantly to the readiness of NQSWs (Clarke *et al.*, 2012; Grant, 2017; Spolander, Pullen-Sansfaçon, Brown & Engelbrecht, 2011).

3.5 VIEWS OF NQSWS, SUPERVISORS, EMPLOYERS AND HEIs ON NQSWS READINESS FOR PRACTICE

The following section will assimilate responses from research conducted by scholars around the world and divulge into similarities and differences between different contexts both globally and locally. Upon completion of a social work programme, NQSWs should have the necessary knowledge on the fundamentals of the social work profession that qualifies them to start their professional careers as beginner professionals (Van Bommel, Kwakman & Boshuizen, 2014). There are conflicting views on almost every aspect that impacts NQSWs' readiness. However, with these conflicting views, it has allowed the researcher to differentiate different aspects on what contributes to 'readiness' and how students, NQSWs, supervisors, employers, educators and HEIs identify what enhances NQSWs' readiness for practice. There is the expectation that HEIs have the responsibility to ensure NQSWs emerge as ready practitioners, and thus a huge emphasis has been placed on the limitations of the social work educational programme and how it can be improved to facilitate 'ready' NQSWs. There are NQSWs (Bates *et al.*, 2010; Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Hussein *et al.*, 2014), social work students (Goodman, Knight & Khudododov, 2014) and supervisors (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2016) who feel as if the social work programme has sufficiently prepared NQSWs for practice. Contradictorily, there are also NQSWs (CWDC Research Team, 2009; De Jager, 2013; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Tham & Lynch, 2019), supervisors (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Welch *et al.*, 2014) and employers (Alpaslan, 2019) who have conceded that the social work programme has either not sufficiently prepared NQSWs, or only prepares them for some, but not all areas of practice. With the mixed views on whether NQSWs are ready or not for practice, there will always be considerations and areas which could be refined and improved on in working towards the readiness of NQSWs

(compare Davis *et al.*, 2019; Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2015; Ornellas *et al.*, 2019). The following subsections will divulge into the specific issues that have an impact on the readiness of NQSWs as a homogeneous group across the world.

3.5.1   Social work skills, knowledge and values

There are varying standpoints on the value of theory once entering the workplace (McSweeney & Williams, 2019). NQSWs have expressed that their degree had left them feeling unprepared as a result of focusing too much on theory rather than that of practice (CWDC Research Team, 2009). Social work education has been described as academically intensive, however, it has also been globally critiqued for preparing NQSWs less for more practical aspects of the profession such as drafting court-related reports, submitting and presenting evidence in court and court proceedings, and the required forms and reports requested by courts, which was something that NQSWS were expected to know and do by their employers (Bates *et al.*, 2010; CWDC Research Team, 2009; De Jager, 2013). Similarly, supervisors and employers from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) and Alpaslan's (2019) respective studies recognised that NQSWs were not well prepared in correctly conducting and following statutory procedures. Participants from Grant *et al.*'s (2014) research indicated that there is great value in learning about legislation. However, this is not always the reality, as De Jager (2013) found that South African NQSWs entering the work field felt ill-prepared in the lack of knowledge they had in implementing specific legislation, such as the Children's Act (Act No. 38 of 2005) and had a lack of conviction whilst working in the South African court system.

Across the globe, the Bachelor of Social Work programme prepares NQSWs in various areas of social work, however, some areas have been seen as more valuable than others for NQSWs starting their professional careers. Only a handful of the participants from Grant *et al.*'s (2014) research in Scotland found knowledge of child development as important. Contradictorily, in the UK, child development has been critiqued for not being divulged into enough, as firstly, theories relating to child development are learnt separately and not shown how they relate to social work practice, and secondly, further practical aspects, such as talking to a child who could possibly be a victim of child abuse, are not addressed (CWDC Research Team, 2009). This view was further confirmed by NQSWs in New Zealand, who expressed that they wished to have been better prepared to communicate with children (Hay, Beddoe, Ballantyne, Maidment, Walker & Mayhew, 2017). NQSWs have also expressed that HEIs had not sufficiently prepared them for the field, highlighting the lack of in-depth exploration of the

relationship between social work and health within their social work curriculum (Grant *et al.*, 2014). Nonetheless, managers are realistic in acknowledging that they do not expect NQSWs to know everything or be fully prepared for all areas of social work, being aware of the elaborateness of the field and recognising NQSWs as novices (Welch *et al.*, 2014). Managers from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) research in Scotland did make remarks in terms of the strengths of NQSWs knowledge by describing that they were appreciative of the motivation and enthusiasm of NQSWs as this allowed for new perspectives, insights and refreshed knowledge from contemporary research to be brought into the work environment.

Curriculum preparation involves preparing NQSWs in various techniques and skills, as well as in the development of social work values and principles. Different practice settings find different skills and attributes in NQSWs more desirable than others. For example, in Yu *et al.*'s (2016) research in Australia, a participant working in the child protection field identified assessment skills in understanding and gaining information about service users, and quality written and verbal skills as most important for NQSWs, whilst another working in a medical setting valued an established social work identity. Additionally, Welch *et al.* (2014) found that managers felt that it was vital for NQSWs to have more developed written and report-writing skills and developed understanding of the realities they will encounter within the social work profession. Participants from Alpaslan's (2019) South African study concluded that the social work programme did not contribute towards the development of the necessary skills needed for effective practice. Supervisors have expressed the need for NQSWs to be more prepared in their ability to disconnect their personal values from their professional values better, as it is professional values that need to guide direct practice with service users, and not personal values (Yu *et al.*, 2016). Educators and students from Ballantyne *et al.*'s (2019) research in New Zealand indicated that NQSWs need to be better prepared with regards to cross-cultural practice, however, the majority of Scottish NQSWs from Grant *et al.*'s (2017) study felt that HEIs had prepared them sufficiently for ensuring that their work is guided by anti-discriminatory values. This emphasises the differences that exist amongst global and cultural contexts, and illustrates how NQSWs' views could rather be a measure of NQSWs' confidence to work with other cultures. It is evident that many skills are found desirable to contribute to an NQSW's readiness, however, that these are also context-dependent.

In South Africa, graduates have acknowledged that they have difficulty applying theoretical components that they had learned throughout the social work degree into practice (Joubert,

2020). For example, NQSWs identified that they had struggled to utilise specific theories in guiding their practice as they had either felt flustered or not found them relative or applicable to the work field (Alpaslan, 2019; De Jager, 2013). An additional finding of De Jager (2013) was that of the dissonance between the terminology utilised by HEIs compared to that used in the field, in which participants of their study emphasised the need for HEIs to keep up to date with the realities, issues and terminology utilised in everyday practice.

Van Bommel *et al.* (2014) was able to learn through their research that employers from the Netherlands considered individual personal attributes to affect their decision on whether to hire an NQSW applicant more than their ability to show their theoretical knowledge of the social work profession. This was an interesting finding, motivated by the fact that an NQSW can learn theory, however, that it is much more challenging to change an NQSW's personality (Van Bommel *et al.*, 2014). Yu *et al.* (2016) from Australia found that most of the research participants from their study were realistic in expecting NQSWs to have an adequate level of various skills and abilities, however, that some individuals expect a higher level of advanced skill from NQSWs. The supervisors who had the highest expectations of what skills and knowledge deemed a social worker as ready, were those with the least supervision experience. Furthermore, Yu *et al.* (2016) pose the question of whether it is realistic or reasonable of supervisors to expect NQSWs to have expertise and advanced levels of skills, or whether it is more suitable to understand that NQSWs will most likely have adequate levels of the skills that supervisors might desire once they have completed their degree.

3.5.2   Report writing

Contentious report writing skills of NQSWs are a general complaint of supervisors across the world (Spolander *et al.*, 2011). Both NQSWs (Grant *et al.*, 2014; Hay *et al.*, 2017) and supervisors (Yu *et al.*, 2016) feel that HEIs are successful in preparing NQSWs for effective and efficient report writing and in conducting assessments. Alternatively, Alpaslan (2019) and Welch *et al.* (2014) found that NQSWs from South Africa and Scotland respectively displayed substandard report writing skills, according to employers and supervisors. This illustrates the inconsistencies between NQSWs, supervisors and employers as to what constitutes good report writing skills, as well as the focus different HEIs place on developing these skills. Employers recognise that spelling and grammar, as well as writing descriptions and analyses appear to be a challenge for some NQSWs (Welch *et al.*, 2014). This is troubling for supervisors as it is their responsibility to correct these mistakes which are time-consuming, and as highlighted by the

time limitations in supervision, supervisors do not have time to correct such errors and that they should thus, be a core focus of the degree preparation (Cloete, 2012; Welch *et al.*, 2014).

3.5.3 Conducting assessments

There are also mixed feelings regarding NQSWs' assessment skills, as managers have identified that NQSWs do not know how to conduct assessments (Sharpe, Moriarty, Stevens, Manthorpe & Hussein, 2011), and NQSWs have both expressed that they have great confidence and lack confidence in their assessment skills (CWDC Research Team, 2009). NQSWs from the UK have identified that conducting risk assessments was something that they were expected to know how to do, however, that they had little knowledge on, due to the specific practice education placements they had during their degree and not needing to know how to do this (CWDC Research Team, 2009). In contrast, the majority of NQSWs in Grant *et al.*'s (2017) research in Scotland felt that HEIs had prepared sufficiently and more specifically for effective intervention, the skills for making accurate assessments, and understanding of what constitutes as risk. Many students in Wilson's (2013a) research indicated that they were well prepared for assessing needs, however, they felt that they were less prepared in assessing risk. It appears that the type of practice education field placement plays a role in the knowledge and confidence NQSWs have in conducting assessments, thus, recognising the need for it to be emphasised not only in the practical learning of social work education, but also within the theoretical curriculum.

3.5.4 Previous practice education field placements of NQSWs

As indicated by the findings of many researchers globally, quality practice education field placements throughout the social work programme and completed under the instruction and guidance of a good supervisor are seen as vital in contributing towards readiness, as this provides social work students with the opportunity to learn how to implement theory, skills and learnt content into practice (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; McSweeney & Williams, 2019; Tham & Lynch, 2019; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Field placements have been identified to effectively prepare students by exposing them to the realities of the field, allowing them to experience this prior to entering the profession, and not feeling shocked or overwhelmed by the complexities of the field only once entering the profession (Clarke *et al.*, 2012; CWDC Research Team, 2009; Welch *et al.*, 2014). As much as a student should be eased into the environment of social work, they also need to be shown the realities of the profession and work together with experienced

social workers on multi-faceted and challenging cases, as this will contribute towards their confidence and readiness in knowing what to expect in the field of social work. However, it is also important to note that there are vast differences between the social work profession and practice education field placements (McSweeney & Williams, 2019).

As much as practice education field placements provide significant benefits in preparing NQSWs for practice, there are also limitations. Placements are unable to fully match the reality of the social work profession (Beddoe *et al.,* 2020; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021), as students are more protected from possible danger, are not required to write as many reports or manage as many cases as social workers in their workplace, and do not need to make challenging or difficult decisions (McSweeney & Williams, 2019; Wilson, 2013a). Thus, as reiterated by the participants of McSweeney and Williams' (2019) research in Ireland, the more responsibility given to students whilst working at their field placement, and with the necessary support and guidance, the more prepared they will feel upon entering a workplace. Furthermore, NQSWs who do not have exposure or experience in a specific area of social work, do not feel prepared enough to work in that specific field, and have to rather balance learning on the job whilst attempting to provide effective services to service users (Tham & Lynch, 2019). Managers from Scotland have openly recognised that those entering the statutory field are less likely to be considered for a job if none of their practice placements during their studies were at a statutory placement (Welch *et al.*, 2014). This accentuates the disadvantage NQSWs who have not had experience in a specific field have in seeming 'unprepared' and 'not ready', thus, not seen as desirable or employable by employers.

With great dependency being placed on practice education field placements to provide NQSWs with experience and contribute sufficiently towards their readiness, the quality of the placement needs to be addressed. A lower quality placement, for example, with low levels of support, could be troublesome in preparing students effectively to be ready NQSWs (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Wilson, 2013a). HEIs in South Africa need to ensure that the learning outcomes and standards required by the Bachelor of Social Work programme are being met not only in the classroom, but also in practice settings by ensuring an effective induction package for field educators, as well as regular contact with field practitioners (SACSSP, 2020). This emphasises the liaison that needs to occur between HEIs and organisations that accept students for practice placements, as this will contribute towards all NQSWs emerging as practitioners ready for practice, upon completion of their social work programme.

3.5.5   Practice realities of social work

Working in the field of social work and experiencing the practice realities of social work is not always an easy task and has been proven to be a **challenging, emotionally charged and demanding profession**. Supervisors around the world have expressed that NQSWs are not fully prepared for the harsh and difficult realities of practice, such as the highly challenging, complex, and difficult cases and emergency situations they, at times, would work on, and what impact this would have on them (Alpaslan, 2019; CWDC Research Team, 2009; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Contradictorily, the findings of Grant *et al.* (2014) in Scotland, suggested that most NQSWs felt confident and ready to enter the field and take on the demand and challenges that arise in the profession. This indicates disparities between supervisors and NQSWs' views, and possibly the naivety of NQSWs entering the profession feeling prepared to take on difficult challenges, emphasising the need for NQSWs to understand the realities of practice.

Concurrently, dealing with and needing to make decisions for complex, tricky or **ethical issues and situations** is a theme NQSWs and supervisors have identified as HEIs not preparing NQSWs sufficiently enough for (Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Over half of the NQSW research participants from the CWDC Research Team's (2009) study in the UK indicated that they had not been trained or were insufficiently trained to deal with **aggressive service users** during their current position. Other findings supported this in identifying that NQSWs from New Zealand, Scotland and Sweden struggle with **being assertive and managing conflict** within client relationships (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Tham & Lynch, 2019). Supervisors in Welch *et al.*'s (2014) research in Scotland also recognised that NQSWs were not sufficiently prepared in **evaluating and managing possible risks posed to themselves and other co-workers**. However, NQSW participants in Grant *et al.*'s (2014) research, also from Scotland, believed that they were prepared in this aspect, indicating the difference in confidence supervisors and NQSWs have in NQSWs' capabilities with this regard.

On a more positive note, many supervisors and NQSWs in Scotland felt that NQSWs fared well **in working together and building networks** with other professionals, networks, individuals and communities as well as excel at empowering individuals and communities through advocating in aid of and alongside them (Grant *et al.*, 2014; Grant, 2017; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Evidently, this coalition with other systems is an area that HEIs are preparing NQSWs in Scotland greatly for, emphasising the importance of cross-global curriculum comparison, as HEIs can learn what other countries are preparing NQSWs well for and how they are doing this.

3.5.6 Continuous learning

In South Africa it is a mandatory professional requirement for social workers to engage in ongoing continuous professional development (CPD) (SACSSP, 2019). With the ever-changing nature of the social work profession, and the development of different contemporary issues and challenges, all social workers need to constantly update their knowledge and skills to be able to work most effectively with these demands and challenges. According to the Supervision Framework for the Social Work Profession in South Africa, supervisors should take an active role in ensuring or arranging continuous educational opportunities for social workers (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). The CWDC Research Team (2009) found that NQSWs in the UK consider their continuous professional development a large determinant when looking for a job upon graduating. NQSWs from both England and Scotland have conveyed their uneasiness over the lack of support and scarcity and confusion in available opportunities at their organisations to attend training or educational programmes upon entering the profession (Bates *et al.*, 2010; Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Grant *et al.*, 2017). Educators and HEIs from New Zealand have explicitly stated that learning needs to be continued even after entering the profession, and consider it crucial that supervisors, employers and organisations encourage and support this notion (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019). It is believed that organisations should provide NQSWs and all staff members with opportunities for continuous learning, training and development programmes (Calitz *et al.*, 2014; Wirth *et al.*, 2019). NQSWs are determined to improve their knowledge consistently, as identified by Australian supervisors of Yu *et al.*'s (2016) research, who stated that NQSWs displayed readiness in wanting to continuously work towards developing their skills and knowledge. Continuously updating NQSWs' knowledge, will effectively contribute towards and enhance the readiness of NQSWs.

3.5.7 Supervision, mentoring, shadowing

There are many benefits to supervision, such as the provision of support supervisors can offer NQSWs during this transitional period (Battaglia & Flynn, 2020; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021), as well as the assistance it has for the development of practice competence and professional identity amongst NQSWs (Roulston *et al.*, 2018). In both the UK and South Africa, it has been identified that the supervision of NQSWs should take place fortnightly, however that the reality is that it only happens every three or four weeks, and at times, even less than that (CWDC Research Team, 2009; DSD & SACSSP, 2012; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). Supervision is a controversial topic, as supervisors are aware of the importance of it, however, due to

organisational and time constraints, they do not have the time to me*et al*l its supportive and educational functions, and instead emphasise managerial functions (Walker, 2014). Studies from Scotland and Ireland echo this statement in NQSWs and supervisors expressing the value of supervision, especially when it also dealt with supportive and education functions rather than only case-specific issues (Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014) and in developing practice competence (Roulston *et al.*, 2018). Supervision does not occur frequently enough all over the world, as identified in countries such as New Zealand (Beddoe *et al.*, 2020) and South Africa (De Jager, 2013; Pretorius, 2020). This lack of supervision is harmful as it contributes to NQSWs feeling anxious and overburdened, and does not assist NQSWs in their transition nor contribute effectively to their readiness.

With the constraints in providing constant effective supervision, the idea of shadowing or peer-mentoring has been brought up globally, which has been identified as an important source of support, invaluable insight, and education for NQSWs (Beddoe *et al.*, 2020; Cloete, 2012; DSD & SACSSP, 2012; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014). A participant from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) study in Scotland identified that when a complex case arises at their organisation, an NQSW will be assigned to a senior or more experienced social worker to work together with them on the case and assist in the facilitation of the NQSWs development and growth as a social worker. This also allows for less power play or intimidation as the senior social worker is not on a supervisory level. Some benefits of mentoring include enhanced work performance, effective service delivery, and lower staff turnover, as defined by Cloete (2012) in a South African context. There is great value in working with mentors in the form of colleagues who have experience, as indicated by the CWDC Research Team's (2009) study in the UK, in which nine out of ten participants acknowledged that these individuals are a great source of building their confidence. Grant *et al.'s* (2014) research in Scotland concurs with this, as participants identified colleagues as an important source of support. However, Gallop's (2018) research in Canada concluded that NQSWs are not given the space to discuss and reflect on their feelings and experiences with other co-workers in an understanding and nurturing environment, acknowledging that the ideal of mentoring is not always implemented in practice. The need for this support is crucial for NQSWs, as illustrated by Hunt *et al.* (2016), who argues that it is an ethical obligation of employers and supervisors to ensure that NQSWs are supported throughout this transitioning period with frequent supervision and mentoring.

Another vital component that will most likely be facilitated during supervision sessions is that of reflective practice. Supervisors are aware of the reflective aspect of supervision and that this should be incorporated into supervision sessions (Welch *et al.*, 2014) to promote learning, development, and critical awareness. However, as previously noted, the working environment of many social work supervisors is not conducive for reflective supervision, creating an emphasis on case-related discussions only as these are seen as more urgent (Walker, 2014). Most supervisors from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) study in Scotland acknowledged the importance of creating a comfortable supervision environment that allows for direct and open communication regarding elaborate cases, which can contribute to learning. Researchers Howard *et al.* (2015) and Yu *et al.* (2016) from Australia identified that supervisors thought that NQSWs displayed readiness by actively participating in reflective practice. However, NQSWs in the UK have recognised that time to reflect upon interactions, decisions, service users and themselves were areas that were not being prioritised (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Walker, 2014). There is a need for reflective practice within supervision sessions and the need for time to be set aside to address the psychological and emotional well-being of NQSWs (Shergill, 2018; Walker, 2014), as this will positively contribute to the readiness of NQSWs and provide the support that they need during this transitioning period.

Supervision on its own is hugely beneficial, however, it can also be complemented by experienced social workers mentoring NQSWs, as well as NQSWs shadowing experienced social workers, especially on risky and challenging cases whilst they are still new and adjusting to their new work role (Cloete, 2012). The support that can be provided through these various avenues is crucial in the transitioning of NQSWs into social workers and has shown to improve the retention of social workers in the profession, enhance the quality of services delivered to service users and positively assist the development of confidence and competence (SSSC, 2020). This all encapsulates the value of working in a supportive team, with NQSWs being able to turn to peers, colleagues and their supervisor for support or any challenge they might be dealing with. Hussein *et al.* (2014) found that the benefit of having a supportive team and colleagues is that it lowers NQSWs intention to leave the profession, which evidently is a current issue of social workers, especially those within South Africa, thus, emphasising the need for employers, supervisors and co-workers in ensuring a supportive working environment for NQSWs (compare Pretorius, 2020).

3.6   ENTERING PRACTICE AS AN NQSW

With all the opposing views on what NQSWs are ready for and what they require more preparation for, little has been noted on what can be done after attending an HEI to contribute to readiness, apart from that of supervision, mentoring and continuous training. Thus, it is necessary to explore what employers, organisations and supervisors can do to enhance readiness and further facilitate the learning of NQSWs even after attending a social work programme.

3.6.1   Induction

A vital component of an NQSW's entrance to practice is induction. It is essential that NQSWs be assisted and guided upon starting work in the profession, and this can be done through thorough orientation and induction initiatives (Battaglia & Flynn, 2020; Hunt *et al.*, 2016). Induction can be described as an introduction to the workplace (Tham & Lynch, 2019), providing NQSWs with an orientation regarding their specific job role, and organisational rules, procedures and protocols (Walker, 2014). NQSWs in the UK who described the time from which they started their first job as positive, had received both induction and a form of training (CWDC Research Team, 2009) which allowed them to feel more prepared and eased into their role. Supervisors also recognise the benefit of induction, as those from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) research in Scotland, were in favour of offering an induction package to NQSWs which could be facilitated through several means, including, but not limited to, supervision, mentoring, learning and training programmes, and the general organisation-mandated induction process. However, managers from England have expressed not feeling supported to offer a social work-specific induction package to NQSWs (Bates *et al.*, 2010). Even with the recognised benefits, many NQSWs have never received a formal induction upon starting their new job roles (Tham & Lynch, 2019, Walker, 2014). Other NQSWs from New Zealand and England indicated receiving a general organisational or corporate induction, however, very few had received a social work-specific induction (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Bates *et al.*, 2010). Grant (2017) found that over a third of their participants in Scotland had not been satisfied with the induction they had received, which poses the question of whether NQSWs are receiving any information on their work role or whether they are being thrown into the deep end. Educators have also favoured the induction of NQSWs once starting a new position (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019). There is currently no formal guideline for the induction of NQSWs in South Africa, and little research on the topic within a South African context, however, it is recommended within the Supervision Framework for the Social Work Profession in South Africa that NQSWs receive orientation

upon starting a new job with regards to the policies of the organisation, and the requirements and expectations of their position (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Nevertheless, the development of a formal framework specifically for induction of NQSWs might assist supervisors and employers in enhancing the readiness of NQSWs, as they will have more understanding of what is expected of them and how they can fulfil their new job role successfully.

3.6.2 Protected workload

A protected workload ensures that NQSWs are not overburdened with work or complex cases whilst they are still finding their feet at an organisation. This is a global concept that is vital in ensuring a smooth transition for an NQSW. Hunt *et al.* (2016) argue that it is an ethical obligation of employers and supervisors to ensure that NQSWs are supported throughout this transitioning period by reducing their workload and cases in amount, complexity and difficulty. Seventy-two percent of participants from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) research in Scotland stipulated that they do not believe that NQSWs are prepared or have the required skills, understanding and competencies to manage elaborate caseloads, thus motivating the need for protected workloads. However, also in Scotland, Grant *et al.* (2014) found that over a third of their participants identified that their workload was not protected. In South Africa, Pretorius (2020) found that NQSWs did not feel prepared for the high workload levels. However, for organisations with few staff members, supervisors struggle to reduce caseloads or give NQSWs fewer complex cases due to the high volume of cases compared to the number of employed social workers (Manthorpe *et al.*, 2014). This makes it extremely difficult for NQSWs to provide effective services to service users as they are expected to manage the same caseload intensity as experienced social workers, putting them at a disadvantage and contributing to them feeling and coming across as 'not ready'.

3.6.3 Probationary period

A probationary period is not an uncommon concept across most professions and is often a standard requirement that graduates begin their new role or position under the supervision of a more experienced employee or employer as a prerequisite before securing the job entirely (Welch *et al.*, 2014). A solution of initiating a set probationary period before a graduate can achieve full professional status has been proposed by Welch *et al.* (2014). This period would allow for graduates to develop their skills, build on their knowledge, and practice implementing theory into practice, and do so in an environment that does not expect the NQSW to be

competent in all aspects of social work or be required to manage the same caseload as experienced co-workers (Welch *et al.*, 2014). This will allow for real exposure and experience in the field without the requirement of completing a degree and meeting educational deadlines at the same time. A probationary period is often not stipulated upon an NQSW starting a new position, as found in Grant *et al.*'s research (2017), in which 93% of their NQSW respondents from Scotland were not on an agreed-upon probation time frame.

As much as this period would be beneficial to NQSWs, it would be just as beneficial to supervisors and employers as they would feel more confident in the NQSW's capacity to fulfil the expectations and requirements of a specific job role. However, there is always the consideration that implementing this would require more resource allocation, as well as take up more time from supervisors who already struggle to manage their workload, which is already a challenge in the field of social work (Welch *et al.*, 2014). Bates *et al.* (2010) found that only a quarter of NQSWs found this period to be of value, emphasising the time and effort that needs to be put into such a period to ensure it is beneficial to NQSWs. In England, there is an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) framework for NQSWs, in which NQSWs are assessed and supported as they transition into the field of social work, through the provision of regular supervision, a protected caseload and with time designated specifically to continuous professional development (Battaglia & Flynn, 2020; Skills for Care, 2012). With the benefits that are found in frequent supervision and mentoring, learning opportunities, induction, and protected caseloads, it is evident that a national framework for NQSW support, possibly similar to that of the ASYE, could be highly beneficial to NQSWs, supervisors and employers, and should be drafted (SSSC, 2020).

3.7   CONCLUSION

There is no blueprint as to what specific competencies make an NQSW ready for practice, thus, indicating the need for a generic curriculum to cover a range of skills and knowledge. As noted from literature both locally and globally, there are several areas where NQSWs, supervisors and employers do not feel as if NQSWs are ready for, such as report writing, conducting risk assessments, and working within the court system. There are, however, several factors that contribute to enhancing readiness, such as reviewing social work curricula, supervision, mentoring, protected caseloads, induction, probationary periods and continuous training and development. However, these solutions require extra time, support and resources, which are already limited in the profession. For the readiness of NQSWs to be enhanced, HEIs, NQSWs,

social work supervisors and employers need to work together to ensure that students are prepared to the fullest during their training, as well as continue to receive post-qualifying training opportunities to allow for a smooth transition to the field (Howard *et al.*, 2015; Wilson, 2013a). The curriculum, working environment and continuous learning and development of NQSWs should all be considered in determining readiness (Grant *et al.*, 2014). It is necessary to note that NQSWs' measure of self-readiness is often at times a measurement of confidence. It is, therefore, essential to consider the views of supervisors due to the vast experience that they have had in the social work profession, as well as the insight and understanding that they have of the realities and challenges in the working field and what competencies are needed to work with these challenges most effectively (Yu *et al.*, 2016).

CHAPTER FOUR

EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE READINESS FOR PRACTICE OF NQSWS BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISORS AT SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The fourth objective of this research is to empirically investigate the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations regarding the readiness of NQSWs for practice which will be presented and discussed in this chapter. Chapter one provided readers with a detailed background regarding the readiness of NQSWs in both a global and local context, and the need to explore this topic further. A detailed description of the goals and objectives, as well as research methodology, were presented as an introduction to the course of the research. Chapter two looked at describing and explaining the global and local context of NQSWs within the realm of the developmental theory of professional identity, providing the context in which NQSWs enter practice. Chapter three analysed contemporary international and South African research on the readiness of NQSWs for practice, by reviewing the competencies which NQSWs have, lack and ought to have.

Using these previous chapters as a basis and contextualisation, Chapter four will expand on the readiness of NQSWs for practice based on the interviews conducted with social work supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape and present this as empirical findings. The findings will be displayed in graphs, tables, themes, sub-themes, categories and relative narratives to allow for an in-depth expansion of the findings from participants' interviews.

SECTION A

This section will briefly describe and reflect on the research methodology that was utilised to conduct this research. A more detailed description of the research methodology can be found in Chapter One.

4.2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section will review the research approach, research design, sampling methods, data collection and data analysis that were utilised for the purpose of this research.

4.2.1   Research approach

A qualitative approach was employed for the purpose of this research. Fouché (2021a) and Guest *et al.* (2013) define qualitative research as research that seeks to address and answer questions about the specific nature of phenomena such as human beliefs, behaviours and experiences. This approach is regularly utilised in social work research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Crowe *et al.* (2015) put forth that this approach allows the researcher to gain insight into the meanings and experiences of individuals. This approach was selected as it allowed the researcher to understand the personal experiences and narratives of supervisors, on the readiness of NQSWs for practice. Furthermore, this allowed the researcher to explore and examine particular meanings, attitudes, descriptions and experiences with supervisors on the readiness of NQSWs for practice.

Additionally, both deductive and inductive reasoning were utilised alongside this qualitative study. Fouché (2021a) and Walker (2014) describe deductive reasoning as when specific ideas and hypotheses regarding the study are formulated prior to the study, by the researcher conducting a thorough literature review and analysing other existing information on the topic, and inductive reasoning as drawing inferences from the obtained research data to formulate general deductions and conclusions. Both these reasonings were appropriate and necessary as deductive reasoning allowed the literature review to guide the formulation of interview questions and provide an understanding of what areas of readiness should be explored. Inductive reasoning enabled the researcher to review local and international literature after the completion of interviews as research participants brought forward other topics related to the readiness of NQSWs during their interviews. This enabled the researcher to gain further insight

and additional understanding on the readiness of NQSWs for practice, specifically in the South African context.

4.2.2   Research design

Both exploratory and descriptive research design methods were utilised to assist in the attainment of the research objectives. Exploratory research is a design that adds new knowledge to a field where there is a lack thereof, rather than only confirming existing knowledge or hypotheses (Fouché, 2021b; Swedberg, 2020). Descriptive research can be described as a comprehensive analysis of distinct experiences encountered by individuals, groups or communities (Doyle *et al.*, 2020; Lambert & Lambert, 2013). This design is ideal for qualitative research as it recognises the subjective and personal nature of individuals or phenomena (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017; Doyle *et al.*, 2020). The exploratory design was applicable and necessary for this study as the readiness of NQSWs for practice in a South African context is an under-studied topic, and thus the data that was obtained from this research has added new, informative and valuable information to the field of social work. Descriptive design was also appropriate for this study, as it allowed emphasis to be placed on understanding supervisors of NQSWs' subjective experiences.

4.2.3   Sampling methods

The researcher identified and drew her sample – present and past supervisors of NQSWs – from the Western Cape, who are a subset of and represent supervisors of NQSWs in South Africa. Both purposive and snowball sampling methods were utilised to find potential research participants for this study. Ritchie *et al.* (2014) and Strydom (2021) describe purposive sampling as when a researcher identifies research participants, they believe have the best understanding and insight regarding the phenomenon being examined and studied. This method was appropriate for this study as it was utilised by the researcher when contacting supervisors at social service organisations – as many NQSWs start their first job at a social service organisation – that the researcher deemed desirable and as potentially having insightful knowledge regarding the readiness of NQSWs for practice. Snowball sampling is a method that utilises research participants to recommend other possible participants whom they feel could contribute valuable information to the study, which allows for growth in the sample size (Oppong, 2013; Strydom, 2021; Taherdoost, 2016). This method was appropriate as several research participants recommended other potential participants from other organisations they

felt had relative experiences about the readiness of NQSWs and could contribute valuable information to the study. Both methods were appropriate and necessary as they assisted the researcher in gaining a sample size that allowed the researcher to reach data saturation.

The criteria for inclusion for this study was as follows:

- The participant had to be a social worker registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP);

- The participant had to have past or current experience as a social work supervisor at their relative social service organisation;

- The participant had to have supervised a social worker who has worked in the field for less than two years (as stipulated by the definition of a newly qualified social worker);

- The participant has to have been employed by a social service organisation in the Western Cape.

The sample included 15 research participants who all discussed and described their subjective experiences on the readiness of NQSWs. The research participants were contacted either by telephone or email. All further communication was continued via email. The researcher sent a letter describing the aim of the research as well as the benefits and potential risks of the research, which the participant could read through at their own pace. The researcher also emailed the participants the informed consent form prior to the interview so that they could ask the researcher any questions if they needed to. Upon calling the participants, the researcher explained that the purpose of the study was to explore their personal experiences of the readiness of NQSWs for practice, as well as went through the informed consent form and discussed their rights as a research participant (see annexure 2 for complete informed consent form). The interviews were conducted telephonically and privately. Interviews were based on supervisors' personal experiences, therefore, the researcher did not need to obtain any organisational permission to conduct the study with research participants, as they participated in their personal capacity as a professional social work supervisor of an NQSW and not as a representative of an organisation. There was one organisation that required the supervisors to obtain organisational permission, in which the researcher contacted the head of the organisation and obtained a letter of permission to interview supervisors from that specific organisation. Interviews ranged from 25 to 70 minutes. The researcher believed that data saturation had been reached once interviews had been conducted with 15 participants, as participants' narratives

became similar. Saturation is reached when no new information is obtained from interviewing research participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A sample of 15 participants is regarded as enough to research the goal of a qualitative study when conducting interviews (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

4.2.4 Data collection

The researcher utilised semi-structured interviews as a method for data collection. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher drew up an interview schedule containing a set of established questions based on themes generated from the literature chapters. These questions were used as a guide rather than a strict set of questions, as this allowed the researcher and participants to explore and discuss new themes and ideas as they came forth throughout the interviews (Crowe *et al.*, 2015; Roulston & Choi, 2018) (see annexure 1 for interview schedule). This effectively allowed the researcher to gain more insight and become aware of new information they had previously not been aware of, as supervisors were able to bring up new information relative to their experiences of the readiness of NQSWs for practice.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via a telephonic phone call by the researcher for safety and health measures. This method was sufficient as it allowed for less interviewer bias; however, it also allowed for less contextual information such as body language or non-verbal cues, which was a disadvantage as this sometimes offers valuable information (Vogl, 2013). One interview was conducted via Zoom as per the request of the participant. Some of the interviews were conducted via WhatsApp voice calls, however, the majority of the interviews were conducted over telephonic phone calls, as some individuals provided landline numbers they wished to be called on, and not all participants had reliable internet connections required for WhatsApp calls. During these phone calls and the Zoom meeting, interviews were recorded with a separate unused cellular phone – with the participant's permission – which allowed the researcher to safely store and manage the data collected on a password-protected cellular phone. In addition, these recordings were downloaded to a password-protected computer and stored in a cloud. The interviews were held between 10 July 2021 and 6 August 2021.

4.2.5 Data analysis

Immediately after each interview, the researcher utilised the cellular recording to transcribe the interview, whilst the interview was still clear in the researcher's mind. Transcriptions followed a denaturalised approach in which the focus was on the informational content of what

participants were saying, and all non-verbal cues, accents or other sounds were left out from the transcriptions in order to make it more comprehensible (compare Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Additionally, the researcher also corrected the participants' grammar where appropriate to allow for an easier understanding of the information that was conveyed. It is necessary to note that this was done extremely carefully to ensure that the meaning of what the participant was saying remained the same. This was effective as it helped data analysis occur more efficiently. The researcher made use of thematic content analysis, which according to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Crowe *et al.* (2015), follows a six-phase process, including: familiarisation with the data by reviewing transcripts several times; developing initial codes by examining the data; searching for recurring themes by compiling related ideas; reviewing themes to ensure their relatability and necessity to the study; naming and generating definitions for each theme; and presenting a final report of the data. The interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the participants, with 14 participants preferring English and one participant preferring Afrikaans. Therefore, one participant's narratives were translated from Afrikaans to English whilst completing the data analysis. The researcher has ensured that the correct nuances and meanings were captured whilst completing these translations.

Data verification and trustworthiness was ensured through member checking. At the end of each interview with each participant, the researcher discussed and reflected on the participant's narratives and responses, with the participant. This was effective as it ensured that the researcher's interpretation of the participant's answers could be recorded and reflected accurately in the data analysis report.

The findings from the research will now be presented and discussed in the following sections.

SECTION B

This section will present the particulars and descriptions of the participants who took part and whose views were analysed for the purpose of this research. Some of the participant particulars are presented in terms of numbers, but this does not imply that this study was quantitative in nature. This was done to provide a context of the participants to the reader, which is necessary to gain an understanding of the generated qualitative themes.

4.3   PARTICIPANT PARTICULARS

Individual descriptions of the participants who took part in this study will be presented in the following section, which will look at: how many years the participants have been a supervisor; how many supervisees they currently have; the type of organisation that they work for and the services that they offer. This will allow readers to gain insight into the context of each participant and their answers. Therefore, this information is necessary as the goal of the research is to explore supervisors' views on this topic. Additionally, the information on participants' contexts will allow for the reader to further understand participant narratives and reasoning in the sections discussing and analysing participants' views.

4.3.1   Individual participant particulars

Participants will be described as individuals in accordance to how many years the participants have been a supervisor, how many supervisees they currently have, the type of organisation they work for, and the services they offer.

Participant 1: Participant one previously worked for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offered child protection services. They had fifteen years of experience as a social work supervisor and would oversee between three to four NQSW supervisees at any given point in time.

Participant 2: Participant two works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have sixteen years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee four NQSW supervisees.

Participant 3: Participant three works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have seven years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee three NQSW supervisees.

Participant 4: Participant four works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have seventeen years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee four NQSW supervisees.

Participant 5: Participant five works for a non-government organisation that works in the criminal justice sector of social work, offering diversion services with first-time offenders.

They have one year of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversees three social workers who were NQSW supervisees when they first started at their organisation.

Participant 6: Participant six works for a non-government organisation that offers child protection services. They have fifteen years of experience as a social work supervisor and are not currently overseeing any NQSW supervisees, however, have previously.

Participant 7: Participant seven works in private practice offering social work consulting and external social work supervision to organisations. They have eight years of experience as a social work supervisor and have previously, and currently oversee one NQSW supervisee.

Participant 8: Participant eight works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have seven years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee three NQSW supervisees.

Participant 9: Participant nine works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have eleven years of experience as a social work supervisor and are not currently overseeing any NQSW supervisees, however, have previously.

Participant 10: Participant ten works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have eleven years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee six NQSW supervisees.

Participant 11: Participant eleven works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They have six years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee six NQSW supervisees.

Participant 12: Participant twelve works for a non-government designated child protection organisation that offers child protection services. They had to act as a stand-in social work supervisor for three months, and during that time, supervised six NQSW supervisees.

Participant 13: Participant thirteen works for a non-government mental health organisation that offers services to individuals with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. They have twenty-one years of experience as a social work supervisor and are not currently overseeing any NQSW supervisees, however, have previously.

Participant 14: Participant fourteen works for a residential care facility, which is a non-government organisation that renders services to vulnerable children. They have two years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee one NQSW supervisee.

Participant 15: Participant fifteen works for a non-profit organisation that offers services to older persons. They have three years of experience as a social work supervisor and currently oversee one NQSW supervisee.

4.3.2   Years of experience
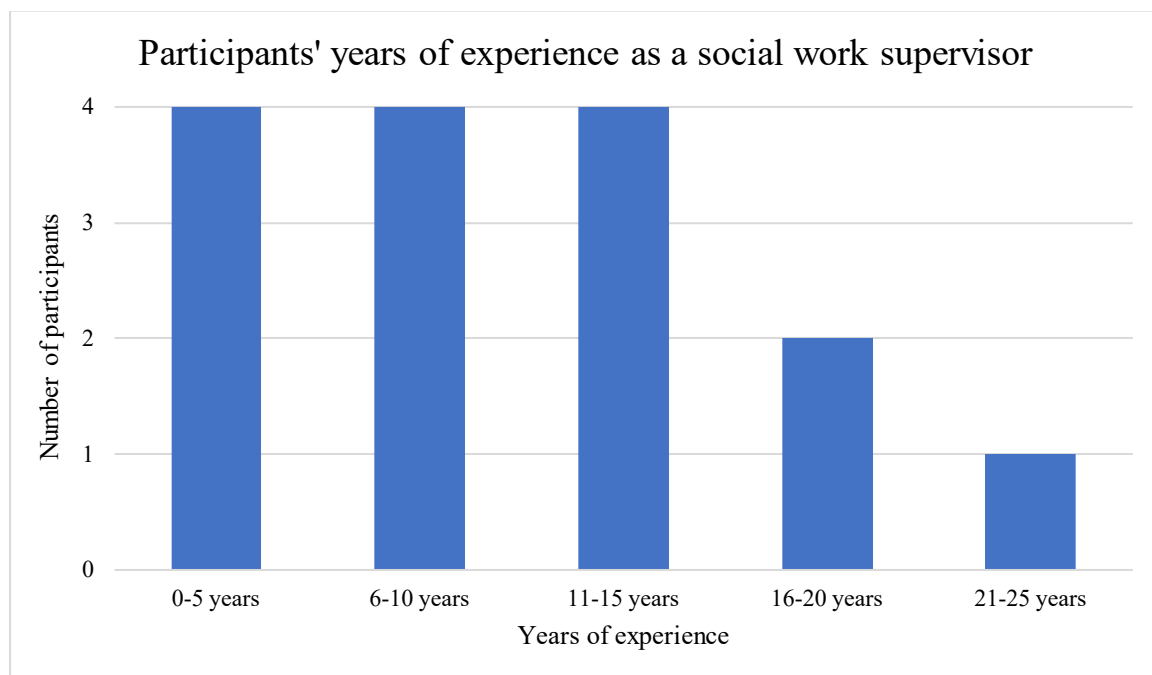
Figure 4.1.   Participants' years of experience as a social work supervisor (N=15)

Social workers can only qualify to be a supervisor after having completed a minimum of five years of experience in the field as a social worker (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). As indicated in Figure 4.1., four participants have between zero to five years of experience, four participants have between six to ten years of experience, four participants have between eleven to fifteen years of experience, and the remaining three have more than fifteen years of experience as social work supervisors. The array in years of supervisory experience was favourable as this provided the researcher with a broad scope of views and experiences amongst various age groups. NQSWs are often young in age (Pretorius, 2020), which can lead to a generational gap between supervisors and their NQSWs, often resulting in misunderstanding and misinterpretation of actions and behaviour (Engelbrecht, 2019b). There is also the consideration

that supervisors with less supervisory experience have higher expectations of NQSWs (Yu *et al.*, 2016), thus, making it preferable to have participants with an array of years of experience, as factors such as supervisory inexperience or generational gaps were outliers in this study.

4.3.3. Percentage of participants practicing in different fields of social work

Percentage of participants in different fields of social work
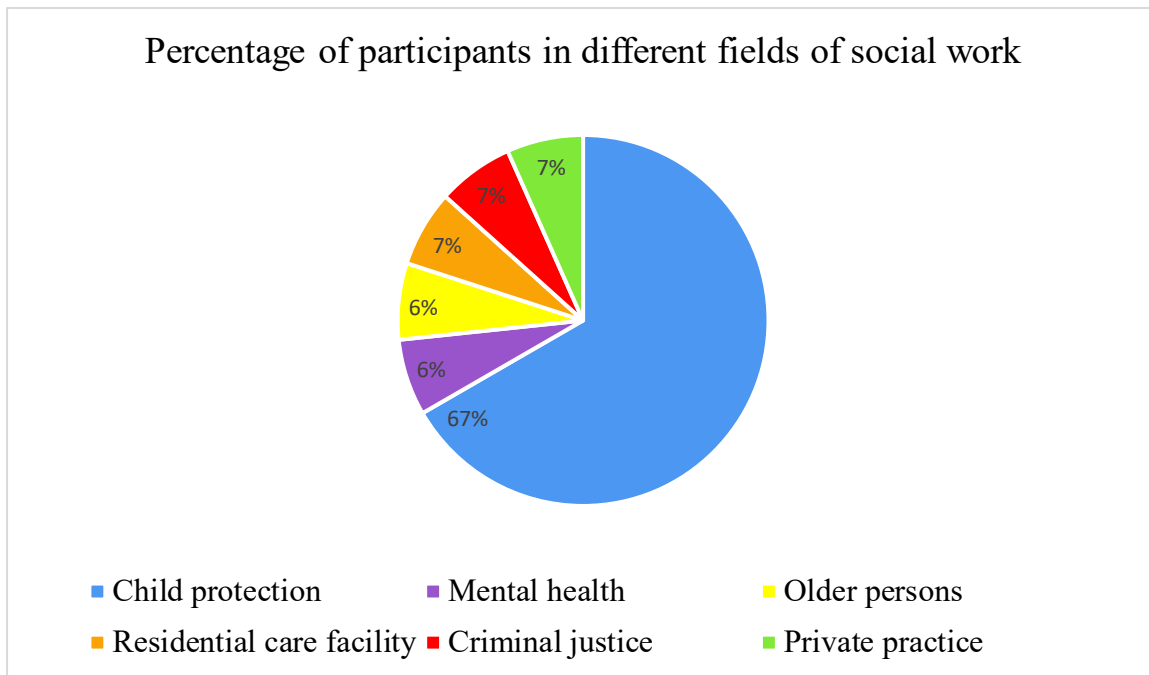
Figure 4.2.   Percentage of participants practicing in different fields of social work (N=15)

As presented in Figure 4.2., the majority of participants are working in the field of child protection, offering child protection services. This concurs with current data, which stipulates that child protection is the largest area of the social work profession in South Africa (Strydom *et al.*, 2017), and also confirms that NQSWs are most likely to enter this profession upon graduating from an HEI, as they are most likely to employ NQSWs. However, this was not entirely preferable, as this meant that many of the participants' narratives would be directed around this field of social work, rather than representing various sectors and finding a typical pattern amongst them all when researching the readiness of NQSWs for practice. It is necessary to analyse this, as the researcher has been made aware of the fact that the data is skewed towards the views of supervisors of NQSWs in child protection, however, still providing some consideration to NQSWs in other fields. It is also important to note that the majority of participants work for non-governmental organisations. Nevertheless, all social workers and supervisors working in public and private sectors of social work are required to be registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions, and must follow all of the

necessary and stipulated norms and standards in order to be able to practice in South Africa; they are thus a homogeneous group of professionals.

SECTION C

This section will put forward the themes, sub-themes and categories that were identified from the data that was collected through the analysis of participants' responses. All quotations have been *italicised*.

4.4 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Five themes and related sub-themes and categories were generated during this research and are displayed in the table below.

Table 4.1.   Themes, sub-themes and categories

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Readiness	Defining readiness	
	Not ready	Practice experience
		HEIs
		Background and personality
	Experience of readiness	
Competencies	The job interview	Willingness to learn
		Passion
		Administrative skills
		Theoretical knowledge
		Driver's license
	Skills and competencies	Legislation
		Theoretical knowledge
		Statutory work
		Practical skills with service users
		Professionalism and conduct
Supervision	Regularity	
	Type	
	Content	
HEIs	Preparation	
	Different HEIs	
Recommendations	HEIs	Practice education

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
		Theoretical content
		External relationships
	Supervisors and social service organisations	Orientation
		Job shadowing
		Supervision
		Working environment
	NQSWs	Willingness to learn
		Theoretical knowledge
		Internships
		Self-care
		Psychometric tests

For the purpose of this research, the researcher decided to use both sub-themes and categories to further divulge into participants responses and provide a structure in which these responses could be quoted, compared, and analysed alongside existing literature. Before the examination of each theme, a table summarising the theme and related sub-themes and categories will be presented. Analyses will be presented in such a manner that identifies the question that was asked to participants, quoting participants narratives, and linking the narratives to related literature to draw inferences. The narratives that were chosen have specifically been selected to accurately represent the specific sub-themes and categories. Within each narrative, key words and phrases have been underlined to highlight the relation to the identified category and theme, thoroughly being discussed thereafter.

4.4.1   Theme 1: Readiness

Participants were asked to describe what an NQSW would look like that displayed readiness for practice, when an NQSW is not ready, as well as were asked to explain how they had experienced the readiness of NQSWs for practice. Readiness is a broad concept without an exact definition, allowing it to often be interpreted differently by individuals, therefore, variations in participants' answers were expected (Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2017; Nathaniel, 2018, Wolff, Pesut & Regan, 2010).

Table 4.2. **Theme 1: Readiness**

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Readiness	Defining readiness	
	Not ready	Practice experience
		HEIs
		Background and personality
	Experience of readiness	

4.4.1.1 Defining readiness

Participants were asked to define what a 'ready for practice' NQSW looked like. All participants provided answers based on their own experiences, thus, allowing for a variety of responses in what participants associated with the term 'ready'. Many participants were able to describe that NQSWs are ready for practice when they are able to display or possess field-related knowledge, professional skills or competencies. However, others focused either on the fact that NQSWs are not ready or that it is impossible to expect them to be ready. Several participants recognised self-awareness and an openness to learning as key indicators of readiness amongst NQSWs. These two concepts were grouped together as they share similarities in NQSWs needing to be self-aware in knowing where they need to learn and grow more as a person and professionally in practice. These narratives are reflected below:

> *Participant 5: "I think someone who is <u>self-aware</u> of the growth that needs to take place ... and I think, just <u>open to continued education and learning</u> throughout the process."*

> *Participant 6: "An <u>openness to learn</u> ... being honest about, you know, where you need to learn, and where you feel confident to continue with things."*

> *Participant 7: "Ideally a social worker who has good <u>self-awareness</u> ... in terms of <u>personal development</u>, because, so much of the skillset within social work is you as yourself, and so the client-worker relationship is your tool, your greatest tool, and actually if your social worker lacks self-awareness, it's actually very scary, what those blind spots can do."*

> *Participant 13: "I also think it is the attitude or the <u>willingness to learn</u>, to participate, and to <u>ask questions</u> and to a certain extent work independently and also <u>take responsibility for their own learning</u> ... If they exhibit those characteristics or traits, that*

they can and will and want to do something, then I feel they are ready because they are open to learning."

It is evident from these narratives that readiness can be seen as NQSWs' ability to be open to learning through displaying self-awareness in acknowledging where they need to learn and enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities further as an NQSW. In theory, *developmental stages of professional identity in supervision*, Stoltenberg *et al.* (1998) and Engelbrecht (2019a) recognise the awareness of strengths and continued learning a social worker can have in the development of their professional identity. Friedman and Kaslow (1986) also identify this learning and awareness in their model that describes six stages in the supervisory process of developing the professional identity of training psychotherapists. However, in both these theories, this level of awareness and responsibility for learning is only expected at an advanced level or final stages of NQSWs' professional identities, whereas in reality, when NQSWs enter the workplace, they are most likely to function on a beginner level of professional identity. Although these narratives confirm this theory of professional identity, they pose the question of whether supervisors are expecting NQSWs to have an advanced level of professional identity formed already upon entering practice, and whether it is realistic to have these expectations or not. These narratives are, however, shared by some participants of Yu *et al.*'s (2016) research, who also believed that NQSWs' preparedness was related to NQSWs being open to learning and recognising where they need to learn more.

The awareness to learn was further recognised with several participants identifying the need for NQSWs to be conscious that they do not have all the knowledge regarding everything when coming into the field:

> *Participant 5: "Not being too, you know, big-headed in terms of <u>thinking that they know everything.</u>"*

> *Participant 6: "To know within confines that <u>you don't know everything</u> at that point ... being open that you don't know all the answers."*

> *Participant 9: "[They] <u>expect to know everything at once,</u> once they enter the child protection field and that's not possible, a person learns as you go along, so <u>there's always something to learn</u> no matter how many months or years you are at an organisation."*

These narratives reflect supervisors' views of NQSWs needing to be realistic in acknowledging that they do not know all the answers or have all the knowledge and having the capacity to

display awareness thereof. A social worker from Yu *et al.*'s (2016) research has also recognised the need for a practice-ready NQSW to be aware and recognise that even with their theoretical knowledge, that there is still plenty for them to learn whilst being in the field. These narratives coincide with the findings of Welch *et al.* (2014), who found that managers of NQSWs did not expect NQSWs to know everything when they first started their job, acknowledging the vastness of the social work field as well as recognising NQSWs as 'beginner social workers' in the field. Nevertheless, even though NQSWs are not expected to know everything, some participants indicated that NQSW are still expected to have some social work skills and knowledge with regard to the field that they are entering:

> *Participant 2: "It's nice to see when they at least have an idea of what you are talking about when you're talking about general things like you know, the developmental approach, assessment, things like that, at least have an idea that it's important concepts, more or less how it works, when its important."*

> *Participant 4: "... if they understand what therapeutic services are, if they are able to render therapeutic services. If they've got basic background about the Acts involved in organisations, and if they can work through processes in terms of the contact, the contract, the services rendered, and the closure of files or the termination with clients."*

> *Participant 15: "So ready for practice would be in my situation, in my environment that I work in, would be understanding and knowing older persons, understanding and knowing the Older Person's Act, which is no. 13 of 2006, and understanding or having had some experience in working with and relating to older persons."*

These narratives reveal that participants believe that readiness encapsulates NQSWs having field-related skills and knowledge of relative service users, legislation, and theoretical approaches. Van Bommel *et al.* (2014) stipulates that once NQSWs have graduated, they should have basic fundamental professional social work knowledge that allows them to enter the profession as novices. This specific knowledge is also known as overt competencies (Parker, 2017). Participants wanting NQSWs to possess such competencies coincides with the belief that for an NQSW to be seen as 'ready', they need to display specific competencies (Austin, 2019; Howard *et al.*, 2015; Nathaniel, 2018). Participants provided varying answers as to what they deemed those knowledge competencies to be, also known as circular reasoning (Nathaniel, 2018). These narratives displayed the desire for 'ready' NQSWs to have professional knowledge, which correlates with employers from Alpaslan's (2019) research who identified

that the knowledge of skills and approaches contributed towards enhancing NQSWs' employability. Employability is often utilised as an evaluation of readiness (Winterton & Turner, 2019), thus, allowing us to recognise a similarity in supervisors expecting 'ready' NQSWs to possess specific professional skills and knowledge to those who think it increases employability.

Other participants recognised the difficulty in NQSWs ever being ready for practice and identified that NQSWs feel overwhelmed when entering the field:

> *Participant 8: "When is anybody really ready?... [It's] overwhelming, nothing to prepare you, it's a completely different thing, the rule books and everything, just goes out of the window. You're not prepared for the clients who scream at you."*

> *Participant 9: "That's actually a difficult question to answer ... If I can think of the new social workers that started in the child protection field, they tend to feel overwhelmed in the beginning because the university didn't prepare them for the child protection field."*

The narratives above recognise that readiness is hard to expect when NQSWs are unprepared for reality and feel overwhelmed and shocked upon entering the field and beginning their first job (Jack & Donnellan, 2010). These participants also expressed the feeling of being overwhelmed as a direct result of a lack of being prepared for practice. These statements correlate with previous research, as participants recognised that NQSWs experience stress and anxiety when entering their profession and starting their first jobs, which is often their experience as they are only starting to shape their professional identity (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Moorhead, 2019). Thus, it appears that there is a consensus amongst supervisors in expecting NQSWs to feel anxious and shocked upon entering the work field, and that this can negatively influence the ideal of ever having an NQSW be fully ready for practice when entering the profession.

Moreover, other participants used this question as an opportunity to immediately describe that NQSWs do not display readiness:

> *Participant 3: "I think ready is the concern."*

> *Participant 8: "It would be difficult for me to describe the positive side."*

> *Participant 10: "By ons definitief nie as sy net klaar gemaak het by universiteit nie."*
> *(Translated: "With us, definitely not if she has just graduated from university.")*

Participant 15: "<u>None of them are ready</u>."

These narratives reflect the view shared amongst four participants that NQSWs do not appear to be ready to enter the profession, thus, making it impossible to associate defining readiness with NQSWs. Unfortunately, a lack in the preparedness of NQSWs is a theme that has been found amongst various authors when interviewing supervisors and employers of NQSWs (Alpaslan, 2019; CWDC Research Team, 2009, Welch *et al.*, 2014). These answers provided the researcher with a basis to further explore within future questions whether 'readiness' can ever be achieved or enhanced by HEIs, supervisors and organisations or by NQSWs themselves, or whether NQSWs were not ready as a result of other factors such as social work education, the HEI that they attended, their background and personality or the supervision that they receive upon entering practice.

4.4.1.2 Not ready

Participants were asked to describe when an NQSW is not ready for practice. Participants provided various answers in which factors such as previous practice placement experiences, the HEI that they attended, and the lack of social work professional knowledge were recognised as determinants in NQSWs not being ready for practice. Some of the narratives reflecting these findings are presented below.

4.4.1.2.1 Practice experience

Participants identified that NQSWs who have had limited practice experience whilst attending their relative HEI are not ready for practice, and that this lack of experience has not prepared NQSWs sufficiently. This is apparent from the narratives displayed below:

Participant 2: "The people who qualified last year, you can see the difference between them and the previous ones because <u>they didn't do practicals properly</u>, and you see that in their work. You can see that they're a <u>little bit more confused</u>. I had one social worker who's like that, she's a nice girl, she's doing her job well, there's nothing wrong, but she would, if I talked to her about a case, cause I always try, you know I want them to think for themselves, so I asked them, "What do you think you have to do?" and she would list me her theory up to first-year probably, but ask her, "But what does that mean in practice? What do you think?" and you can see that <u>she never really had that opportunity</u>

to first practice it a bit, you know she struggled with interviews and things like that in the beginning ..."

Participant 3: "What I've experienced especially with last year and the current [HEI name] fourth and third-year students we are accommodating, is the <u>limited time that they have doesn't prepare them for reality in practice,</u> and that's a big concern. I think especially with the 2020 lot and this year's current third and fourth-year students, they will <u>experience more difficulty in practice</u> than the ones from 2018, 2019 and backwards, because they have <u>limited practical experience</u>."

Participant 5: "We are also supervising fourth-year social work students, and those ones I feel will next year <u>not be ready</u> because they <u>skipped a whole year of practical</u>. So they, I don't think, are in any position to go into the field, and I probably <u>would not want to employ any of those</u>, just from what I've already seen."

It is evident from these narratives that previous practice experience plays a significant role in determining the readiness of an NQSW, and when there is a lack thereof, that this increases the likelihood of an NQSW not being ready for practice. Previous research has found that practice placements are of great value of learning for social work students, and this view is widely shared amongst supervisors, employers and NQSWs (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Clarke, Kirwan & Byrne, 2012; Frost *et al*., 2013; Joubert, 2020; McSweeny & Williams, 2019; Ornellas *et al*., 2019). These educational field placements serve the purpose of teaching NQSWs vital skills that they need in the profession, as well as allow them to experience the reality of social work, which in turn, prepares them better in knowing what to expect when beginning to practice (Clarke *et al.*, 2012; CWDC Research Team, 2009; Welch *et al.*, 2014). During the year 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many South African HEIs had to stop students' practice placements as a result of nationwide lockdowns starting from 26 March 2020 (SAnews, 2020). According to these narratives, this has impacted NQSWs' readiness, as social work students have lost valuable hours in experience that they would typically have gained whilst being placed at an organisation during their undergraduate degree. This lack of experience appears to have negatively impacted their readiness, thus making them less prepared to enter the field and unaware of the realities of the profession. These narratives, therefore, recognise the positive relationship between the time spent gaining practice experience and consequently, enhancing readiness.

4.4.1.2.2 Higher education institutions

Participants also recognised the role that HEIs have in determining the readiness of NQSWs, or the lack thereof, and identified that not all HEIs are effectively fulfilling this role. These views are reflected in the following narratives:

> Participant 2: *"Some of them really do look clueless. I think a lot of them have not really got an idea of what they are going into in practice, and I think some of it might just be the person itself, but I think some have not been prepared that well maybe at university, about what to expect when you're actually in practice."*

> Participant 11: *"I don't want to mention specific universities, but we have seen a trend in some universities when, I've now started not even considering those students to work for us, just because the training is so bad. I think some people or some students when they come, or when they start working for that specific organisation, it's as though they're not even a third-year student."*

> Participant 14: *"I think those who I've experienced not to be ready, have gone to an institution that doesn't put a lot of emphasis on their practical, and doesn't guide them through practical, so that when they get into practice, they have a bit of knowledge of practical, but they haven't really worked hands-on or without, or they've worked with too much supervision, like they're basically just shadowing."*

These narratives highlighted that some participants find that not all HEIs are preparing NQSWs for the reality of the profession, which is either related to the reputation of the HEI or, often as a result of, not emphasising the importance of their field placements. It is believed that HEIs and social work programmes should prepare NQSWs to a satisfactory level that will allow them to enter practice with the required skills and knowledge that will allow them to enter the profession as beginner professionals (Van Bommel *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, to these findings, Alpaslan (2019) and Saitadze and Dvalishvili (2021) respectively found that employers of NQSWs believe that HEIs are not sufficiently preparing NQSWs for the skills that they need to render services in practice. NQSWs learn essential skills both throughout their attendance at theoretical courses and practical placements. This emphasises HEIs' responsibility to ensure that learning standards are not only being met and taught in theoretical courses, but that they are also being matched to the same standard of quality by the experiences social work students

are having at organisations, which can be managed through ensuring that there is a constant liaison between HEIs and placement organisations (SACSSP, 2020).

4.4.1.2.3 Background and personality

Two participants identified that it is the NQSW themselves who determine their own readiness, and that this comes down to either their background or personality, which can be seen in the following narratives:

> *Participant 7: "So much of this to me, in what I've experienced with newly qualified social workers, also depends on what they have gone through in their <u>personal life</u>. I know it sounds so weird, but you know, when you take on a social worker who's come from a <u>very sheltered, well-functioning, lovely, not many turbulent spaces in their background</u>, it's a very, very hard, scary thing to be <u>confronted with the very real, raw realities of South Africa</u>. Whereas when you've had a social worker who <u>has had a little bit more turbulence</u>, but has done some of the work, <u>hasn't had everything necessarily straightforward and handed to them</u>, they've often developed some of that resilience. Your data is sometimes you've had social workers who've gone through rough things but haven't done any of their own work, so they're also having their own <u>personal triggers</u> going on, so again so much comes down to self-awareness, in terms of their own strengths, their own gaps and weaknesses, their own histories, and their own emotional reserve, and so actually, it's a hard one.*

> *Participant 8: "... so some fold, some manage to stay on and break through the barrier, but that comes down to me, to <u>personality.</u> I think if you have a <u>strong, committed, willing to learn, willing to bite the bullet type of social worker</u>, they'll push through. The ones that are a little bit <u>more sheltered</u> and have a completely different idea of what social work might be, are in for a very tough time."*

Further on in their interviews, other participants recognised the role of the background or personality of an NQSW and the way in which it can affect their ability to deliver services effectively:

> *Participant 2: "I'm sometimes quite surprised with the work ethic that they show as young people, who haven't had a proper job before, but I think that's probably also something to do with the <u>person that you are already</u>, <u>your personality</u>, and the <u>drive</u> that you have."*

Participant 9: "... it is a <u>shock for certain new social workers</u>, if they come from a <u>background</u> where, or a community, where there's no gangsterism and abuse, various types of abuse, neglect and stuff. It could be a shock, even traumatic for them, that exposure, if they now have to do a safety assessment when it comes to sexual abuse, allegations, but if it someone from a community where it's not something new, I think it's a little bit easier."

Participant 10: "... om met trauma, kinders te werk wat trauma het ... baie keer, as hulle uit agtergebelewe gemeenskappe self kom, dan voel dit dat dit nog moeiliker is, want hulle het self baie keure ook trauma ervaar, waardeur hulle nog nie gewerk het nie so hulle, hulle kan nie die kind help om sy trauma te verwerk nie... want hulle word gechallenge met goed in kinderbeskerming, wat dalk, want in hulle gemeenskap dit kom mos nou orals voor, ook voorkom en wat hulle nog nie verwerk het nie." (Translated: "... to work with trauma, to work with children who have experienced trauma ... a lot of the time, when they come out of <u>less fortunate communities</u>, then it feels as if it is even more difficult, because they themselves have also <u>experienced trauma</u>, through which they <u>have not yet worked through</u>, so they cannot help the child to process their trauma ... because they are challenged with things in child protection, which possibly, because in their community it appears everywhere, also comes forward and which they have not worked through yet.")

It is apparent from these narratives that participants recognise the role that the individuality of an NQSW plays in ensuring their own readiness, which is formed by and linked to their personality, characteristics, emotional well-being and background. Van Bommel *et al.* (2014) found that employers appreciated and valued personal characteristics more than theoretical knowledge as it was believed that it is easier for NQSWs to learn theory than it is to change an NQSW's personality. Studies have also found a relationship between personality traits and resilience amongst social workers (De las Olas Palma-García & Hombrados-Mendieta, 2017), as well as a relationship between personality and the ability to cope with work-related stressors (Collins, 2008) and the ability to transition more effectively when entering practice (Shergill, 2018). Joseph (2017) also explains that previous personal difficulties or challenges have the potential to naturally enhance social workers' ability to be empathetic to other individuals. Furthermore, Newcomb, Burton and Edwards (2019) identified amongst social work students that adverse childhood experiences could potentially help them in their self-awareness, by taking care of themselves through successfully regulating their stress. This emphasises why

participants' reason that personality or background could be a determinant of whether NQSWs are ready for practice or not, as these both can negatively or positively influence readiness.

4.4.1.3 Experience of readiness

Participants were asked to describe whether, based on their personal experiences, NQSWs are ready for practice. There were many variations in answers, acknowledging that some NQSWs are ready for practice and others are not. As similar to the previous question, remarks with regards to the HEI that NQSWs attended and their personality came forward whilst participants stated whether they believed NQSWs are ready for practice. There were participants who believed that NQSWs are ready, somewhat ready or that most are ready, and some of their relative narratives are displayed below:

> *Participant 2: "Again, I think it's about <u>the person</u> and <u>their commitment</u> to the job. So I would say they have most of the basic knowledge that they need, there are some things that I think are lacking like I said before …"*

> *Participant 5: "I think for the most part they are <u>ready</u>, but like I said, there are gaps and it's not only down to the <u>individual</u>, it comes from the <u>educational background</u> as well."*

> *Participant 6: "No, they're <u>ready</u>, the ones that I've interviewed, no, they're ready, they just come in with an <u>open spirit, want to learn</u>, have a <u>passion</u> for what they want to do, and yes."*

> *Participant 14: "The social worker that I'm supervising now comes from a <u>South African institution</u>, and she did <u>a lot of practice education</u> in her degree, and she's quite <u>ready</u>."*

Contradictorily, there were those participants who believed that NQSWs or the majority of them are not ready for practice:

> *Participant 3: "Compared to what I'm used to getting from <u>[HEI name]</u> a few years back, currently they are <u>not ready</u>."*

> *Participant 9: "<u>No, they are not</u> … So I would say new social workers, but I'm actually specifically talking about social workers that are starting in the child protection field, they are <u>not prepared at all</u>."*

Participant 13: "In all honesty, I think they're <u>not fully ready to practice on their own</u> ... but the majority with whom I've worked, you know, just give them three to six months and they are A for away."

Participant 15: "Okay, so in the environment in which I work, the client base that I work with, <u>they are not</u>."

There were also participants who provided mixed answers or did not want to generalise readiness:

Participant 4: "I would say 60% of the social workers who started off <u>were not ready</u>, 40% <u>were</u>."

Participant 8: "I think it comes down to the <u>person itself</u>, doesn't matter where they study ..."

Participant 11: "Since we've started implementing the screening process to not appoint students from that specific university, it's been very good ... I think it would depend on the type of organisation they work in, but I think child protection is quite specialised in a lot of ways, so I think sometimes just the <u>general training doesn't really prepare [them]</u>."

Within these narratives, it is important to note the different views on whether NQSWs are ready for practice or not. It is also necessary to point out that many participants relayed NQSWs' readiness to be dependent on where they studied or who they are as an individual. There is significant variation in answers which was expected, as 'readiness' is a concept that is interpreted and understood differently amongst all individuals (Nathaniel, 2018; Winterton & Turner, 2019), and global research on this topic has shown differing views amongst different entities (Grant, Sheridan & Webb, 2017; Hunt *et al.*, 2016). Participants in Mackay and Zuffrey's (2015) research acknowledged the need for a person to be driven, passionate and have key characteristics in order to be able to identify with the profession. Kheswa (2019) also noted in their findings that when individuals commit themselves to the profession, that they could relate to and find purpose in the profession. These findings of the influence personality can have on the ability of an NQSW, concur with the narratives of participants who mentioned that a part of readiness comes down to the individual. Furthermore, some of the participants who recognised the influence of educational background on their opinion of readiness, concur with others who believe that HEIs should produce 'ready-made' practitioners (Moorhead *et al.*, 2016), however – as identified in earlier narratives of whether readiness is attainable or not –

this is not realistically likely. The influence of HEIs on readiness was further explored in future questions during the interview.

The main deduction from this theme is that readiness, or the lack thereof, cannot be generalised amongst NQSWs, as everyone interprets and understands readiness differently and, therefore, have different expectations as to what constitutes an NQSW to be ready for practice. It is evident that NQSWs should possess overt competencies to enhance their own readiness when entering practice. As a result of the different interpretations of readiness, NQSW in South Africa are seen as both ready and not ready, depending on participants' criteria as to whether they believe NQSWs are ready to enter their specific field of practice.

4.4.2   Theme 2: Competencies

Table 4.3.   **Theme 2: Competencies**

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Competencies	The job interview	Willingness to learn
		Passion
		Administrative skills
		Theoretical knowledge
		Driver's license
	Skills and competencies	Legislation
		Theoretical knowledge
		Statutory work
		Practical skills with service users
		Professionalism and conduct

Participants were asked to describe what skills, knowledge and competencies they look for when interviewing an NQSW as a potential candidate for a job position, and whether they display or lack these competencies. Competent NQSWs have the required skill set needed to successfully navigate an emotional and challenging profession whilst building professional relationships with service users (Sheppard & Charles, 2017). There are differences in opinions as to what desirable competencies are for NQSWs amongst HEIs and supervisors, as well as amongst supervisors themselves, due to the various needs and differences in social work roles and tasks completed in different areas of social work. Therefore, variations in participants answers were expected (Hodges *et al*., 2014; Winterton & Turner, 2019)

4.4.2.1   The job interview

Participants were asked to describe what skills, knowledge and competencies they look for in an NQSW when interviewing them for an available position, or those they find desirable to make an NQSW more employable. Participants acknowledged that they look for passion, administrative skills, theoretical knowledge, a valid driver's license and the ability to display a willingness to learn.

4.4.2.1.1   Willingness to learn

Similar to what some participants identified in their responses as to what readiness constitutes of previously, several participants also highlighted that they actively seek NQSWs to display a willingness to learn. The representative narratives are reflected below:

> *Participant 7: "One of the things I'm quite big on is their <u>ability to learn</u>, so their receptiveness towards the supervisory relationship but also <u>taking responsibility for their own learning</u> journey."*
>
> *Participant 13: "... <u>wanting to learn, being willing to, or express that they are willing to consult, to seek guidance</u>, and you know, can share what they have been involved with, during their years of studies, during their practicum, and what have they learnt, and if they can actually convey that information to us, for instance during an interview."*
>
> *Participant 14: "I really look for ... someone who is <u>willing to learn</u> and be supervised."*

These narratives elude that the participants look for NQSWs who want to learn and can acknowledge that they need to learn as they are still new to the profession. Fraser, Duignan, Stewart and Rodrigues (2019:162) describe a 'willingness to learn' as: "Being willing to learn new tasks, skills and information; being curious and enthusiastic about things; looking for opportunities to improve or to help; accepting advice and learning from feedback.". Thus, highlighting participants' desire for NQSWs to convey this eagerness and openness to learn as well as how this learning can be enhanced through the supervisory relationship, whilst they are being interviewed. A 'willingness to learn' is not an uncommon desirable trait as Fleming, Martin, Hughes and Zinn (2009) and Pang *et al.* (2019) found that this was a top competency desired by employers in various professions when seeking to hire graduates, thus, concurring with participants' narratives in wanting NQSWs to show competence in this regard.

4.4.2.1.2 Passion

Some participants expressed that they want NQSWs to display their passion for the profession and, specifically, the passion they have for that particular field of social work, both whilst looking at their curriculum vitae and being interviewed for a position at an organisation. These relative narratives are presented below:

> *Participant 5: "I think just <u>passion</u> in terms of what they want to do going forward. Knowing that coming to [organisation] is possibly just a stepping stone, you know, to something else. So, I think just <u>openness in terms of the journey,</u> and it's not just a job that they're kind of just walking into for the sake of having a job."*

> *Participant 9: "... sometimes I can see it with the CV of a new social worker, you can also sometimes see a personality coming through, if the person has a <u>passion for children,</u> some CVs you can't see it, but with some CVs you do."*

> *Participant 11: "We usually look at people's <u>motivation and their energy to do the work and their enthusiasm,</u> and I think with jobs being scarce, we can quickly see people who just want the job because it's a job, versus those who's really <u>passionate about child protection</u> for instance. So that normally comes out in the interview when we say, when we ask them, for example, 'Why did you apply for this job?' or 'Tell us about your experience in your practicals, what did you like, what did you dislike?'."*

> *Participant 13: "The worker must show at least some <u>passion</u> for the work ..."*

It is apparent from these narratives that the participants want NQSWs that are motivated, enthusiastic and passionate about social work, rendering services to different service users, and furthering their learning to improve their skills and abilities as a social worker. These views coincide with stakeholders from YouGov's (2020) study, who stated that they look for social workers who are passionate and want to make a difference. These findings also concur with Welch *et al.* (2014), who found in their research that some managers in Scotland value when NQSWs are motivated and enthusiastic as this enables original and modern outlooks and awareness to be considered amongst team members and in the workplace. Walker (2014) also found that NQSWs, regardless of their working environment, tend to display passion towards their service users, which can be seen as positive as social work can often be a challenging and difficult profession (Ntsoane, 2017; Shergill, 2018). However, Zeng *et al.* (2016) noted that often this passion tends to diminish because of the stressful constraints of the profession. Joseph

(2017) discovered in their research that passion was a great motivating factor for social workers to remain in the profession in South Africa, even with challenges that present themselves whilst working in the profession. Kam (2020) concurrently found that service users are aware of and appreciative of social workers who consider their profession as more than a job, but rather as a passion. Nonetheless, a participant from Alpaslan's (2019) study in South Africa revealed that often NQSWs do not have any passion for the profession. Therefore, it is evident why passion is seen as a necessary trait to enhance NQSWs commitment and motivation to remain in the profession.

4.4.2.1.3   *Administrative skills*

Other participants recognised the amount of administrative work in the social work profession and identified that they looked for NQSWs who are administratively strong. These views are reflected as below:

> *Participant 5: "We do look for people <u>who are administratively very strong</u> because, as we know with social work, there is <u>a lot of administration</u>."*

> *Participant 6: "I think part of it is knowing that in social work, unfortunately, <u>you have to do notes</u>, and you have to do it kind of immediately or the next day, and admin. I think, especially with forensic things, you have to do it sometimes quicker, because <u>you have to do it word for word</u>, and I think their readiness would be that they are <u>able to carry the load for admin</u>."*

> *Participant 10: "... [Ons kyk] administratief hoe sterk hulle is, want dit is gewoonlik waar ons ook probleme kry met, of waar hulle swaar kry, is administratief ... en hulle dink hulle wil met, of hulle het die beroep gekies omdat hulle met mense wil werk, maar daars administratief so baie goed wat hulle moet doen, dat dit baie keer agterwee bly." (Translated: "... [We look at] <u>administratively</u> how strong they are, because that's usually where we also find problems, or where they struggle, is administratively... and they think that they want to, or that they chose the profession because they want to work with people, but administratively, there's so much that they need to do, that it often falls behind.")*

This heavy administrative load was confirmed by some participants throughout the interviews who acknowledged that the workload was a massive jump from university to working in the profession, and that NQSWs struggled with this:

Participant 4: "I think that's the other thing about newly qualified social workers, when they suddenly get a caseload of 140, 190, 230 cases, they cannot cope with it."

Participant 10: "[In] hulle vierde jaar, as hulle hulle prakties doen by a DCPO [designated child protection organisation], het hulle so vyf gevalle. So van vyf gevalle in vierde jaar spring hulle as hulle in kom om by ons te kom werk na sê twee honderd [gevalle]." (Translated: "[In] their fourth year, when they do their practical at a DCPO [designated child protection organisation], they have about five cases. So, from five cases in their fourth year, they jump to, when they come to start working with us, to about two hundred [cases].")

These narratives reflect the heavy administrative duties that NQSWs will have to keep up with when entering the workplace and the desire for NQSWs to manage their administrative duties effectively and in a timely manner. Even though participants find this desirable, research has indicated that the administrative and caseload load is often something that NQSWs struggle with due to the other demands needing their attention in the field (Pretorius, 2020; Skhosana, 2020). NQSW participants from Walker's (2014) research acknowledged how surprised they were with how much administration they had to do as well as how much time it took. Joseph (2017) also found that social workers often had to continue doing administrative tasks after hours at home as a result of the immense workload that they had to manage. It is important to note that the two participants acknowledging the jump in caseload, both work in the child protection field, possibly indicating that this may not be the reality in all areas of social work. It is evident that administration makes up a large portion of the job. It can often lead to working after work hours to stay on top of the workload, thus making participants' desire to employ administratively strong NQSWs reasonable, as it is a requirement that they can keep up with the administrative demands of the profession.

4.4.2.1.4 Theoretical knowledge

Three participants identified that when interviewing potential NQSW job candidates, that they wanted NQSWs to have and display specific theoretical knowledge regarding associated legislation. These narratives are represented below:

Participant 3: "We are all looking for people with experience in the Children's Act, because it takes a lot of time to learn and understand the Act and it makes up a big part

of the work, so to orientate and learn that newly social worker a skill or act that they could actually just learn while they study is taking up a lot of time."

Participant 12: "If we hire a social worker, we will ask them about 'What do they know about the <u>forms of abuse</u>?' ... we would ask, 'Do they have <u>knowledge of the Children's Act</u>?', because I know in their third year some of the universities do the Children's Act, only part of the children's Act, where the abuse and all that is in."

Participant 15: "I would like them to <u>know about the Older Persons Act</u>, that there is one at least. They don't have to know it off by heart, they don't have to know it to the degree I know it, but they should at least know that there is one, and they just have <u>some understanding of what older persons are facing</u> on a daily basis."

However, in contradiction, two other participants indicated that they do not expect NQSWs to know legislation or specific knowledge off by heart as this was something that can be taught to NQSWs:

Participant 6: "For me specifically, <u>we can teach them that</u>. Especially because we are in a specialised field, <u>I don't expect them to, you know, know everything</u> when they come."

Participant 13: "As long as they know about the Act, <u>I just feel that they can learn</u>, because even if you are an experienced social worker in, shall I say child protection, then you, I would still consult the Children's Act on a constant and regular basis, and the same here with this environment, because often you are challenged with different case scenarios and you really have to read up to understand how it can be applied in a specific situation. So, <u>it's not a prerequisite, I feel they can always learn."</u>

These narratives reflect conflicting views on the necessity for NQSWS to have prior in-depth knowledge and understanding of relative legislation. Engelbrecht (2019b) acknowledges that there is a vast amount of legislation that currently influences and impacts social work service delivery, all of which have been formulated in accordance with South Africa's constitution. Similarly, according to the Council of Higher Education (2015), understanding of policy and legislation in South Africa is a requirement that NQSWs are expected to have competence in and have learnt about in their social work education upon graduating from an HEI in South Africa. Agreeing with those who want NQSWs to know legislation, NQSW participants from Grant *et al.*'s (2014) research indicated that knowledge regarding legislation was extremely helpful during their first year of working after graduating. In contradiction and support of the

participants who do not believe it is necessary to have fully known this, managers from Welch *et al.*'s (2014:28) study reiterated that they did not expect NQSWs to "know everything" as continued learning and education would be part of the job. This emphasises not only the opposing views on the necessity of theoretical knowledge on legislation in narratives, but also in global literature.

4.4.2.1.5 Driver's licence

Some participants made comments worth noting of NQSWs not having driver's licenses, which they look for when reviewing NQSWs' curriculum vitae. These narratives are reflected below:

> *Participant 1: "I must be honest, when I have ten CVs in front of me, I interview the people with <u>driver's licenses</u>, and if they don't have a driver's license, they are of no use in the field."*

> *Participant 7: "In all of the positions I've ever looked for, for a social worker, <u>we've needed the social worker to have a driver's license</u>. So, without a doubt, the universities from the first year need to help social workers understand that without a driver's license, you <u>are not actually going to be able to effectively function</u> in the field."*

These narratives indicate that the lack of a driver's license could negatively affect the employability of an NQSW, as that this is something participants actively look for whilst seeking to employ a social worker at their organisation, with one participant acknowledging that they would not even call in an NQSW for an interview if they did not have one. Comparably, Alpaslan (2019) found this to be an issue in South Africa as well, as several employers in their study also indicated that NQSWs do not have driver's licenses and they found this to be an issue as it is needed. Many job advertisements for social workers in South Africa request that applicants hold a valid driver's license, therefore, without this, it appears to negatively impact the chances NQSWs have of being hired for a social work position.

4.4.2.2 Skills and competencies

Participants were asked to list and describe which skills and competencies NQSWs appear to have, and which they lack. There was an array of answers amongst participants, however, some commonalities were found. From participants' answers, competencies that NQSWs have, included their theoretical knowledge and skills in working with service users. Participants' acknowledged that the competencies that NQSWs lack, included their knowledge of policy and

legislation, ability to integrate theory into practice, knowledge of statutory work and related forms and reports, skills in working with service users and professionalism. The narratives displayed below represent these findings.

4.4.2.2.1 Legislation

Some participants acknowledged the lack of knowledge and understanding NQSWs have with regards to legislation and Acts that are used to guide social work service delivery. The narratives reflecting these views are indicated below:

> *Participant 2: "What would be nice is if they knew a little bit more about <u>the Children's</u> <u>Act</u>... so they at least have some kind of idea, that's usually where they struggle the most in the beginning, is just to grasp the whole concept of what the Children's Act is about, on how to do that, <u>to actually put it into practice</u>."*

> *Participant 3: "... [the] <u>regulations, the Acts and the laws of the profession</u>, that's definitely a lack."*

> *Participant 9: "When it comes to <u>the Children's Act</u>, safety and risk assessment training, you know those types of things, the different, the practical things, <u>they don't have any</u> <u>knowledge</u> or experience of it."*

> *Participant 12: "Most of them don't know anything about the <u>legislations</u> or some of <u>the</u> <u>Children's Act</u> ... if they can just concentrate more on the whole part of the Children's Act."*

> *Participant 15: "When they start here, most of them do not even know there's an <u>Older</u> <u>Person's Act</u>."*

A substantial number of participants indicated through these narratives that NQSWs do not have the knowledge or understanding of relative social work legislation and Acts that participants would like them to have. This finding is not surprising, as, similarly to these answers, other research has also indicated that NQSWs do not have a vast knowledge of the legislation necessary for social work practice (Alpaslan, 2019; CWDC Research Team, 2009). NQSWs have also indicated the importance of knowing legislation as participants from Grant *et al.*'s (2014) research rated this as the most helpful knowledge to have in their first year after qualifying. However, Mathias-Williams and Thomas (2002) found that NQSWs do not believe they possess the necessary knowledge regarding legislation for their area of practice. Similarly,

De Jager (2013) also found that NQSWs believed they were not prepared sufficiently regarding the Children's Act 38 of 2005 in South Africa and other legislation. This view is shared with South African employers from Alpaslan's (2019) research. Therefore, this lack of knowledge appears to be a recurring issue arising from South African literature, highlighting NQSWs' legislative knowledge as a current gap that exists in the competencies of NQSWs in South Africa.

4.4.2.2.2 Theoretical knowledge

Two participants recognised that the theoretical knowledge that NQSWs have is a strong competency of theirs. The narratives below present this finding:

> *Participant 2: "Also, the <u>theory is good</u>. I know you do most things, or most of what you do in university is theory."*

> *Participant 15: "... they also have a lot of <u>theoretical background and theoretical knowledge</u>, and they've just learnt all the theory of social work, so that they do have."*

However, two other participants recognised that NQSWs do not have the competency to integrate or implement theory into practice:

> *Participant 2: "But I think it would be nice ... just to help them understand a little bit more how the <u>theory actually provides the basis</u> for what you are doing in practice every day."*

> *Participant 10: "So teoreties, behalwe die Kinderwet, is daar 'n goeie onderliggende teoretiese onderbou, maar die intergrasie van teorie en praktyk is baie ver van mekaar." (Translated: "So theoretically, besides the Children's Act, <u>there is a good theoretical basis</u>, but the <u>integration of theory and practice</u> is very far apart.")*

These narratives display that participants believe that NQSWs do have adequate social work theoretical knowledge, however, that even with this knowledge, that they do not have the competency to know how to implement or use the theory to guide their service delivery with service users. According to the SACSSP (2020), the Bachelor of Social Work degree should ensure that the relationship between theory and practice is clearly acknowledged throughout the theoretical course attended by social work students. In addition to the participants' answers, South African researchers have had similar findings in which NQSWs and employers have indicated that NQSWs struggle with implementing theory they have learnt to guide their

practice when working in the field (Alpaslan, 2019; De Jager, 2013; Joubert, 2020). This puts forth that social work theory and practice integration appears to be a competency that many NQSWs do not have, thus, highlighting a potentially broad issue with social work curricula in South Africa.

4.4.2.2.3 Statutory work

Many Participants indicated that NQSWs understanding of statutory work and related reports appears to be an additional competency that NQSWs do not have. The relative narratives describing this view are presented below:

> *Participant 1: "At the moment, I think, and that's only from my past experience, is the court work and then the Form 38's, they need to practice that a lot, and all the other statutory reports."*

> *Participant 7: "I still find that with young social workers, it is actually in the child protection field, there are a lot of very specific sections and very specific reports, and most social workers haven't seen or even had anything spoken to them in terms of those reports."*

> *Participant 9: "When it comes to the Children's Act, safety and risk assessment training, you know those types of things, the different, the practical things, they don't have any knowledge or experience of it."*

> *Participant 10: "Hulle dra glad nie kennis as hulle by ons kom, oor die learner manual van die safety and risk assessment of children in the field of child protection, ek dink hy het al in 2016, 2017 uit gekom, hulle dra glad nie kennis van dit nie." (Translated: "They do not have any knowledge when they come to us, about the learner manual or the safety and risk assessment of children in the field of child protection, I think it already came out in 2016, 2017, and they have no knowledge about it.")*

> *Participant 12: "The knowledge and skills that they lack, because they need to know about statutory work, I think they lack there. There are some that were exposed in their fourth year to statutory work, but not a lot, so that is the main thing, statutory work."*

These narratives recognise that NQSWs lack competencies to work in the statutory field or complete statutory-related tasks such as forms, reports and assessments. These findings concur with what other research has found, as Alpaslan (2019) and Welch *et al*. (2014) both discovered

in their research that employers and supervisors were not satisfied with the level of competency that NQSWs have in conducting statutory tasks and procedures. The CWDC Research Team (2009) also found that employers were not pleased with the level of NQSWs knowledge of statutory work. NQSWs have expressed similar views in not feeling prepared or knowledgeable in completing statutory forms and processes (De Jager, 2013). The participants' views are somewhat surprising, as statutory work forms a large portion of social work curricula due to it being one of the largest fields of social work specialisation in South Africa (Strydom *et al*., 2017). However, it appears that this still does not prepare NQSWs to meet participants' expectations on what their statutory knowledge should be when entering practice. Risk assessment is an area that both managers and NQSWs respectively in Sharpe *et al.* (2011) and the CWDC Research Team (2009) have identified as an area that NQSWs are not confident in due to their lack of knowledge thereof, furthermore, also confirming participants' views.

4.4.2.2.4 Practical skills with service users

Participants recognised the skills needed to work professionally with clients, and whilst some thought NQSWs have the competency to do this, others did not. These findings are presented below as narratives:

> *Participant 1: "Another thing is <u>assertiveness, difficult clients,</u> I don't know how you can teach a person that, but we do deal with difficult people in the field, and you need to be <u>assertive</u> and be able to <u>manage conflict</u> and all of that."*

> *Participant 2: "So it's also <u>communication</u> and interpreting <u>the feelings</u> of the person who's sitting in front of you, the client, sort of understanding and showing that. A lot of them seem a bit stoic if I can call it that, it's like 'Okay I've got my list, I have my answers, thank you very much, goodbye.', that <u>connection that you need to make with a client</u> is sometimes lacking."*

> *Participant 3: "They have the basic skills of social work but the <u>lack of handling professionally with clients,</u> there's definitely a lack of that and I think that is based on a lack of practical and exposure to the client system and that you can see ..."*

Others recognised that NQSWs do have skills necessary to work with service users:

> *Participant 9: "... they mustn't think they have nothing to bring to the table, because they already have skills that are very important for the child protection field like <u>active</u>*

listening skills, your communication skills, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution skills, empathy, all those values when creating an atmosphere during a session or building a relationship with a client."

Participant 11: "I think a lot of them have a general idea of what they should not be doing in terms of building relationships with clients ... so I think in general they know those basics, well they know more than basic, but for us, that's also the most important, how to connect to clients, how you must treat people."

It is evident through these narratives that there are differing views on the competencies that NQSWs have and bring into their professional relationships and interactions with service users. There are those who have identified a lack of: professionalism with clients; being assertive; having communication skills; knowing how to manage conflict; being able to interpret feelings and connect with service users. Other participants believe that NQSWs have listening skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution skills, empathy and the skills needed for relationship-building. Grant, Kinman and Alexander (2014) and Shergill (2018) have emphasised the need for social work curricula to place importance on emotional aspects of social work to assist NQSWs in improving their competencies in developing emotional intelligence and resilience. Competency in dealing with emotions and building relationships are desired characteristics of NQSWs due to the nature of the social work profession (Sheppard & Charles, 2017) and the effect it has to allow for effective intervention (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2016). Similarly to participants' responses, difficulty with assertiveness and conflict resolution is an area in which many NQSWs are not confident in (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Grant *et al.*, 2014; McSweeney & Williams, 2019; Tham & Lynch, 2019). Furthermore, the importance of communication skills in social work is critical, as individuals have identified communication skills being vital to social work practice (Applewhite *et al.*, 2018; Walker, 2014), thus, emphasising the need for NQSWs to be competent in this regard.

4.4.2.2.5 Professionalism and conduct

Some participants brought up professionalism and conduct as an area that NQSWs lack competence in. The narratives below represent this finding:

Participant 1: "... but from my child protection supervision, there were little things like the language in reports, court etiquette, just general conduct in the workplace, like being late, being absent on a Monday."

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Participant 2: "Yes, that's something else that you notice from the students nowadays, is the communication, they are <u>poor at communication</u>, which is clearly concerning, since our job relies on communication 24/7. There's not really a way to do the job if you can't communicate properly. So most of the complaints that you will get from clients or other professionals are usually something to do with communication, poor communication."

Participant 9: "I can tell you some horror stories about social work CVs and emails that I received as a part of application processes ... But I found that most social workers didn't have a good <u>email writing style</u>, or <u>CV style</u> for that matter."

Participant 13: "In this environment, they don't necessarily have to write reports as in child protection services, but they also have to <u>write letters,</u> and then you really have to take them by the hand, so to speak, in terms of using <u>proper language</u> that's in line with the field in which they are working and then also sometimes, they don't <u>follow through or follow up</u> and then you need to sketch some scenarios to them ..."

These narratives indicate that professionalism in language and communication, email and letter writing, curriculum vitae and conduct in the working environment is lacking amongst NQSWs. These findings concur with Alpaslan's (2019) research, in which employers of NQSWs indicated that NQSWs behave unprofessionally and that their CV writing was abysmal with regards to lacking information and containing language errors. In Rai and Lillis' (2013) research, NQSWs expressed that they had received no guidance from their university in teaching skills in professional writing, lending in them feeling ill-prepared in their professional writing. This is not a surprising finding as several authors have found that NQSWs and student social workers skills in report writing are dwindling (Alpaslan, 2019; Alter & Adkins, 2001; Bates *et al*., 2010; Welch *et al.*, 2014). The need for NQSWs to have competence in communication is essential in the social work profession due to the necessity to record events and situations accurately (Leedham, Lillis & Twiner, 2020), thus verifying participants' concerns in this regard.

From this theme, we can deduce that there is an array of competencies that participants deem desirable when looking at employing an NQSW to work at their organisation. It is evident that NQSWs both lack and have some of these competencies, as similarly identified in the previous theme when defining the readiness of NQSWs. This could be a result of the current gap in social work education in South Africa, in which different HEIs focus on teaching and emphasising

different competencies, thus all producing NQSWs with competencies and strengths, or a lack thereof, in different skills needed for daily social work practice.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Supervision

Table 4.4. **Theme 3: Supervision**

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Supervision	Regularity	
	Type	
	Content	

Participants were asked to indicate whether regular supervision is helpful for NQSWs and could positively influence their readiness, and explain why they thought so. Research has emphasised the need for more regular and intensive supervision for NQSWs (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). Within their answers, participants referenced and reflected on the regularity of supervision, the need for specialised supervision and the content of supervision for NQSWs.

4.4.3.1 Regularity of supervision

Participants were asked whether they thought regular supervision could positively influence NQSWs readiness, in which almost all participants answered yes. One participant was ambivalent. Some narratives are presented below to reflect these findings:

Participant 2: "It helps a lot ... I mean most of them need a lot of <u>guidance</u>, I find that some of them it's not so much about the 'How do I do this?' or 'What's the process I have to follow?', they pick that up quickly. I think it's more the <u>lack of life experience, job experience</u>, so you often have to guide them in their thinking. They will tell you the facts and you have to sort of guide them through that, 'What does that mean? How does that link together? Why is the way that you are thinking not the right outcome for this case? Why can't we rather do this?'."

Participant 3: "Yes, definitely, and it's needed. <u>They need it</u>, because they <u>lack experience</u>, they <u>lack exposure to the reality</u> in the field."

Participant 6: "Yes, absolutely. I think <u>they don't know the field</u>. I think within our area, for instance, because a lot of it is about deception and lies, in terms of sexual abuse, things from the offenders and things like that. I think it's very important that they <u>have a soundboard</u> and that <u>they can reflect</u> upon that ... So, I think it's very important, in terms

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of, seeing when they're <u>coping or not coping</u>, it's very important that they have a lot of supervision in the beginning.

Participant 7: "Definitely, I don't know if supervisors are always well-positioned to mentor newly graduated social workers, but newly graduated social workers ... really need quite an <u>intensive, very empowering style of supervision</u>, which not all supervisors can do, but when you have supervisors who can do it, it's a <u>make or break</u> of a social worker. If they get the right kind of infrastructure and <u>support</u> ... you really can set a social worker on a phenomenal trajectory or can crash and burn really very intensely and too quickly, sadly."

Participant 11: "Yes, I do think so because I've experienced it. At [organisation name] we've got a very good supervision model, and I think I've seen colleagues in other organisations, who don't necessarily have the same supervision structure ... we've appointed quite a few from one of the other organisations and the one thing they do tell us is how much better they feel about their work and how much more <u>supported</u> they feel because of our <u>regular supervision</u> and the <u>content of our supervision</u>. So I think it really is important that <u>they don't feel alone</u>."

Participant 14: "For sure, I think supervision is honestly the only thing that can prepare newly qualified social workers in the field that they've decided to get involved in ... we have such a broad career field that you could never specialise in everything, so once you get into a field, <u>you need an expert to kind of guide you</u> on that."

As displayed in the above narratives, all participants agree that regular supervision is both helpful and needed for NQSWs entering practice due to aspects such as needing guidance, having a lack of exposure and experience to the reality of the profession, having a lack of life experience, requiring additional support and for supervisors to assess whether they are managing or coping in the field. It is a requirement for NQSWs to receive regular supervision as stipulated by DSD & SACSSP (2012) in the Supervision Framework for Social Workers in South Africa. Many researchers have concurrently indicated and found similar findings in acknowledging that the support and guidance NQSWs need and want, can be provided through effective and regular supervision sessions with supervisors (Battaglia & Flynn, 2020; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Grant *et al.*, 2017; Parker, 2017; Roulston *et al.*, 2018; Welch *et al.*, 2014; Walker, 2014). There is also overarching support as to supervision being pivotal in the development of NQSWs professional identity, thus only further confirming participants

views in understanding the need and regularity for supervision (Auxier *et al*., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Gibson *et al*., 2010; Hafford-Letchfield & Engelbrecht, 2018; Moorhead, 2019; Levy *et al*., 2014; Roulston *et al*., 2018; Stoltenberg *et al*., 1998).

All of the participants acknowledged the assistance that regular supervision could have in improving NQSWs' readiness, however, supervisors' answers were varied as to how often these sessions should occur:

> *Participant 1: "They need to have it weekly and structured, and then maybe once a day just an informal discussion."*

> *Participant 6: "Me personally, would say, once a month for a formal supervision, but I think daily check-ins."*

> *Participant 9: "At [organisation name], in our supervision policy, for the three-month probation period it is stipulated that every second week a new social worker must get structured individual supervision, but if a new social worker feels they want more than two structured supervision sessions per month, or for three months, then that can also be arranged because, at the end of the day, it's all about what are the needs of the social worker."*

> *Participant 14: "I think when you first start, you should be checking in every day. In that first week and the first month, there should definitely be an everyday guidance for newly qualified social workers. But then after that, it can become once a week, and then once every second week, and then ideally getting to a place of twice a month and then after about a year or two, depending on their supervision goals and what they've set out to achieve, then you can move to once a month you know. But I think initially you need so much support."*

These narratives reflect the varying viewpoints participants have in how often they believe NQSWs should be receiving supervision. According to DSD and SACSSP (2012), NQSWs in South Africa are mandated to receive supervision fortnightly during their first year of practice. Unfortunately, this is not always the reality, as NQSWs have indicated and studies have found that they do not receive supervision as frequently or regularly as they would like to or should be receiving it (Beddoe *et al.*, 2020; CWDC Research Team, 2009; De Jager, 2013; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Gallop, 2018; Parker, 2017; Pretorius, 2020). With the mention of some participants using phrases related or similar to 'daily check-ins', the researcher was able to

identify that several other participants also recognised other forms of this, also known as having an 'open-door policy', and used this to describe a type of supervision they have with NQSWs. These narratives are presented below:

> Participant 9: "... have an <u>open-door-policy</u> because my office is at the branch, and the two new social workers know that <u>they can come to me at any time if they feel uncertain of something</u>, as well as I see them twice a month, for structured individual supervision, but it doesn't mean that if they are unsure of something outside that structured supervision session they can't approach me, they know they can."

> Participant 12: "... [to have] an <u>open-door policy</u> on a regular basis, or on a daily basis or on a weekly basis, will definitely help them, because you can't just let them function on their own."

> Participant 13: "I'm also a strong believer in an <u>open-door policy</u>, especially in the beginning phase as well. Apart from the set, once a month, also an open-door policy."

However, one participant completely disagreed with this approach:

> Participant 14: "I think a lot of supervisors think that <u>'open-door supervision'</u>, <u>which is a terrible term</u>, but it's definitely happening, just sort of 'Pop into my office, let's chat about this, that's cool, carry on.'. <u>That's not enough</u> either. You can't be saying that I'm having supervision with my newly qualified social worker, you know, every second day, but meanwhile, it's just the supervisee popping into the office frantically trying to figure out something."

It is apparent that several participants believe that having an "open-door policy" is a form of supervision to have with NQSWs. However, from their narratives, it can be seen that this is done above and beyond set and structured supervision sessions, which occur either fortnightly or monthly. In their research, Wynne (2020) found that social workers associated an open-door policy positively, however, they emphasised that this cannot replace formal, structured supervision, nor even be considered as a form of supervision. Similarly, Chibaya (2018) agrees with this in stipulating that an open-door policy consists of shorter conversations and discussions that do not allow for reflection or the assessment of a personal development plan of an NQSW. Thus, the participant who acknowledged that an open-door policy is not adequate for NQSWs concurs with these researchers in emphasising that an open-door policy does not

equate to effective supervision aimed at assisting in the development of NQSWs or in enhancing their readiness for practice.

4.4.3.2   Type of supervision

With all participants recognising the importance of supervision with NQSWs, many participants also identified that the supervision offered to NQSWs is a much more specialised and intensive style of supervision than that offered to more experienced social workers. Participants' responses are presented in the narratives below:

> Participant 2: "You also have to adjust your supervision quite a lot, your <u>focus of supervision is quite different to those of the social workers who have more experience</u>, because you actually have to, and it's sometimes a challenge for the supervisor, to remember that the things that I have forgotten, <u>they still need to learn</u>, things that I don't even know how I know it and you kind of assume that everybody knows it if you're in the job."

> Participant 7: "Newly graduated social workers really need quite an <u>intensive, very empowering style of supervision</u>, which not all supervisors can do, but when you have supervisors who can do it, it's a <u>make or break</u> of a social worker. If they get the right kind of <u>infrastructure and support</u> … you really can set a social worker on a phenomenal trajectory, or they can crash and burn really very intensely and too quickly sadly."

> Participant 8: "I try to really, just get them settled, just <u>take out all that fear</u> and all those things out of them, and just try and <u>motivate</u>. You've just got to <u>invest</u>."

> Participant 9: "But it can be overwhelming. <u>It's not the type of supervisor-supervisee relationship that you have with someone that is a year plus at the organisation</u>."

> Participant 12: "That's why, newly social workers, it <u>mustn't be an inexperienced supervisor</u>, it must be someone that's been long in the field, that will be <u>good for their development</u>."

It is evident from the above narratives that participants recognise that the type of supervision NQSWs need is different from the supervision provided to more experienced social workers, and that it is less than desirable for inexperienced supervisors to provide this supervision because of NQSWs' unique learning and developmental needs. DSD & SACSSP (2012) stipulate that supervision consists of consultation with more experienced social workers and

that NQSWs can only start receiving this style of supervision after three years in the field. These participants' views are shared with the research findings from Cloete (2012), Engelbrecht and Ncube (2021) and Welch *et al.*'s (2014) respective research, which all indicate that NQSWs require supervision that is more attentive to their specific needs and development. However, many NQSWs have indicated that they are not satisfied with the content or the type of supervision that they receive (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Grant, 2017). This highlights the mismatch that exists between supervisors realising that NQSWs need a more specialised type of supervision, however, in reality, not always being able to provide or offer this type of supervision to NQSWs due to their own workload demands.

With this more focused and in-depth approach that supervisors need to take when conducting supervision with NQSWs, several participants referred to this style as the 'mothering' or 'hand-holding' approach that is needed when an NQSW first starts their job:

> *Participant 1: "So there's little things to work on when they start working because they come from being a student, into being a professional I found, so you almost have to, you have to mother them into being on the ball."*
>
> *Participant 5: "I think their understanding of supervision lacks. They feel that their supervisors are there to counsel, handhold and spoon-feed through the working process. They don't always have the ability to work independently from the get-go, which obviously we understand and that comes down to professional maturity... having three or four [NQSWs] starting around the same time, feeling like you're at a kindergarten ..."*
>
> *Participant 8: "I think once you start investing into the social workers from the beginning, and just try and make them calm, you've got to be a mum and a dad, you've got to be everything as a supervisor, it's really psychology 101, and even further than that you've got to really be on top of your game within their first year, I don't allow them to do anything without verifying it with me... it's probably the year where they will make the most mistakes if possible or if they can."*
>
> *Participant 9: "With a new social worker, you really have to nurture and provide the extra support, you know, because otherwise that person will feel so overwhelmed and discouraged, because everything is all so new to that social worker."*

With the phrases and specific terms mentioned in these narratives, it is apparent that participants associate supervision and their relationships with NQSWs once they enter the field, as fulfilling

a nurturing role – similarly to how a mother would have to look after a child, and how a child is dependent on its' mother to help meet their needs. The association of NQSWs with such phrases is not uncommon, as similarly, Moorhead (2019:6), McSweeney and Williams (2019:365) and Hunt *et al.* (2016) also found NQSWs to describe themselves in a child-like manner, using phrases such as "kindergarten", "baby social worker" and "fly the nest" when describing their abilities or perceived reputation upon entering practice. This elicits the picture that many NQSWs see themselves and are seen as naïve and dependent when entering practice, and to be able to survive in the social work profession, they need a supervisor who can guide them through their initial transitional period. Therefore, these findings emphasise the requirement for NQSWs to be sufficiently supported by supervisors during this transitional period in their work lives to assist in enhancing their readiness to eventually become independent practitioners.

4.4.3.3   *Content of supervision*

Throughout their answers, many participants recognised the supportive function of supervision that needs to be fulfilled and addressed during supervision sessions with NQSWs. These views are presented in the narratives below:

> *Participant 7: "I've been very grateful to be a supervisor to a young social worker because I can step into that place and mentor and support and coach and nurture and ensure that there's proper self-care. But the big fear is whether that's happening in an organisation where the supervision isn't very good or isn't very intensive or almost non-present."*

> *Participant 8: "... apart from the work, I really invest into the emotional side of the social worker as to support networks which are family and make sure that they take their leave regularly, make sure that they understand what's going on"*

> *Participant 10: "Ek begin gewoonlik daarmee, net emosioneel 'Waar is jy?', sou jy depressie of sou jy iets agterkom dan moet ek verywys, dan kan en mos nie self daaraan aandig gee nie, maar net herkenning te gee vir hulle gevoelens. Baie keer, ook van stres en hoe om al die stress wat saam met die beroep gaan te kan hanteer, en met die druk wat hulle ervaar met statûtare datums. Op die ou end, begin ons altyd [supervisie] daar − well-being, personal well-being en dan gaan ons oor na die werk toe." (Translated: "I usually start with that, just emotionally, 'Where are you at?', should one notice*

depression or something then I need to refer them, then I cannot give attention to that myself, but just to <u>acknowledge their feelings</u>. Many times, also stress and how to <u>manage all the stress</u> that comes with the profession, and the <u>pressure</u> they experience with their statutory dates. In the end, we always begin [supervision] there – <u>well-being, personal well-being</u>, and then we switch over to work.")

Participant 14: "... supervision is crucial because you are a person dealing with <u>secondary trauma</u> on a day-to-day basis, you need to learn a new skill and also most of the newly qualified social workers, this is their first job or their first social work job, and there's a lot of responsibility tied into that, so the <u>three functions of supervision are crucial</u>, and so if you don't have that, you're not developing, and it can be so overwhelming, and I think that's why a lot of people leave the field to be quite honest."

Participant 15: "Supervision is not only checking the cases and the casework, but there's an element of supervision which also looks at the <u>mental health of the supervisee</u> ... I think right now it's even more important because all of us are feeling kind of tired and burnt out, and worried and concerned and nervous and all of that. I think a <u>burnt-out</u> social worker or a <u>tired</u> social worker, or an <u>anxious</u> social worker is not going to give the best, best, best, best service to my older persons. So that's where I focus, a lot of energy."

Unfortunately, some participants admitted that they do not have the time or availability to always provide the emotional support that NQSWs seek from supervision sessions with their supervisor:

Participant 5: "I do have one social worker currently that is not really understanding, you know, the supervision and feels that the <u>supervisor is the counsellor</u> and needs to provide an <u>extreme level of support</u> which is not always, either necessary or able to because of <u>the amount of staff that the supervisor needs to oversee</u>."

Participant 10: "Ek het op hierdie stadium twaalf maatskaplike werkers, drie GOBs, en ses, sewe, agt, nege, tien hulpwerkers om vir supervisie te gee. Jy kan mos nou dink, ek sou my werk beter kon gedoen het as ek minder supervisies gehad het om voor te gee." (Translated: "At this stage I have twelve social workers, three GOBs, and six, seven, eight, nine, ten social auxiliary workers whom I have to give supervision to. You can think, I would <u>be able to do my job better</u> if I had less supervisions to provide.")

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Participant 14: "Everyone has quite a <u>high caseload, and sometimes supervisors aren't able to just really, even though they <u>might be doing all the functions of supervision, maybe not really listening and really treating it as such an important role to the supervisee</u>."

Upon reading these narratives, we can distinguish that some participants are aware of the supportive function of supervision and the need to ensure that this function is especially fulfilled during supervision sessions with NQSWs. DSD and SACSSP (2012) stipulate that supervision sessions with NQSWs should address all three supervision functions known as administrative, supportive and educational functions. The goal of the supportive function is to activate emotional capabilities that will enhance NQSWs competency for effective service delivery (Engelbrecht, 2019b). Research has acknowledged the need for the supportive function to be fulfilled when conducting supervision with NQSWs (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). Unfortunately, the reality is that many supervisors are unable to fulfil this function due to their own workload, and thus rather spend time focusing on administrative and managerial functions (Chibaya, 2018; Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Grant, 2017; Parker, 2017; Walker, 2014). These findings thus concur with some of the narratives reflected in this research, that due to supervisors' own demands and workload, that they are not always able to provide the emotive and supportive style of supervision that is needed by NQSWs when they first enter to practice, that would ultimately positively influence their readiness for practice.

From this theme, we can deduce that supervision is a crucial factor in the development of an NQSW and that this can be achieved by providing NQSWs with regular and specialised supervision that addresses all three functions of social work. It is necessary to emphasise the supportive function of supervision with NQSWs to assist them in this transitional period and in the development of their professional identity. Unfortunately, the reality is that NQSWs do not always receive the type of supervision that they need as a direct result of supervisors' demanding workload and, therefore, not being able to provide it.

4.4.4   Theme 4: HEIs

Table 4.5.   Theme 4: HEIs

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
HEIs	Preparation	
	Different HEI's	

Participants were asked to explain what their thoughts were on HEIs and whether they are preparing NQSWs sufficiently enough, what HEIs are preparing them sufficiently for, whether they notice differences between NQSWs who have studied at different HEIs and whether this influences their decision to employ an NQSW. The Council of Higher Education (2015) stipulates that South African social work curricula should prepare NQSWs to start practice as 'ready' and be able to do so in various types of social work settings.

4.4.4.1 Preparation

Participants were asked to describe whether HEIs are preparing NQSWs sufficiently to enter practice. Some participants identified that HEIs are preparing them sufficiently whilst seven participants indicated that HEIs are not. Participant narratives reflected that HEIs are doing some things right, however that this could also be dependent on the specific HEI. The narratives are indicated and discussed below.

There were those participants who responded that HEIs are preparing NQSWs sufficiently:

Participant 1: "Yes, just the little things that I mentioned, but overall, they are ready for practice."

Participant 2: "I think they're doing a great job, I think they're doing the best they can because as I've said it's impossible really to do it all and you can't ever really prepare everyone."

Participant 6: "Yes, you know, I think so, I do."

Participant 13: "I think universities do try their utmost, I think it's extremely difficult in this time now, with some organisations like we are working remotely, and placement opportunities also for students, so that becomes a bit tough in this time in which we are functioning."

However, there were also participants who expressed that the did not believe HEIs were preparing NQSWs sufficiently enough:

Participant 3: "No, that's my honest answer."

Participant 9: "The thing is I'm out of touch with what they are at the moment teaching social work students, but the thing is for the child protection field, I don't know how they are prepared, I don't believe they are prepared as they should be for entering the child

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protection field ... I think in my time there was maybe less preparation for a social worker going into the child protection field. I think maybe universities are trying now to do something, that little bit extra, to prepare a social worker, probably with the Children's Act or something like that, you know, basic stuff. But I don't think it's enough for someone walking into the door, because it is a shock for certain new social workers."

Participant 11: "I think because of how communities have changed over the years, in terms of the intensity of problems and challenges in communities and with clients, and also the way that children have changed over the years and the challenges they face, I think, more specialisation would be needed to prepare students, because a lot of times, students, even if they come from difficult areas, they are quite shocked when they actually have to work with the clients that they'd usually only see in their neighbourhoods for instance. So I think there might be some lack in the training."

Participant 15: "Not for my field. I think, like I've said before, it seems like, and most of my newly qualified that have started here, they have had practical experience with children. It seems like the university, I don't know if it is that the university sways that way, or if it's maybe their choice, because I think all of us started out thinking that's where we wanted to go. So I'm not sure if it's the fault of the university, or if it's the social work students themselves that are choosing to do that, but it seems like I haven't had anyone come and tell me 'Oh, they did an apprenticeship or a practical at an old age facility'. It seems like that's not an option."

Furthermore, there were participants who explained that NQSWs' preparedness was dependent on either the HEI that they attended or their practice placement and the experience they gained from that, as well as indicated that HEIs only prepare them for fifty percent of the work:

Participant 14: "I think some are, for sure, I don't think its universal, I don't think every institution is, and I think also to be honest, it depends on where you get placed practically too, and where your practice education is, you know, who you get as a practice supervisor, so it is quite dependent on your supervisor and your institution's supervisor, because if you have a supervisor whose just letting you do whatever you want and trying to get through your university work and tick all your fields that you need to, you know, then you're certainly not going to be ready. But if you're put into practice education and you have a good supervisor and you know, you're getting what you need, then I think you could be ready, but it's very dependent, and that's not good."

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> *Participant 12: "I think only half of the work, 50%, they prepare them for, but the <u>other</u> <u>50% they don't prepare them for.</u>"*

As reflected in the above narratives, variations in participants' answers were expected as there are various factors that contribute to how well an HEI prepares NQSWs, such as the curricula and the emphasis placed on various learning outcomes, students' field placements and their supervisory experiences, as well as the quality of education from the specific institute that they attended. Current social work curricula are generic to allow for an overall preparation of NQSWs to work in various different environments and, therefore, does not always divulge into specialised fields, requiring supervisors and social service organisations to teach NQSWs more field-specific knowledge (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021). This might indicate why participants believe that HEIs are not preparing NQSWs sufficiently, as they find that they still need to teach NQSWs upon entering practice. NQSWs have expressed feeling both unprepared and ready as a result of their education. Those who expressed that HEIs were not sufficiently preparing NQSWs, concur with findings from De Jager (2013) and Tham and Lynch's (2019) respective studies, who found that NQSWs did not feel adequately prepared by their training institutions to enter the working field. In contradiction and support of other narratives, other research conducted by Grant (2017), Grant *et al.* (2017) and Joubert (2020) has found that the majority of NQSWs do feel generally prepared by their social work education for practice. These differences in views, across the globe, emphasise the vast number of influences and factors that need to be further divulged into when understanding readiness, as this is what indicates how different individuals perceive HEIs in preparing NQSWs adequately (Moriarty, Manthorpe, Stevens & Hussein, 2011; Saitadze & Dvalishvili, 2021).

Participants were then asked to describe what they thought universities were doing well in their training of NQSWs. Similarly, to the previous question on what competencies NQSWs have, several participants indicated that they thought HEIs were sufficiently preparing NQSWs with regards to theoretical preparation, however, that they were not teaching them how to implement this theoretical knowledge into practice. These findings are reflected in the narratives below:

> *Participant 2: "I think they give them a very <u>good theoretical background</u> which we don't really always have the time to really give them, and also make them aware of it, you know, 'Do you realise you are using this model, this perspective?'. So that is a good thing."*

> *Participant 4: "I think the <u>theory</u> is there, but I don't think they understand <u>how to do it</u> <u>in practice</u>."*

> *Participant 9: "Probably when it comes to the approaches to use, you know, <u>theoretical</u> <u>approaches</u> …"*
>
> *Participant 10: "So teoreties, behalwe die Kinderwet, is daar 'n goeie onderliggende teoretieses onderbou, maar die intergrasie van teorie en praktyk is baie ver van mekaar." (Translated: "So theoretically, besides the Children's Act, there is a <u>good underlying theoretical basis</u>, but <u>the integration of theory and practice are far apart from one another</u>.")*

In contradiction, one participant thought that HEIs were excelling in teaching NQSWs how to incorporate theory into practice:

> *Participant 14: "I think what <u>they are doing right</u>, is that they've incorporated practice and theory, and I think that's imperative."*

It is apparent from these narratives and previous narratives that participants believe that HEIs are proficient in providing NQSWs with good theoretical knowledge and background, however, there were conflicting views on whether they were teaching NQSWs how to implement this learnt theory into everyday practice. Managers from the research by Welch *et al.* (2014) have expressed similar views in being satisfied with the theoretical knowledge NQSWs bring into the working environment, however, along with Alpaslan (2019) and students from Saitadze and Dvalishvili (2021), are less satisfied with the way HEIs are preparing NQSWs to implement theory into daily practice. NQSWs have also expressed that their social work education was too theoretically orientated, and that this left them feeling unprepared for practical aspects when entering the workplace (CWDC Research Team, 2009), as well as having expressed the difficulty they have in linking the theory that they have learnt into practice (De Jager, 2013; Joubert, 2020). In contrast, NQSWs have also identified that one of the tasks they feel most confident in is integrating theory into practice (CWDC Research Team, 2009). These opposing views of participants may emphasise that whilst HEIs prepare NQSWs theoretically, that only some of them are teaching NQSWs how to use this theoretical knowledge to guide their service delivery and practice. This is resulting in an incongruence amongst the competencies of NQSWs, with those who lack these skills, being seen as less ready for practice.

Some participants referred to HEIs preparing NQSWs well by enabling and motivating NQSWs to think holistically, by teaching them to be empathetic towards diverse groups and individuals in society. These views' are exhibited in the narratives below:

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Participant 10: "Ek dink [HEIs] leer ons om wyer te dink, om holisites te kan dink, en om empatie te hê vir die samelewing en om te kyk na samelewing as 'n geheel." (Translated: "I think [HEIs] teach us to think more broadly, to <u>think holistically</u>, and to have <u>empathy for society</u> and to look at <u>society as a whole</u>.")

Participant 11: "I do think that most universities do try and teach the students that it is a difficult, or the <u>different cultures</u> that we are working with, we need to be very <u>sensitive to the past</u>... and I think human rights in general, there's more being taught to be more <u>tolerant to people who are different to you</u>."

These narratives reflect the respect and empathy for others', participants believe HEIs are instilling in NQSWs, enabling them to work effectively and sensitively with diverse groups and individuals in society, as well as to be aware and knowledgeable of past injustices to members of society. Stanley *et al.* (2020) believes that the practice of empathy is crucial in strengthening the professional relationship as it allows for a social worker to enforce a client-centred approach when working with service users. Social workers and social work students have indicated the importance of being empathetic as well as practicing the value of having a non-judgmental attitude and how crucial it is to develop this skill for social work practice (McSweeney & Williams, 2019; Scholar *et al.*, 2014; Yu *et al.*, 2016). Melendres (2020) puts forth that the social work profession should be characterised by practicing cultural humility in ensuring that social workers are committed to showing understanding, learning about and being respectful to service users' past experiences. The Council of Higher Education (2015) requires the current Social Work curriculum to be continuously reviewed to incorporate and acknowledge current issues, as well as recognise the influence historical events have had on groups and individuals as well as the challenges that they face today. HEIs are clearly aware of the need for this within South Africa's diverse population and their past experiences, as evidenced by these narratives stating that NQSWs are well trained to think in a holistic and respectful manner, positively influencing their readiness for practice.

Some participants commended HEIs' training and preparation of NQSWs in having good report writing skills, however, emphasised that this is very dependent on the specific HEI and its respective training:

Participant 7: "Particularly with [HEI name], <u>I can't apply this to all universities</u>, but [HEI name], I have this assumption that they have trained their social workers well with <u>report writing</u> and coping with report writing deadlines."

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Participant 11: "Some universities are excellent, others pathetic. There's almost, for me, there's almost not an in between and I think that's, for me, that's the biggest lack, because some, I'm still trying to figure out <u>how to teach people to write good reports if they didn't get used to it throughout their training</u>."

Participant 12: "I think the <u>report writing</u>, they help them a lot with the report writing… especially [HEI name]."

Participant 15: "So the <u>report-writing</u>, I must say I've got some very good report writers, they write correctly and they write well. So it seems like that they do well. That's it."

These narratives indicate that participants are satisfied with the level of competence NQSWs have in their report writing skills, and credit this to the HEI training that they received, however, that this is not universal amongst all HEIs in South Africa. Concurrently with these narratives, research has also found NQSWs and supervisors to be satisfied with the manner HEIs are preparing NQSWs in their report writing skills for practice (Grant *et al.*, 2014; Hay *et al.*, 2017; Saitadze & Dvalishvili, 2021; Yu *et al.*, 2016). Contradictorily, other researchers have found that employers and supervisors of NQSWs were not satisfied with their report writing (Alpaslan, 2019; Welch *et al.*, 2014). These contrasting views allude to what some of the narratives stipulated in that some HEIs are training NQSWs well for this, whereas there are others that are not, thus allowing for the incongruence amongst NQSWs' skills in report writing. These narratives enabled the researcher to lead into her next questions regarding the differences in quality of training amongst HEIs in South Africa which further confirmed this view.

4.4.4.2 Different HEIs

Participants were asked to describe whether they found a difference in readiness amongst the NQSWs that studied at different HEIs in South Africa, and if they did, whether this would influence their decision to employ an NQSW from a specific HEI.

Almost all participants acknowledged that they can notice a difference between emerging NQSWs from different HEIs in South Africa. Participants were asked to describe these differences, in which concepts of NQSWs' ability to take initiative, skills in report writing and administration and their previous practice experience were indicated. Some of their answers are reflected in the narratives below:

Participant 2: "[Differences in] I think the general development of the student. It's not just about theoretical knowledge, it's also about their understanding at least of what they understand from what the practice is, you can also see a difference, and <u>mostly in the thinking</u>, you can see, <u>some of them were encouraged to think more</u> than others, where others were more like 'Just get the degree and get out my hair.', whereas some you can see that the attitude of the training institute sort of, carries over to the student and we see that difference."

Participant 4: "Yes, definitely. [Differences in] <u>report writing</u>, as well as <u>coping</u> and <u>taking initiative</u>, in terms of, 'If I'm unsure, I go and I look up in literature what it says about it, and I come and I discuss it with my supervisor.' instead of waiting for my supervisor just to say 'This is now what you need to do.'."

Participant 5: "Oh yes definitely. I think just in their <u>overall knowledge</u>, the <u>level of initiative</u>, I think that they take. Just in terms of the <u>standard of work</u> that I've seen has been very different across the board depending on the institute that they've come from ... we've seen that when people come from [HEI name] the level is a lot higher than the ones we've had come from [HEI name] and [HEI name]. So even that in itself has presented its own kind of challenges."

Participant 7: "... some just a very high standard in terms of report writing and then record of <u>administration</u>, so in my head I've got [HEI name] being very strong in that area. Some have just had such really <u>good exposure from a practical side</u>, so again [HEI name], knowing that there has been very good practice education and exposure. I think [HEI name] is quite good as well, [HEI name] I think is slightly more vague, I think a lot of their students have to sort it out themselves, so to find their own placements, and so again it's a complete gamble. But for example, then [HEI name] I have absolutely no idea whether they've had anything meaningful because then also again all of their supervision and oversight, even their <u>academic supervision has been remote</u>, so it hasn't been that kind of, it <u>lacks that intensity</u>."

Participant 8: "I think there are certain institutions that send out a, I wouldn't say a better, but a different social worker. Those that <u>think for themselves</u>, those that can <u>handle the pressure and understand</u>, those that have actually <u>more hours in the field</u>, I've had for instance a social worker that didn't have much knowledge about a few things that

worried me, but her hours in the field were about, let's say 150 more than the others, and that's a good thing."

Participant 14: "I've really seen <u>huge discrepancies</u> between different institutions, and I can acknowledge my own bias, because if you come from a certain institution, you're more likely to relate with that person that's been at the same institution for sure. I've dealt with three different institutions, or social workers from those institutions, and there are definitely differences... I'm not sure if it's so much the theoretical aspect, more so the <u>practical aspect</u>."

Participant 15: "I know that certain institutions are not doing a very good job. However, I also have some social workers who are just <u>really, really good social workers, irrespective of the training</u>. So, it's a difficult question to answer ... But also, when I hear that someone's done it through a certain institution I also go 'Oh gosh'. [Differences in] <u>Admin</u> I would say, all of those, you know, <u>report-writing</u>, all of those things. And admin is a huge part of what we do, and it has to be 100% right."

It is apparent from these narratives that clear differences can be noticed amongst HEIs offering social work education in South Africa, and these differences are most likely seen in NQSWs' skills in report writing, their level of initiative and the practical experience and exposure that they have had from their relative HEI. There are clear guidelines on what the Bachelor of Social Work degree in South Africa should constitute of, for example, that students should not complete any less than seven hundred hours of practice experience whilst undertaking their studies (SACSSP, 2020). However, even with these guidelines in place, HEIs still have their own control as to how practice education and placements are managed, the emphasis placed on specific skill development and what theoretical knowledge should be further divulged into. Consequently, it is not surprising to find differences in social work curricula as this is a global phenomena (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Yu *et al.*, 2016). With these findings, it is apparent that social work students are not receiving the same standard of education, however, at the end of the day are graduating with the same degree, posing the question of whether there should be a more stringent processes and reviewing of social work curricula to ensure that it is implemented and taught at a quality-level of standard to all students throughout the nation, to ensure the enhancement of NQSWs' readiness.

Participants were then asked whether they would more likely hire one NQSW over another based on the specific HEI that they obtained their social work qualification from. Half of the

participants indicated that they would, the minority participants indicated that they would not, and other answers were more mixed in which participants stated that the HEI that an NQSW came from was not thought to be a main consideration, however, can play a minor role. Some of these narratives are reflected below:

Participant 1: "Unfortunately that's the truth. And if they're from that <u>certain university</u> and she's got a driver's license, she's <u>bound to get the job</u>, because I know the <u>quality of the training</u>."

Participant 2: "I do yes, I don't like to say it but I do. I won't disregard someone just because they don't train at the right university in my mind, but I base it basically really on my experience with people who are trained at these certain universities. So I do, that's <u>one of the first things I look at, is to see where you have trained</u>. With some of them I just think 'Oh I don't know, I don't know, I'll put you on the list but you're sort of just like number five.' Then you have to work your way up if you're worth it, and others, it's just easier if I know where they've studied, you can just <u>see the difference</u>."

Participant 9: "Actually, that is not a criterion for me that I think to use, I know I have perhaps spoken to a supervisor who do think to see, if according to her there's a difference, but I think I take each applicant for a post, I see it uniquely, because <u>every institution has their strengths in teaching</u>, you know, every institution also have their <u>growth areas,</u> so I don't think a university can be the perfect university, you know, so I look for the strengths in that candidate, so <u>I look a little bit further than the university where the person studied</u>."

Participant 10: "Ja sorry, maar ek prober om dit nie te doen nie, maar as ons 'n onderhoud gevoer het en die een van [HEI name] en die een van [HEI name] min of meer die selfde gedoen, dan gaan [HEI name] s'n vat, net omdat ek al my ervaring uit geleer dat op die ou end is hulle teoretiese fondering baie beter, daars groot gaps in, byvoorbeeld, [HEI name], en [HEI name] is also not so good." (Translated: "Yes sorry, I try not to do it, but if we conduct an interview and the one from [HEI name] and the one from [HEI name] more or less did the same, then we are going to take the one from [HEI name], just because I have learnt out of my own experience that their <u>theoretical foundation is better</u>, there are big gaps in, for example, [HEI name], and [HEI name] are also not so good.")

> *Participant 11: "Yes. We actually <u>shortlist people</u> at the moment according to the universities that they come from ... I don't want to mention specific universities but we have seen a trend in some universities when, I've now started not even considering those students to work for us, just because the training is so bad."*

Two participants recognised that the personality of an NQSW is also a consideration:

> *Participant 3: "At the moment, it's difficult, so yes, but it's also difficult to say no ... Let me say it like this, from the three social workers I appointed this year, the [HEI name] one is standing out definitely, but the appointments I did last year, the one social worker from [HEI name] are standing out, but I think the <u>personalities also have a big influence</u> on that person as well. So, it's not only where she studied or he studied, but personality also adds to that."*

> *Participant 12: "No, no, no - it also depends on the newly social worker, <u>on their personality</u> ..."*

Most respondents acknowledged that they would employ an NQSWs over another based on which HEI they attended for their social work training. Although this might appear unfair, this is not a surprising finding as research has found that other employers or supervisors also consider where NQSWs completed their social work training when considering them for a job position (CWDC Research Team, 2009). Employers from Alpaslan's (2019) research clearly indicated that they did not think NQSWs from the University of South Africa were well-prepared, which further acknowledges the insight employers have in recognising which HEIs quality of training is up to their standards in what they expect for an NQSW to be prepared for. Although NQSWs may not realise it when first applying to study social work at an HEI, unfortunately, as evidenced from narratives, the reputation of an HEI will influence the likelihood of them being employed after completing their social work degree. Consequently, this contributes further to the challenges the profession faces with high unemployment rates of qualified social workers in South Africa (Skhosana, 2020). This underlines the clear disparities amongst HEIs in delivering social work education in South Africa, which comes at the expense of NQSWs struggling to find employment upon graduating as a direct result of where they studied, as well as decreases their level of readiness, based on the HEI where they received their social work training. The personality of an NQSW came up again as it did in other themes, with participants recognising that it's not only an NQSW's education that influences their decision to hire them, but also their personality.

From this theme, it is evident that the preparation of NQSWs is not being fully achieved as a direct result of different HEIs not preparing NQSWs sufficiently for the realities and competencies needed for effective social work practice. Thus, HEIs preparation of NQSWs cannot be generalised due to the vast differences in teaching and learning amongst various HEIs. Unfortunately, participants are aware of the reputation of various HEIs and allow this to influence their decision to employ an NQSW, resulting in NQSWs struggling to find employment when coming from a specific HEI. Therefore, NQSWs' readiness is negatively affected, due to some HEIs' lack in effectively preparing NQSWs for practice, by providing them with lesser quality social work education.

4.4.5   Theme 5: Recommendations

Table 4.6.   Theme 5: Recommendations

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Recommendations	HEIs	Practice education
		Theoretical content
		External relationships
	Supervisors and social service organisations	Orientation
		Job shadowing
		Supervision
		Working environment
	NQSWs	Willingness to learn
		Theoretical knowledge
		Internships
		Self-care
		Psychometric tests

Participants were asked to provide recommendations to various entities on how they can assist in improving the readiness of NQSWs. Participants provided recommendations for HEIs, social service organisations, supervisors of NQSWs and NQSWs themselves. The findings are represented in the narratives reflected below. It is the joint responsibility of various entities, including HEIS, supervisors, social service organisations and NQSWs themselves, to ensure that social work curricula, as well as work contexts, enhance NQSWs' readiness to be able to transition into the profession and render services to service users effectively (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2017; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Saitadze & Dvalishvili, 2021; Welch *et al.*, 2014).

4.4.5.1 Recommendations to HEIs

Participants were asked to give recommendations to HEIs regarding how they can improve their assistance in enhancing the readiness of NQSWs. Various answers came forth, however, there were a few similarities that appeared amongst participants. Amongst these recommendations, participants acknowledged the need for more focus to be placed on practice experience, statutory exposure, legislations, casework and the relationships HEIs have with organisations and social workers in the field.

4.4.5.1.1 Practice education

The practice education that students undergo was brought up as an area that HEIS should focus more on. Some participants recognised that placements should not only be for a few hours a week, but rather several consecutive months to provide a more intensive and immersed experience. These narratives are reflected below:

> *Participant 3: "I would say <u>more constant practicals</u>, <u>not only a few hours one day in the</u> <u>week</u>. My final year was in 2002, and we did six months theory and six months practical, so I went to [organisation name] at that time, and I worked there for six months. So that constant practical experience and exposure was much better than going to an organisation once a week for a few hours."*

> *Participant 8: "It would be nicer to maybe finish the whole theory and <u>getting six months</u> <u>completely in the field</u> with an organisation or something like that. I kind of like that six months within the organisation, you learn the intake register, you learn what the auxiliary social worker does, [and] you're with a supervisor."*

This concurred with the narratives of other participants who noted that social work students need to have more practice education whilst obtaining their degree:

> *Participant 2: "<u>More practical exposure</u>, I really think they should, well the best way would probably be to be in practice more, in whatever way is possible ..."*

> *Participant 14: "I think for me, the biggest thing would be, I guess for <u>more practice</u> <u>education</u>, and <u>more supervision within practice education</u>, I think that could make newly qualified social workers more prepared for practice."*

Participant 15: "I think that they need <u>a lot more practical experience</u>, and maybe the places where they're being hosted, are not giving a real snapshot of what life is like. I don't know, maybe where they're doing the practicals is <u>kind of sheltered</u>, because I find some of them have no clue. They've done the practical, but they just don't have a clue of what's actually happening on the ground."

Some believed that this practical exposure should take place after attending an HEI in the form of a community service year:

Participant 2: "What I do think, and I've always thought this, like speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, all those people, have a year, <u>a community service year</u>, where they have to do some practical stuff before, you know working properly, before they're actually fully qualified, and I still think that if they brought this for social workers, they have that as well, because you are working with people's lives. Especially being in child protection and most of the new social workers start in child protection, depending on whatever you go on doing later on, but at least you start there mostly, which I think is great because you get a bit of everything and I think for them, it's so important, because they can remove children which is a huge responsibility."

Participant 5: "I feel that <u>we should all do like a Zuma year</u>, like the doctors do, do a one-year, like bridging into the field. It can obviously be a paid internship sort of thing, but I definitely think, you know, they need to have a foot in the door straight after, but not to the level of being a permanent social worker with all of the responsibility that comes with it. Just some level of being introduced to all the different things, and I think also being able to find out if that's really what you want to do …"

These narratives evidently indicate that more practical exposure during and after NQSWs' graduate from their studies, will greatly benefit NQSWs when entering the field in preparing them for the reality of the profession and allowing them to know what to expect when entering the workplace. Practice placements throughout the undergraduate degree have been seen as a determinant of readiness as well as a valuable source of learning for NQSWs, especially with regards to learning how to implement theory into practice (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Joubert, 2020; McSweeney & Williams, 2019; Tham & Lynch, 2019; Welch *et al.*, 2014). However, the learning potential of a placement is influenced by factors such as the quality of the placement and the type of the placement (Welch *et al.*, 2014; Wilson, 2013a). Similarly to these narratives, managers from Welch *et al.* (2014) acknowledge that more placement experience is beneficial

to exposing NQSWs to the reality of the profession and thus beneficial to their learning. Thus, emphasising the need for HEIs to ensure that the practical exposure that social work students have is relevant and of quality (Welch *et al.*, 2014). With the SACSSP (2020) requiring the Bachelor of Social Work to provide a minimum of seven hundred hours of practice experience, some countries, such as Australia, have seen their students obtain 1000 hours during their degree (Moorhead *et al.*, 2019). These narratives suggest that HEIs should consider going above and beyond the minimum requirement to further expose NQSWs to the realities of the profession and thus contribute effectively towards their readiness. There has been further support for a post-qualifying placement year by employers of NQSWs (Alpaslan, 2019), as often during their undergraduate degree, NQSWs have to balance tests, assignments and other modules on top of their social work curricula (Stanley & Mettilda, 2016). Therefore, NQSWs are not able to fully learn from their practice placements, due to other scholarly demands.

Participants also recognised the need for students to have more statutory exposure whilst completing their field placements, and be taught more statutory forms and reports. These narratives are presented below:

> *Participant 7: "... [NQSWs need] just some of the really good nitty-gritty, <u>in terms of child protection work</u> specifically, and I think that the reality is that that <u>benefits all social workers</u> even if some social workers never work within the child protection field."*

> *Participant 8: "I would send [fourth-year social workers] to an organisation and get them six months of <u>statutory grinding</u> ... I would spend more time doing the <u>statutory nature of social work</u>, the detail, the <u>what you need to take to court, filling in a Form 2</u>. I mean, I'm talking about from A til Z what you can expect."*

> *Participant 9: "I think at the end of the day, for them to do their fourth year, practical work, at a <u>child protection organisation</u>, and maybe it's good if a person is placed outside a person's comfort zone."*

> *Participant 12: "... if they can explain to them or show them how to do a <u>statutory report</u>, or a <u>Form 38 report</u> that is also in the Children's Act, if they can focus more on the Children's Act, <u>all the forms that are being used</u>, <u>what type of reports there are</u> that a social worker must do, that will really, really help them, and if they can start that in their third year, not in their fourth year."*

These narratives reflect participants' views on the importance of NQSWs having statutory knowledge and understanding of all statutory forms, reports and procedures, as it is believed to be beneficial to NQSWs, even if they do not enter the statutory field of social work upon graduating. This view is shared with several other NQSWs, managers and employers who believe that statutory experience is crucial in enhancing NQSWs skills, knowledge and confidence upon entering practice (Bates *et al.*, 2010; De Jager, 2013; Joubert, 2020; Walker, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Similar to these narratives, Alpaslan's (2019) research found that NQSWs lack knowledge on statutory-related reports and procedures and that this, in turn, negatively affected their employability to employers. Furthermore, managers from Bates *et al.*'s (2010) research stated that a minimum requirement for student social workers should be to complete at least one of their field placements in a statutory environment. This concurs with these narratives in acknowledging the learning and development that can occur when a student social worker is placed in such an environment, ultimately enhancing their readiness when they become an NQSW.

4.4.5.1.2 Theoretical content

Several participants recognised the need for HEI curricula to focus more on various types of legislation that NQSWs will use once they enter the profession. These views are reflected in the narratives presented below:

> *Participant 3: "Focus a bit more on Acts - <u>Children's Act, Child Justice Act, Sexual Offences Act</u> - because that's the type of information that they need, like 80+ percent of the work they are going to do, any social worker."*

> *Participant 4: "Even if [NQSWs] work for a hospital or go private, they still need to know and understand the <u>Children's Act</u> because it has a direct impact on their services. So just one session about the Children's Act is insufficient at the university."*

> *Participant 12: "It will be great if they get with the whole <u>Children's Act</u> in their third year, because the theory that they are using, is also completely different, as to what they learn in the field, because here they don't use theory, it's all about the <u>legislation and the Children's Act</u>."*

These narratives reflect that participants feel the need for legislation, and more specifically the Children's Act, to be further divulged into by HEIs as they have expressed that it forms a significant part of service delivery in social work practice. According to the Council of Higher

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Education (2015), the Bachelor of Social Work curriculum should teach NQSWs how to apply global and national policies and legislation in the field of social work in South Africa. Similarly to these narratives, employers have identified that NQSWs have a lack of knowledge regarding relative legislation and the means to implement it, thus emphasising the need for this to be an area that is taught more in-depth to NQSWs (Alpaslan, 2019; De Jager, 2013; CWDC Research Team, 2009). The use of legislation guides practice in all areas of social work, asserting the need for this to be taught in more detail, throughout the generic social work curricula to ensure that NQSWs can be flexible and transfer this knowledge to all settings (Council of Higher Education, 2015).

Participants also recognised the need for HEIs to focus less on group work and community work and instead place more emphasis on casework:

> *Participant 3: "Social auxiliaries focus nowadays more on group works and community works so focus less on community and group work and more on individual work."*
>
> *Participant 8: "I would leave group work, leave community work although I know it's a part, and I would send them to an organisation and get them six months of statutory grinding and that. Because you can learn group work, if you can find your confidence in removing a child in statutory work, you can easily work in small groups."*
>
> *Participant 10: "Ek sou sê hulle moet meer aandag gee aan gevalle werk. Maar gevalle werk, om die student te help om ervaring op te bou – hoe om gevalle werk te doen, vyf gevalle doen dit nie, hulle moet ten minste dertig kan hê aan die einde van die jaar." (Translated: "I would say they should give more attention to case work. Case work, to help the student build on their experience – how to do case work, five cases will not do it, they should at least have thirty by the end of the year.")*

The narratives above reflect participants' views on the recommendation for HEIs to place greater emphasis on and teach casework skills rather than spending as much time as they currently do in group and community work training. According to the SACSSP (2020), social work curricula in South Africa must allow students to gain experience in practicing at micro-, meso- and macro-levels, thus, gaining knowledge and learning skills in working with casework, group work and community work. However, upon looking at these narratives, it is evident that participants would rather have NQSWs trained more in-depth with casework, as this forms a large portion of their work in the field. In contrast, NQSWs have indicated that their training

and preparation for macro-practice were insufficient and did not prepare them for the skills they needed when entering practice (De Jager, 2013). Even though participants have reflected these views, contradictorily, NQSWs and social work students have expressed that they do not feel as HEIs have sufficiently trained them in group work skills, thus making it an area they would like to gain more expertise on (Goodman *et al.*, 2014; Wilson, 2013a). One participant indicated that social auxiliary workers conduct group work and community work. Goliath (2018) defines social auxiliary work as the profession of a social auxiliary worker who works under the instruction and management of a social worker to assist them in completing the functions of social work and service delivery. This poses the thought of whether skills in community work or group work should rather be taught to social auxiliary workers, to lessen NQSWs' workload, and assist in NQSWs strengthening their skills and competencies to deliver more individualised and focused casework services.

Some participants recognised that these changes need to happen in social work curricula due to lecturers being out of the field for a long time or due to curricula being set up several years ago and thus lacking relevancy:

> *Participant 4: "I think <u>the university needs to relook at the information they are providing to social workers</u>. I feel that some of the universities kind of, the same information they provided in 1992, they are still providing in 2021, they just do it now edition 3 or 4 or whatever. But there are so many more things out there that social workers need to know."*

> *Participant 5: "I think preparing them a little more realistically, <u>having more people from the field come in and have discussions with students and do presentations</u>, because a lot of the lecturers and stuff have not been in the field for twenty plus years, so they don't always know or have a full understanding of what is actually happening on the ground and what the reality is. You're never going to get everything right, but I think really bringing the reality into it, is going to allow people not to have this fantasy of how things are when they leave."*

> *Participant 7: "... there was a time where a lot of the lecturers had all had their experience working in the Child Care Act, and they didn't necessarily have their training or own experience in practice under the Children's Act. So I think there was also this time for the university where <u>a lot of their lecturers were almost like old school trained, and now there's a whole new legislation, they haven't worked under the legislation,</u> but*

they're still lecturers, so they didn't necessarily themselves have the practice experience of having worked under the Children's Act."

These narratives evidently indicate that social work education needs to be revisited and reviewed as one participant believes that social work curricula have not been updated for years, whereas the others believe that lecturers have been out of the field for too long to effectively teach new legislation and more current issues and challenges that society faces. These findings concur with both the CWDC Research Team (2009) and Shergill (2018), who stated that lecturers at HEIs have often not been working in front-line social work for many years, therefore, are ineffectively able to teach students on contemporary issues that NQSWs will most likely face when entering the profession due to their own lack of experience in working with these newer issues. This negatively influences NQSWs' readiness, as they are unable to be fully prepared for the realities of the profession upon entering practice.

4.4.5.1.3 External relationships

Several participants also indicated that HEIs need to have better relationships with organisations and social workers in the field to help establish what is needed to prepare NQSWs better for practice, and expose NQSWs to the realities and experiences of social workers in the field. Some indicated that consultations with organisations could assist HEIs in gaining insight and information as to how students can be better prepared. These narratives are presented below:

> *Participant 3: "I think that, say for instance, [HEI name] [should] have a <u>consultation with NGOs</u> in their area, I think they can benefit a lot from what they still need to <u>prepare students</u> for, for future purposes."*

> *Participant 4: "I think universities should actually have <u>discussions, maybe with organisations</u>, and sit down and hear what their needs are so that they can work it in with their training sessions, or with their training as the university. I think there aren't really any communications between organisations and universities."*

Other participants recognised this relationship and indicated that HEIs should be bringing more field social workers into lectures and theoretical classes, to talk with students and provide them with insight into the real-life experiences of social workers in the field:

Participant 2: "I think <u>bringing in more people who are actually in the field</u>, even if it's for one or two lectures or something, just a few connections made between what you've learnt, and how you apply that at practice, <u>more practical examples</u> almost ... Even if it's a tut session with a practical person in the field, you know, one or two, where they can just say, "This is what you've learnt, this is how we can bring it together.""

Participant 6: "... they could have, you know, <u>social workers who are in practice already</u>, sitting with the students and <u>challenging their thoughts</u> already, because I think that will also <u>prepare</u> them in future for becoming a social worker ... because students love to reason. I think that will also help them to think about stuff."

Participant 15: "I would love the university to phone me up and say 'Can you please come and do a section on older persons?', because I can talk all day about it, and it's something that, as you can see, I'm very passionate about it and just <u>don't think it's being done</u>, in fact, not I don't think, I know it's not being done, I know it's not being looked at."

These narratives reflect participants' views on the need for HEIs to collaborate and hold consultations with social service organisations, so that their input can be taken into consideration into curriculum development. The SACSSP (2020) states that social work curricula should include the considerations of supervisors and organisations when being reviewed and updated. Participants reflected that HEIs should invite social workers out in practice to facilitate more discussions and presentations with student social workers to discuss the field that they work in and their experiences thereof. This will provide social work students with first-hand experiences to know what to expect when they are an NQSW in a specific field of social work. It is apparent through these narratives that several participants believe that the relationship between HEIs and social service organisations and social workers in the field, is crucial in improving social work curricula and preparing and exposing students to the realities of the field, prior to them entering it. Alpaslan (2019), Applewhite *et al.* (2018), Cleak (2019) and Moorhead (2019) all indicate the need for a collaborative and integrated approach to take place between different entities such as HEIs and supervisors in ensuring effective social work curriculum development, and emphasised that it is not only the responsibility of one of these entities. This collaborative relationship will only improve social work curricula and enhance NQSWs readiness for practice.

4.4.5.2 Recommendations to supervisors and social service organisations

Participants were asked to provide recommendations to supervisors and social service organisations on what they can do to assist in the readiness of NQSWs. Participants recommended the role social service organisations need to play in ensuring effective orientation, job shadowing and supervision of NQSWs when entering practice. It was recommended that supervisors also ensure that quality orientation, job-shadowing and supervision is provided to NQSWs, as well as the importance of creating a culture of teamwork and a positive working environment amongst colleagues. The narratives below will present these findings.

4.4.5.2.1 Orientation

Several participants recognised the need for social service organisations and supervisors to provide an adequate orientation to NQSWs when they first start working at an organisation. The views of those who attributed this to social service organisations are reflected in the narratives below:

> *Participant 1: "They need to do a <u>good orientation</u> and job shadowing."*
>
> *Participant 4: "What we try to do is, we take a week to do <u>in-service training</u>, to ensure that they understand the organisation and the processes and the forms and the stats and the whatever. Then we've got monthly and quarterly training sessions, so I think that's all we can do."*
>
> *Participant 9: "I think at the end of the day, it's all about the <u>orientation program</u> that is being used, to identify those <u>priority aspects</u> on which a new social worker needs to be briefed or trained on."*
>
> *Participant 12: "Okay, in general, what can be improved is your <u>orientation</u> for the first time at the organisation, that is the most important out of everything. So that you know how does the, for instance, your <u>working hours, when must court reports be in, when must you book a car</u>, if there's conflict between you and another colleague, what is the <u>protocol</u> that you need to follow the proceedings."*

Others also recommended that supervisors also play a role in ensuring that an effective orientation programme is offered to NQSWs:

Participant 3: "I think we need to spend more time with <u>induction</u>, but the <u>reality of the caseload is actually a problem</u>, because we focus more on caseload than proper induction."

Participant 12: "... the <u>orientation</u> is the most important, and supervisors must be really prepared to do that orientation because it needs to cover everything ..."

Participant 15: "The <u>orientation process is very important</u>, and it doesn't take a week, like I normally give a week for it, but actually it <u>takes two to three months</u>, because the initial part is explaining "This is how the organisation works, this is what we do.". But once they start phoning clients and going out to see clients, that is also part of their orientation because they come back and say, 'I don't understand, or I don't know what to do next.'. So, it actually can take two to three months."

These narratives indicate that the manner in which an NQSW is orientated is essential when starting at an organisation as this can teach them things such as work protocols, the type of reports that are required and completed and the processes that need to be followed within the organisation. The orientation of NQSWs is not an unfamiliar concept, although, its implementation, at times, is not followed through in the most effective manner. Orientation can form a part of induction in which NQSWs are guided and provided with information regarding the rules, their job expectations and necessary processes within the organisational context (Walker, 2014). These narratives coincide with authors Battaglia and Flynn (2020), Hunt *et al.* (2016) and Welch *et al.* (2014), who believe that orientation and induction periods are crucial for NQSWs to assist in a smoother transition into the workplace, thus enhancing their readiness for practice. However, the implementation of this is not always the reality, with many NQSWs indicating that they have not received a formal induction or social-work specific orientation upon starting a position at their workplace (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019; Tham & Lynch, 2019; Walker, 2014). This could be a result of, as reflected in the one narrative, effective orientation not being possible due to unmanageable workloads and the emphasis being on their workload rather than an introduction of the organisation and the role that they will fulfil there. Thus, reiterating the importance for social service organisations and supervisors to ensure that an informative orientation is provided to NQSWs.

4.4.5.2.2 Job shadowing

Participants also acknowledged the role organisations and supervisors should have in ensuring that job shadowing occurs between NQSWs and senior social workers working at the organisation. The narratives of those indicating that social service organisations should take responsibility for this are reflected below:

> Participant 1: *"Probably job shadowing for a week or two; doing their first home visits and stuff with a colleague maybe just to get them going in terms of their skills and doing the work."*

> Participant 5: *"Maybe just having them shadow a more senior social worker maybe, for the first couple of months when they start before they really actually get into, but that's never going to happen because there's always a backlog or caseload that needs attention when someone starts."*

> Participant 9: *"It's also good probably if the new social worker also does some shadowing, you know, with the social worker that's going to leave the post, in order to be familiarised with priority cases, if he or she is going to start at a child protection organisation. Even, if the old social worker has the time, for that person to accompany on a home visit or interviews, just to have some exposure, that it's not a shock, the first day, and not having had someone who can give over the workload to a person, and not having had the chance to ask questions."*

> Participant 12: *"... they must shadow more with senior social workers or with their colleagues because they can also learn a lot. Everybody does not do the work the same as the other one, everybody is doing, like for instance, we are eight social workers here, and all of us work differently, so all of us learn every day from each other."*

A participant also mentioned that supervisors should facilitate the process of NQSWs job shadowing other colleagues:

> Participant 5: *"... looking at the way that you orientate the worker, your accessibility to them in that first month or two, linking them up with other workers in the organisation, allowing them to also orientate or let them shadow, you know if it's going to court let them go with someone to see how it works, to get a more practical example instead of just sending them out."*

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It is evident from these narratives that there is considerable support for NQSWs to shadow senior social workers or more experienced colleagues, as this can assist NQSWs with being exposed to what their job will entail, what will be expected of them, and most importantly, learning how their job should be performed. Job shadowing is a concept that has support from many managers, supervisors and NQSWs, as found by several researchers (Grant, 2017; Manthorpe *et al.*, 2014; Tham & Lynch, 2017; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Welch *et al.* (2014) further acknowledged that fellow colleagues and peers are seen as an important source of support, motivation and information for NQSWs entering practice. However, in contrast to these narratives, NQSWs have also indicated shadowing as being one of the least important forms of support and least important valuable experiences when entering the workplace (Grant *et al.*, 2017). This emphasises the possibility that job shadowing may not always be effective for NQSWs to learn the priorities of their new job, if it is not facilitated correctly or effectively.

4.4.5.2.3 Supervision

Several participants recognised the need for supervisors to be available to NQSWs and to be aware that taking on an NQSW can be a time-consuming process. These views are presented in the narratives below:

> *Participant 1: "... just <u>being available</u> either by phone or email, or walk-ins, just <u>for support</u>."*

> *Participant 4: "You need to <u>make time</u>. You need to sit with them and <u>help them through the initial period.</u>"*

> *Participant 5: "I feel like I want to say, '<u>Don't plan to do any other work for like the first three months when they start</u>.'."*

> *Participant 15: "To have a social worker that doesn't need a shadow, as in a supervisor, for a newly qualified, it takes a year, so the advice is that <u>it is a lot of work</u>, it's more work than we anticipate, its more time than we budget for actually, it's <u>time-consuming</u> that's what I'm trying to say."*

These narratives allude to the fact that employing an NQSW can take up a lot of a supervisor's time because of the additional support and guidance that they need, and that supervisors need to be aware of this and make sure that they can make the time available to offer this necessary support and guidance to NQSWs. This can, at times, be an issue as supervisors have immensely

large workloads and are often overstretched with overseeing many supervisees simultaneously as well as due to organisational constraints, duties and demands (Moorhead *et al.*, 2019; Walker, 2014; Wilkins & Antonopoulou; 2019). Therefore, it is essential that supervisors understand that when hiring an NQSW, that they must have the capacity to assist and guide them, and assist in the development of their professional identity (Hafford-Letchfield & Engelbrecht, 2018; Moorhead *et al.*, 2019). Supervision can also assist in managing and mitigating the impact of challenges NQSWs face when they enter the workplace (Joubert, 2020). If supervisors are unable to provide that support, NQSWs will likely feel overwhelmed, anxious and struggle with their transition into the working field as well as with the development of their professional identity (Bruno & Dell'Aversana, 2018; Moorhead, 2019), ultimately, negatively impacting their readiness for practice.

The time put into NQSWs by supervisors is also characterised by the type of supervision that they need. Participants emphasised the need for supervisors to provide constant and specialised supervision to NQSWs:

> *Participant 5: "Your supervision element is obviously, trying to <u>do it as regularly as possible</u>. <u>Doing regular check-ins, self-reflection, giving them tasks</u> and stuff to complete, <u>exposing them to as much training opportunities</u> that come as well, because your older ones that have been there for some time have already been exposed or not – there's no great or urgent need. So I think giving the newly qualified ones as much <u>opportunity to further educate and provide knowledge and skills</u> where possible."*

> *Participant 6: "I think for the first year or two, <u>constant supervision</u>."*

> *Participant 11: "I think again it depends on their, the <u>supervision model</u> that they use, because for us there's a lot of things built into the supervision model that can be, that help us, to help the social worker, to find their areas where they need to improve on ... it's good to be able to <u>spot the strengths and weaknesses</u>. I don't like to call it weaknesses, but the challenges or the growth areas for social workers, and then <u>help them to focus on that</u>."*

> *Participant 13: "Then also <u>regular supervision sessions</u> with this individual. Sometimes it's not also just about their theoretical knowledge. Sometimes <u>it's also about who they are, and how they do things, and how they plan, how they organise themselves</u>, because there is some method in their own madness and in terms of organising themselves and,*

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because it can become stressful for a newly qualified social worker, becoming overwhelmed, and definitely give that <u>emotional support</u>, it's very important."

Some participants also identified the role social service organisations should have in ensuring supervision is provided effectively:

Participant 6: "I think they must <u>prioritise supervision</u>, and <u>support for staff</u> and really, not necessarily always prioritise meetings and all of the stuff that looks as if you're doing something, but it looks good, so you must prioritise, you know, connection with people."

Participant 7: "So again to the social service organisations, I would offer some kind of <u>mentorship option</u>, or <u>specialised supervision</u>, more <u>intensive supervision</u> for newly graduated social workers."

Participant 14: "The biggest thing, and maybe this might be the more realistic one, is social work organisations could just step up and make sure their <u>supervision is done properly</u> and that all <u>three [supervision] functions are met</u>, and you know that, that newly qualified social workers are actually being equipped in their first year, to render good services to the client."

These narratives reflect the importance of both supervisors and social service organisations' roles in ensuring that regular, focused, and structured supervision is provided to NQSWs. The need for supervisors to provide a specialised type of supervision that focuses on all three functions – administrative, supportive, and educational – to NQSWs is not a surprising recommendation. There is overwhelming support for the need for supervisors to provide effective and quality supervision that not only focuses on cases, but also the supportive and educational functions of supervision, to NQSWs when they first enter practice (Engelbrecht & Ncube, 2021; Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014). There is also the need for NQSWs to take part in reflection during supervision, as this assists with professional identity development and enhances learning (Nunev, 2014; Moorhead *et al.*, 2019). However, Moorhead *et al.* (2016) has found that supervision does not occur regularly enough and does not provide NQSWs with the opportunity for self-reflection. Wilkins and Antonopoulou (2019) concur with this in finding that supervision for NQSWs does not occur frequently enough. It has been recommended that a solution to this, as mentioned by one participant, is the development of a mentorship programme. This will allow supervisors to share some of their tasks with an experienced social worker who can mentor the NQSW, in order for supervisors

to have more time to provide effective and valuable supervision (Pullen *et al.*, 2016) and effectively enhance their readiness.

4.4.5.2.4 Cohesive working environment

Some participants acknowledged the need for supervisors to place emphasis on creating a harmonious working environment amongst team members. These narratives are displayed below:

> Participant 6: *"... also creating a culture where you have time <u>to speak to your colleagues</u> about cases and <u>reflect</u> on things. There shouldn't be a senior social worker-junior social worker, that kind of attitude of, you know, you must deal with your things, and I think that is the supervisor's role, to <u>create an environment where they learn from the people</u> in the organisation."*

> Participant 9: *"Also to <u>build relationships with fellow team members</u>, who are at the end of the day are like a <u>family at work</u>, you know, covering each other's backs and asking each other for advice or input, you know, so <u>peer relationships are very important</u>."*

These narratives reflect the importance of creating a supportive and cohesive working culture amongst colleagues and peers and ensuring that there is no 'top-down' approach amongst team members, but rather, that everyone learns from each other and assists one another with their day-to-day tasks and cases. These narratives concur with many researchers who have found the value in 'peer-mentoring' with NQSWs in providing vital support and information to assist and guide them when entering practice (Beddoe *et al.*, 2020; Cloete, 2012; DSD & SACSSP, 2012; Grant *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2014). Managers from the research by Welch *et al.* (2014) identified that creating an environment where informal learning is encouraged is just as important as the need for supervision of NQSWs. Colleagues in the social work spectrum have been recognised as valuable sources of support as well as a source of confidence-building in NQSWs (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Grant, 2017; Grant *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, there is overwhelming support for the value of peer or coworker relationships with NQSWs in assisting with their learning and development, thus, concurring with participants' recommendations, which will contribute towards enhancing their readiness for practice.

4.4.5.3   Recommendations for NQSWs

Lastly, participants were asked to provide recommendations to NQSWs themselves, as to what they could do to enhance their own readiness. Participants identified that NQSWs need to be open and willing to learn, familiarise themselves with field-related knowledge, take up training opportunities, take part in volunteering or internships, make time for self-care and take a psychometric test to ensure that they are suited for the profession. Their answers are reflected below.

4.4.5.3.1   Willingness to learn

Participants recommended that NQSWs need to ensure that they take responsibility for their own learning as well as be open and prepared to learn. These views are presented as narratives below:

> Participant 2: "I'm still learning 23 years later, so it's important for them to slow down and understand, <u>take the time to learn your job and your craft</u> and then you can move on from there, don't give up too quickly."

> Participant 4: "If you've got a positive attitude and you've got the basic skills, you can go far in terms of what you need to do, but if you are negative and <u>you're not prepared to learn,</u> and you're not prepared to do anything, <u>then you won't get far.</u>"

> Participant 6: "They must just be <u>open to learn</u>. To know that in the beginning, you're not going to know, so if you ask them to go and read legislation or articles or whatever, sometimes you'll have to do it <u>after hours</u> because you <u>won't have time during the day</u> when you're young and newly qualified."

> Participant 9: "When it is before starting at a new child protection organisation, maybe to, out of your own, do some <u>self-study</u> about the Children's Act... because I also forward to team members, relevant educational material, you know, that can assist them, that is relevant to the setup we work in, with the issues that we encounter. But it's all about getting the time to read it, because there's <u>not always time in the workday</u>, so it could <u>be after hours</u>, to put some time aside, reading."

> Participant 13: "When they get to the new organisation, <u>be open, for new learning</u>... you just need to continuously <u>read up and learn</u> and <u>take responsibility for your own learning</u>.

If you don't know, do ask for resources that you could read up and <u>extend your</u>
<u>*knowledge*</u>*."*

These narratives reveal that when entering the field of social work, NQSWs need to be open
and willing to read and learn about that specific field, and that at times, this learning will have
to take place outside of working hours, however, NQSWs need to be prepared to do this in order
to enhance their own readiness. These narratives coincide with earlier narratives in previous
themes wherein participants described what an NQSW that was 'ready for practice' looked like
and when participants described what they looked for during an interview with an NQSW. This
further highlights that readiness is linked to NQSWs understanding the importance of being
willing to learn more about the job. Although little research exists on this topic, Yu *et al.* (2016)
found in their research that openness to learning was deemed as something that a supervisor
looked for in a practice-ready NQSW. With participants acknowledging that this learning might
need to take place after working hours, it highlights the dedication and commitment required
from NQSWs to enhance their own readiness and to the profession of social work.

4.4.5.3.2 Theoretical knowledge

With the openness to continued learning previously identified, participants also indicated that
NQSWs should familiarise themselves with field-related knowledge regarding the field that
they are entering. These narratives are presented below:

> *Participant 2: "Well, they are going to apply for a job – prepare yourself on what that*
> *organisation does, <u>make sure that you understand the scope of their work</u>, what they focus*
> *on, understand at least what kind of work you will be doing, what kind of things you are*
> *going to be focusing on when you are working there, that will help a lot."*
>
> *Participant 9: "When it is before <u>starting at a new child protection organisation</u>, maybe*
> *to, out of your own, do some self-study about the <u>Children's Act</u>... If you are waiting to*
> *get employment, even if you have started at a new child protection organisation, also to*
> *do some self-study, because I also forward to team members <u>relevant educational</u>*
> <u>*material*</u> *that can assist them, <u>that is relevant to the setup we work in, with the issues that</u>*
> <u>*we encounter.*</u>*"*
>
> *Participant 13: "If there's any legislation involved, that they do <u>familiarise themselves</u>*
> <u>*around that legislation in that field*</u> *that they are working in."*

Participants recognised that learning this kind of knowledge can be done through attending additional training, courses or workshops:

> Participant 9: "… go for *training*, that's also another one because there are so many *online trainings*, or you get *workshops* a person can attend, *continuous professional development* is also so important."

> Participant 10: "Dalk as jy besluit om, byvoorbeeld, in kinderbeskerming te gaan werk, dat jy seker maak dat jy die Kinderwet ken, wat baie moeilik is. So jy moet eintlik maar ekstra kursese gaan bywoon wat my dan betref, daars kursese oor terapie, trauma-informed, om maar kursese te doen daaroor." (Translated: "Maybe if you decide, for example, to go work in child protection, to ensure that you *know the Children's Act*, which is quite difficult. So according to me, you should actually just *attend extra courses*, there's courses about therapy, trauma-informed, just to do courses on those things.")

The narratives above reflect the need for NQSWs to gain further in-depth knowledge and insight into the field they are entering by reviewing relative legislation and learning about their scope of work and the challenges that they might encounter in that field. Due to the genericism of social work curricula (Council of Higher Education, 2015), more specialised knowledge could assist NQSWs in being better prepared and more knowledgeable about the specific field that they are going into. In South Africa, it is mandated by the SACSSP for social workers to continuously update their knowledge on contemporary issues by obtaining continuous professional development points (CPD). This training and development can often be done through attending external training and workshops upon graduating from an HEI and will further expand NQSWs' knowledge on fields that they are interested in or topics that they would like to know more about, which can positively influence their readiness. These narratives concur with the managers from Welch *et al.*'s (2014) research, who acknowledge that it was beneficial if NQSWs showed responsibility in organising opportunities for themselves to attend training to expand their knowledge. However, many of these workshops that are accredited for CPD points cost money, which poses an issue for unemployed NQSWs wanting to enhance their readiness before finding permanent employment.

4.4.5.3.3 Volunteering or internships

Participants recommended that NQSWs volunteer or do internships before applying for jobs to gain real-life experience and exposure. These narratives are presented below:

Participant 5: "I think once they're qualified, before they do look for work, they should possibly explore <u>volunteering or do an internship at an organisation that they are possibly interested in working</u>, just so that they can get a <u>reality check</u> in terms of how it is and the type of work that they do before they commit to something specific."

Participant 8: "If you want to take a sabbatical, take a sabbatical and go and say "Listen here, I want to work for six months or a year, I want to link in with [organisation name] as a social worker, I want to shadow the social worker, I want to learn everything" ... I know it's hard to say because you probably won't get money, and not everybody comes from a rich family, but if you ever in doubt whether the job, the profession is for you, or if you're ever in doubt that you're not going to make it, <u>rather go and log in at a place, for six months to twelve months, learn everything, ask all your questions</u>, the who's and the when's, especially statutory work, and then you can apply."

Participant 9: "You can even <u>volunteer</u> at a new child protection organisation if you are waiting to get employment."

These narratives reflect participants' views for NQSWs to gain further experience after graduating by doing internships or volunteering at organisations before starting to practice. These narratives further emphasise the importance and the value that practice experience, even after graduating from an HEI, can have in exposing NQSWs to the reality of the profession and building their skills to expand on their knowledge and professional development (Welch *et al.*, 2014). This further concurs with previous narratives in participants recommending that HEIs provide student social workers with more practice experience and that NQSWs possibly have a paid community service year, as this is where participants believe NQSWs gain the most from in terms of their learning and enhancing their own readiness. However, this is difficult for NQSWs who are under pressure to find a job quickly due to their own financial constraints. Therefore, they do not have the financial stability to work for free in order to gain more experience.

4.4.5.3.4 Self-care

Participants recognised the need for NQSWs to ensure that they look after themselves emotionally through establishing support networks and enforcing self-care due to the emotional challenges that present themselves in the profession. These narratives are represented below:

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Participant 7: "Again for social workers to find, I mean nowadays, you can find <u>support networks</u> in so many places but also online you get such great support networks, so just some <u>social work groups, international social work groups</u>."

Participant 11: "Do what you need to do to become <u>emotionally healthy</u>, because even now with, I think during the COVID period, everybody is struggling and suffering."

Participant 14: "When you're going into practice, don't take it too light-heartedly. Our career can be quite <u>draining and quite taxing</u>, so you need to <u>take care of yourself</u> and that will help you to grow."

The above narratives reflect participants' views in reinforcing the challenging nature of the social work profession and the need for NQSWs to ensure that they are healthy to cope with the challenges and difficulties that arise from working in the profession. Unfortunately, burnout amongst social workers is a common reality. Therefore, it is not surprising for participants to make these recommendations, as self-care strategies have been found to help reduce burnout and increase retention of NQSWs in the profession. Kheswa (2019) found that establishing support networks through religious and familial relationships, assisted in social workers remaining in the field and coping with the challenging and demanding profession. Similarly, Pretorius (2020) also found that the practice of self-care strategies assists in stopping the deterioration of NQSWs as individuals and professionals. Calitz *et al.* (2014) further reiterate that the establishment of support networks can assist social workers in feeling passionate about the profession and coping with the challenges that present themselves in the profession. These narratives concur with these findings, highlighting the need for NQSWs to practice self-care and establish support networks for themselves as they enter a turbulent profession. The establishment of these can assist NQSWs in enhancing their own readiness by not feeling overwhelmed or overworked too soon.

4.4.5.3.5 Psychometric tests

Some participants acknowledged that NQSWs should undergo aptitude tests or approval processes to identify whether they are inherently suited for the profession by displaying specific traits and characteristics. These findings are represented in the narratives below:

Participant 8: "I would make sure firstly that I am meant for this profession, that I go and take an, what's it called, <u>aptitude test</u>, and if they say dogs and people, then you're pretty much there."

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Participant 10: "Ek dink dat hulle gekeur word, dat daar 'n keuringsproses is by 'n universiteit, om te kyk of hulle oor die kapasiteit beskik om 'n goeie maatskaplike werker te wees. Daar is tog sekerlik karaktertrette wat jy moet kan hê om goeie maatskaplike werk te doen... dit vat 'n sekere persoonlikheid, jy kan tegnieke aanleer om dit beter te maak, maar jy het tog sekere karaktereienskappe nodig om die beroep te kan beoefen." (Translated: "I think that they should be approved, that the university has an <u>approval process </u>to look at whether they have the <u>capacity to be a good social worker</u>. There is certainly specific characteristics that you should have to be able to do good social work... it takes a <u>specific personality</u>, you can learn techniques to improve things, but you <u>need certain characteristics</u> to be able to practice in this profession.")

Participant 11: "I think one other thing that is quite important, I don't know how it's going to be done, but I do think that, there needs to be <u>psychometric tests</u> for social workers, because we've had quite a few in the past that was, on a psychological level, definitely <u>not suited for the profession</u>."

As evidently displayed in the narratives above, NQSWs should undergo personality tests, also known as aptitude or psychometric tests, to ensure that they are suited for the profession. Not all of these participants believed that it should be the responsibility of the NQSW, however, all believed it was crucial to ensure that NQSWs find out whether they display desirable characteristics to be able to work in the emotionally challenging profession. In Israel, it is mandatory to complete a psychometric test before admission into an HEI for all types of academic programmes (Freund *et al*., 2017). Freund *et al*. (2017) found in their research, that there is a positive correlation and relationship between higher psychometric scores for social work and the commitment students have to the profession, thus, concurring with these participants in acknowledging that these tests can help predict the suitability of NQSWs for the demanding profession. Therefore, this recommendation enables the researcher to note that such testing could enhance NQSWs' readiness by being aware that they are suited to work in the profession and by displaying characteristics that supervisors deem necessary to be a social worker.

From this theme, we can deduce that a shared approach to enhancing NQSWs' readiness should be undertaken by HEIs, supervisors, social service organisations and NQSWs, as it is not the sole responsibility of only one entity. NQSWs have unique learning needs and their development is marked both by previous, current and future learning. Thus, all entities should

ensure that a collaborative approach is taken to learning, and that all education undertaken or provided, will enhance NQSWs' professional development by positively contributing to their readiness and allowing for a smooth transition into practice.

4.5   CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to meet the third objective of this study, which was to empirically investigate the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape regarding the readiness of NQSWs for practice. The chapter started by evaluating and discussing the research methodology that was utilised during this study, which was then followed by a description of all participants' particulars who took part in this study. Thereafter, the five themes and relevant sub-themes and categories that emerged during this research were identified and analysed. The themes that arose during this study included: readiness; competencies; supervision; HEIs; and recommendations.

The following chapter will put forward conclusions that the researcher was able to establish upon completing the empirical study, as well as provide relevant recommendations that will follow after each conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of supervisors' experiences of newly qualified social workers' readiness for practice at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa. The relevant objectives as described in chapter one were successfully achieved through the researcher being able to: describe the international and local context of NQSWs, underpinned by an expansion on the influence of the developmental theory of professional identity; analyse contemporary international and South African research on the readiness of NQSWs for practice whilst expanding on relevant covert and overt competencies; and empirically investigate the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape regarding the readiness of NQSWs for practice. The fourth objective will be addressed and discussed in this chapter, contributing to the attainment of all objectives in this study. The research questions presented in chapter one have successfully been answered as the concept of readiness, whether NQSWs are ready or not for practice, desirable skills and competencies of NQSWs, the influence of supervision on NQSWs' readiness, the role and reputation of HEIs in contributing towards NQSWs' readiness and relevant recommendations were all indicated, evaluated and discussed in the empirical study. This has enabled the researcher to gain more insight into the overarching question in this study of whether or not NQSWs are ready for practice, based on the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa.

The literature analyses revealed that although research on this topic is growing globally in countries such as Australia (Moorhead *et al.*, 2019), New Zealand (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2019), Scotland (Grant *et al.*, 2017; Welch *et al.*, 2014), England (Joubert, 2020), Luxembourg (Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2015) and South Africa (De Jager, 2013), there is still not enough research on the readiness of NQSWs, even more so in the South African context. Within these studies, there are both an array of differences and similarities, thus, making it difficult to generalise whether NQSWs are ready for practice and what can enhance their readiness due to the differences in interpretation, understanding and requirements of what constitutes a 'ready' NQSW (Nathaniel, 2018). Therefore, it was vital to undertake this study to see whether there were similarities in opinions amongst social work supervisors in South Africa on the readiness

of NQSWs. It was also crucial to identify what can be done by HEIs, supervisors, social service organisations and NQSWs themselves to enhance readiness that will allow for effective service delivery in the field of social work.

This literature review enabled the researcher to conceptualise the current context of NQSWs in South Africa, which allowed for the further discussion of aspects such as relative theoretical frameworks influencing NQSWs entering practice, the professional identity of NQSWs, social work curricula in South Africa, desirable competencies of NQSWs, the various areas and skills of social work that they are competent in and appear ready for, as well as those that they are not ready for, and the role and influence of supervision and social service organisations. With this background and point of departure, the researcher designed a set of questions (based on the initial research questions in chapter one) and conducted an empirical study with 15 participants. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and were conducted via telephonic phone calls and one Zoom call. The findings from these interviews were identified and examined in accordance with existing literature in the previous chapter.

This final chapter will extend from the empirical study and aims to achieve the fourth objective of this research, which is to make conclusions and recommendations to Higher Education Institutions, NQSWs, supervisors of NQSWs and social service organisations regarding the preparation of NQSWs to be ready for practice.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions presented in this chapter will be formulated based on the findings indicated during the empirical study. Furthermore, the recommendations will be established from the presented conclusions. A discussion of the central findings from both literature and the empirical study will be put forth in a uniform manner, followed by descriptive conclusions that will be exhibited in accordance with the themes and sub-themes generated from the preceding chapter. Thereafter, the researcher will present recommendations for each theme after presenting the conclusions for that specific theme.

5.2.1 Participant particulars

It was crucial to present and describe the participant particulars as this provided the researcher with context and background to further understand and elucidate participants' answers, thus allowing the researcher to make subsequent and relative conclusions and recommendations.

The participants who took part in this research were all social work supervisors, except for one, who was a stand-in social work supervisor for three months. A social work supervisor can be defined as a qualified social worker who has the necessary experience and requirements to oversee and supervise social workers in the field. Participants' years of experience ranged from three months to twenty-one years of experience. Of the 15 participants, 14 were employed at non-governmental organisations (NGOs), whilst one participant worked in private practice offering external supervision to social service organisations. Participants supervised varying numbers of NQSWs, however, all had had at least experience supervising one NQSW previously or currently. Of the 15 participants, 10 participants worked in the child protection sector of social work, resulting in many of the answers favouring aspects of the readiness of NQSWs for this sector specifically.

5.2.2   Readiness

Several participants indicated that NQSWs that are ready for practice are characterised by their ability to have self-awareness, an openness to learning, not thinking that they know everything and having field-specific knowledge. Participants also recognised that this was a difficult question to answer as readiness is not actually attainable, or that it was impossible to associate readiness with NQSWs entering practice. These vast array of answers were expected, as indicated by previous research, as 'readiness' is interpreted differently by different individuals and thus, makes it difficult to describe the perfect 'ready-for-practice' NQSW that could be universally agreed upon by all supervisors.

Narratives indicated that a lack of practice experience throughout NQSWs social work education contributed to NQSWs not being ready for practice. This is often a result of the HEI not emphasising the importance of practice education, or NQSWs not being sufficiently prepared for the realities of the social work profession. However, it is not only the education of an NQSW that plays a role in them not being ready, but also their background and personality as the presence of inherent characteristics, or external experiences, could influence whether an NQSW can handle the realities of the profession and their readiness when entering practice. Comparing these narratives amongst one another and existing research indicate an array of both internal and external factors that could either negatively or positively influence an NQSW's readiness for practice.

There were varied answers on whether participants thought, based on their own experiences, that NQSWs were or were not ready for practice. Some indicated that they are not ready, others indicated that they are ready, and some stated that some NQSWs are ready and some are not, dependent on factors such as the HEI they attended or their unique personalities. These contrasting answers concur with global research, which has found differences in opinions on whether NQSWs are ready for practice or not, indicating that readiness for practice, or lack thereof, cannot be generalised to the entire population of NQSWs, due to the array of factors contributing to NQSWs' readiness.

5.2.2.1 Conclusions

Readiness for practice, or the lack thereof, is a concept that cannot be generalised to NQSWs in South Africa. It appears that NQSWs who are ready for practice possess covert and overt competencies, including their ability to have self-awareness, an openness to learning, not thinking that they know everything and having field-related skills and knowledge. However, an awareness of learning is often associated with more experienced social workers who have further developed professional identities, indicating that this is possibly an unrealistic expectation for NQSWs to display competence in. These competencies all link to knowledge that NQSWs should have, or be aware of not having, and use this to guide their further learning or service delivery with service users. NQSWs are not always seen as ready for practice, due to a lack of preparation, their feelings of anxiousness, and 'readiness' being seen as an ideal rather than reality. Therefore, NQSWs cannot ever fully be ready for practice, upon entering the work field after graduating from a relative HEI.

NQSWs who have limited practical experience are seen as not ready for practice as they are less exposed to the realities of the profession and experience difficulty when transitioning into practice, emphasising the need for HEIs to ensure that NQSWs are exposed to as much practice experience as possible. Unfortunately, not all HEIs prioritise the practice experience of student social workers, and have a reputation for doing so, ultimately affecting NQSWs' readiness as they are seen as less prepared, due to not having been exposed to that which is going on in the social work profession. However, it does not always come down to practice experience and the education that NQSWs' received, as their personality and own personal experiences could have an influence on being ready for practice. This could be for both individuals from challenging or sheltered backgrounds, as it depends on how they dealt with their own trauma and whether

this enhances or negatively influences their service delivery with service users and when working with trauma.

The current readiness of NQSWs is determined by factors such as their personality and the HEI that they attended, as demonstrated by NQSWs who are perceived as both ready and less ready for practice. Individual characteristics such as drive, passion, resilience and purpose could all enhance NQSWs' dedication and commitment to the profession, thus, explaining why personality is seen as a variable in determining readiness. With differences in opinions of whether NQSWs are ready for practice, the researcher can deduce that there are too many variables contributing to readiness and that the readiness of NQSWs in South Africa cannot be generalised or applied to the entire population because of these vast influences. However, it can be noted that current social work curricula in South Africa does not appear to be universally preparing NQSWs to be ready for practice.

5.2.2.2   Recommendations

- The Council of Higher Education and the SACSSP should ensure that social work practice education contributes to enhancing readiness through ensuring that social service organisations that take on students for practice education are registered, capable and accountable to ensure that they can provide quality training to social work students to allow for them to be exposed to all realities in the social work profession.

- HEIs should ensure that not only social work education is taught to NQSWs, but also that NQSWs are assisted in developing specific and relevant professional inherent and overt characteristics to assist in the contribution of enhancing NQSWs readiness, by developing the competencies seen necessary by supervisors to be ready to enter the profession. A constant, formalised and reciprocal flow of knowledge transfer and experience between HEIs and social service organisations regarding what is needed in the training of social work students is thus vital, and could be promoted by the SACSSP as professional social work statutory regulator.

- HEIs should ensure constant and regular liaison with practice placement organisations to ensure that practical education outcomes of the Bachelor of Social Work degree are being met to a satisfactory standard. Therefore, social service organisations should avail themselves for the practice education of social work students, and should furthermore avail qualified supervisors for the supervision of social work students at field

placements. In order for social service organisations to actively contribute to the practice education of social work students, it is strongly recommended that the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) liaise with the national Department of Social Development regarding appropriate subsidies for supervisors of social work students at both public and private social service organisations, in order for social service organisations to avail supervisors for practice education of social work students. This will be a significant contribution towards the enhancement of the readiness of NQSWs.

5.2.3   Competencies

Participants recognised an array of competencies they look for when seeking to employ an NQSW to fulfil a position at their social service organisation, including a willingness to learn, passion, administrative skills, theoretical knowledge and a driver's licence. There is a massive jump in the number of cases that NQSWs are responsible for, compared to when they are students, requiring them to be competent in administration to manage this large workload. Most participants agreed on areas where NQSWs should be competent in, except those who thought that NQSWs do not need to have vast theoretical knowledge as this is something that can be taught, similarly to what has been indicated in literature.

Participants identified that NQSWs lack knowledge regarding legislation used to guide practice, statutory work and related reports, and professionalism and conduct, concurring with existing research that has indicated a lack in these competencies amongst NQSWs. At the same time, there were conflicting views on whether NQSWs have competencies in practical skills with services users and the ability to implement theory into practice. Narratives indicated that although NQSWs have sound theoretical knowledge, they are not always aware of how to use this to guide their service delivery with service users, emphasising the mismatch between what is taught in social work education and utilising this knowledge to guide practice.

5.2.3.1   Conclusions

As identified by participants' narratives, both covert and overt competencies are deemed desirable when seeking to employ an NQSW for a social work position. The most controversial competency had to be that of theoretical knowledge, with some participants indicating that they want NQSWs to have this knowledge, others stating that is not a requirement for them to have this knowledge, and others recognising that NQSWs struggle to implement this knowledge into

practice. A lack in professionalism and conduct in both NQSWs' behaviour and their curriculum vitae, indicates the need for this to be addressed by HEIs to prepare them effectively for entering the work field. NQSWs also appear to lack knowledge regarding legislation and statutory work, highlighting NQSWs lack of competence to enter the child protection field. This indicates that there are differences amongst NQSWs' skills and knowledge in this regard, highlighting the differences in theoretical content taught and provided at different HEIs to NQSWs. The narratives indicated in this theme were similar to those in the previous theme, that discussed factors contributing to the readiness of NQSWs, such as a willingness to learn and theoretical knowledge, thus, further confirming these views that these competencies enhance both the readiness and employability of NQSWs.

5.2.3.2 Recommendations

- HEIs can assist in better preparing NQSWs for job interviews by meeting with supervisors and social service organisations and obtaining insight into what they seek from NQSWs when they apply to work at an organisation, and including this into social work students' final year's education.

- HEIs can review and update their curricula upon having consultations with supervisors and social service organisations in various fields as to what competencies are deemed most important for NQSWs at specific times to possess when entering the field, and ensuring that this is taught both theoretically and practically in social work education.

- HEIs should ensure that all theoretical knowledge provided is not only taught in theoretical courses, however, also addressed practically to ensure that practical application of theoretical knowledge is a competency that all NQSWs have upon entering practice. HEIs should involve social service organisations more in their theoretical training courses to provide social work students with cutting-edge knowledge from practice.

5.2.4 Supervision

All participants acknowledge the benefit and necessity of regular supervision for NQSWs as they need guidance due to their lack of experience and exposure to the realities of the profession. This finding is further confirmed in existing literature. There were variations as to how often these structured supervision sessions should occur, even though NQSWs are mandated to receive supervision every second week throughout their first year in the field, with some

participants also mentioning that they have an open-door policy with their NQSWs. However, this approach is not always seen as desirable as it is often seen as a replacement for structured supervision and thus, does not allow for the effective growth, development and support that should be addressed during supervision sessions with NQSWs.

Several participants indicated that NQSWs need a more specialised and intensive mode of supervision, which is not the same as regular supervision conducted with more experienced social workers. Such a mode of supervision requires an experienced supervisor to ensure that NQSWs unique learning needs and transition into the professional field of social work are followed through effectively and with the appropriate support. This support was compared to that of a mother who nurtures a child, emphasising the dependent relationship NQSWs have on supervisors, in needing them to assist them in meeting their professional developmental learning needs.

According to many participants, this mode of supervision emphasises the need to address the supportive function of social work supervision, ensuring that NQSWs emotional needs are considered, discussed and met during supervision sessions. However, the reality is that supervisors do not always have time to provide such intensive supervision, resulting in this function often being neglected, allowing for administrative tasks to rather take priority. These findings are reiterated in existing research, indicating that this is an unfortunate global reality amongst many supervisors and NQSW supervisees, which negatively affects their readiness or the growth thereof upon entering practice.

5.2.4.1 *Conclusions*

NQSWs need intensive guidance and support from supervisors when entering practice, due to their lack of experience in the field. Social work supervision with NQSWs should be offered regularly, fortnightly precisely, and effectively address all functions of supervision to ensure that the needs of NQSWs are met accordingly. A large emphasis should be placed on the supportive and emotive function of supervision, as this transitional period can often be experienced as overwhelming and result in NQSWs feeling anxious, ultimately affecting their ability to render services effectively. Social work supervisors need to make time available to provide this type of supervision to NQSWs. Unfortunately, if supervisors continue to have unmanageable workloads and large amounts of supervisors to oversee, the reality is that NQSWs will only address case-related issues during supervision due to their supervisor's time

constraints, and thus, not be able to develop and grow as successfully as they could, if their emotional and developmental needs were being addressed throughout these sessions.

5.2.4.2 *Recommendations*

- The SACSSP needs to ensure that supervision is provided to NQSWs on a fortnightly basis and meets all supervision functions through the regular audits of supervision practices within social service organisations.

- Social service organisations should provide social work supervisors with specialised training in terms of providing supervision to NQSWs and attending to their unique needs when entering practice to enable supervisors to effectively be able to provide this type of supervision to NQSWs. Experts from HEIs could also develop specialised, accredited courses for supervisors of NQSWs.

- The SACSSP should specifically regulate the number of supervisees social work supervisors have to ensure that they are not overworked or overloaded with too many demands, and thus, be able to more effectively provide crucial supervision to NQSWs and fellow supervisees so that they can render services successfully.

5.2.5 HEIs

Participants expressed contradictory answers on whether they thought HEIs were successfully preparing NQSWs enough to be ready for social work practice, confirming the vast number of factors that impact readiness and participants having different expectations as to what they deem as prepared or ready. The variations in these answers indicate that not all HEIs are preparing NQSWs successfully, however, that some are, concurring with findings in existing research. HEIs appear to be preparing NQSWs well in their theoretical knowledge, ability to think holistically about services users and their challenges, and report writing skills, which are all competencies that supervisors appreciate and find helpful in their relative fields. However, they emphasised that the preparation and existence of these competencies were dependent on the specific HEI that an NQSW attends.

The majority of participants were able to identify that they can notice a difference amongst NQSWs based on the specific HEI that they attended, concurring with existing research. Furthermore, the HEI that they attended influenced many participants' decisions on whether they would likely employ someone based on their attended HEI. Participants acknowledged

that not all HEIs prepare NQSWs sufficiently, resulting in them favouring the NQSWs that specific HEIs develop and send out into the field. Participants based this decision on the skills and competencies that a specific institution trained NQSWs to develop and have, being in conjunction with the competencies they seek in NQSWs entering the field.

5.2.5.1   Conclusions

HEIs play a prominent role in the preparation of NQSWs as they provide them with their fundamental and initial knowledge to successfully enter a variety of practice settings and use this knowledge to begin practice with service users. Unfortunately, not all HEIs are sufficiently preparing NQSWs to do this due to the lack of emphasis they place on specific theoretical topics, practical skills or ensuring quality practice education placements that will further enhance social work students' knowledge and competencies. Furthermore, not all HEIs are teaching NQSWs to take initiative, a competency that has been seen as desirable and reflected throughout themes in participants wanting NQSWs to show an openness to learn. Supervisors are aware of this and have acknowledged that the HEI that NQSWs attend, does influence their decision on whether they would hire them, emphasising the lack of universal, quality social work training amongst all HEIs in South Africa, and the disadvantage some NQSWs are put at purely as a result of the HEI that they attended.

5.2.5.2   Recommendations

- Social service organisations, supervisors and HEIs need to ensure that they regularly consult each other on the development of social work curricula to ensure that the readiness of NQSWs is enhanced by improved preparedness through what is taught via social work curricula. Regional forums in this regard, including all relevant stakeholders, are strongly suggested.

- The Council of Higher Education and the SACSSP should continuously review and assess social work programmes being offered at different HEIs in South Africa, by means of a national education, training and development assurance policy, to determine whether HEIs are providing social work education that meets the required norms and standards and to ensure quality education for social work students in the country. More specifically, the admission requirements of social work students at HEIs in the country should be benchmarked, as significant discrepancies seem to be prevalent.

5.2.6 Recommendations by supervisors of NQSWs

HEIs need to look at the specific field education experience they are providing to NQSWs as well as how many hours of experience NQSWs are gaining during these placements, as this is seen as a valuable source of experience and learning for NQSWs. Therefore, HEIs need to ensure that these placements are of quality and meet all learning outcomes. This finding is in conjunction with similar findings in existing research. HEIs also need to review their theoretical preparation in ensuring that NQSWs are provided with knowledge deemed necessary for the field. External relationships should also be fostered with social workers in the field and organisations to allow for effective curriculum development, and to expose student social workers to the reality of the profession.

Participants expressed that supervisors and social service organisations have a responsibility to ensure that effective orientation, job shadowing opportunities, specialised supervision and a cohesive working environment are provided and maintained to allow for the growth, development and learning that needs to take place to enhance NQSWs' readiness for practice. All of these concepts and entities can positively influence NQSWs' skill and knowledge development and are seen as valuable sources of providing NQSWs with information that they did not have prior to entering an organisation, a view that is confirmed with existing literature.

It is evident that NQSWs also have a hand in ensuring their own readiness through being willing to learn and obtain further field-specific knowledge, attending training opportunities, volunteering or interning at organisations, ensuring that they take care of themselves emotionally and making sure that they are inherently suited for the profession. This learning will, at times, have to take place outside of regular working hours, emphasising the commitment and dedication NQSWs need to have in furthering their own development in the profession, and not relying solely on HEIs, social service organisations and supervisors to provide them with the necessary information and knowledge that they need.

5.2.6.1 Conclusions

The readiness of NQSWs is dependent on various entities and should not be placed solely as the responsibility of one stakeholder. HEIs, social work governing and statutory organisations, social service organisations, supervisors and NQSWs all play a role in enhancing NQSWs' learning and development that will positively influence their readiness for practice. HEIs have a responsibility to ensure that social work curricula meet the learning needs of social work

students through continuously reviewing and updating both theoretical and practical teaching and learning, and ensuring that these two modes of learning are of quality standard. Supervisors and social service organisations need to provide sufficient training and supervision that will enable NQSWs to learn and develop specialised skills and competence in areas that HEIs were unable to, due to their generic approach in curriculum development. Supervisors should also create a harmonious working environment that encourages learning, to further enhance NQSWs' development, outside of the supervisory relationship. Furthermore, NQSWs' colleagues can lessen the burden of social work supervisors having to educate and support NQSWs on their own, and positively influence their ability to provide effective supervision. NQSWs need to take responsibility for their own learning outside of practice as there is not always time to do so during practice. NQSWs also need to recognise the importance of self-care in the profession of social work, as due to the nature of the profession being taxing and overwhelming. NQSWs need to have support systems in place to prevent burnout and cope with the challenges and demands of the profession. In addition, NQSWs need to ensure that they are inherently inclined to work in the challenging profession, and if they are able to, taking an aptitude test may confirm this. As indicated by participants, many NQSWs should not have studied social work at all.

Ultimately, it is a combined effort that needs to occur amongst NQSWs, HEIs, social service organisations and supervisors to ensure that NQSWs cope with the transition into practice, and that their learning needs are met to build on their confidence and readiness to deliver services to service users effectively.

5.2.6.2   Recommendations

- <u>HEIs</u> need to ensure that both theoretical and practical preparation of NQSWs meets the norms and standards of the social work degree and furthermore create spaces for the articulation of specific and unique national, regional and institutional challenges in social work training, through consulting with other HEIs in forums such as the ASASWEI to identify what can be done to improve current social work curricula to be more context-specific. It is specifically recommended that this should be a standing and dedicated point at the agendas of future endeavours by ASASWEI.

- <u>Social work governing and statutory organisations</u>, such as the National Department of Social Development, ASASWEI and the SACSSP should partner with and support HEIs, particularly in their social work practice education placements of students at

social service organisations. It seems that the myriad challenges of individual HEIs (exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic) to find suitable practice education placements and field supervision of social work students, directly hampers the readiness for practice of NQSWs. Therefore, collective action by these governing and statutory bodies, with the emphasis on the creation of conducive social work students' field practice education placements, may ultimately enhance the readiness of NQSWs for practice.

- <u>Social service organisations</u> need to ensure that they effectively enhance NQSWs readiness and transition into practice by providing effective orientation, supervision, training and facilitating learning relationships amongst fellow colleagues and NQSWs to enhance their learning further.

- <u>Supervisors at social service organisations</u> need to make time available to effectively provide supervision that will address all three functions of supervision (administration, support and education) and specifically address NQSWs learning needs, to assist in their transition into practice and enhance their readiness.

- <u>NQSWs</u> need to realise that they have to take responsibility for their own learning, both inside and outside of the workplace, to further enhance their own capabilities and readiness to effectively provide services to service users.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The goal of this research was to gain an understanding of supervisors' experiences of newly qualified social workers' readiness for practice at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa. The researcher was able to gain this understanding through reviewing and analysing existing literature to formulate an idea about the current readiness of NQSWs both locally and globally, and learn what areas they seem to show a lack in and which they show readiness in. This formed the basis and served as a guideline for the researcher to empirically investigate the views of supervisors on the readiness of NQSWs in South Africa, how this can be achieved and whether readiness is currently lacking amongst NQSWs. The empirical study enabled the researcher to identify that various factors play a role in the readiness of NQSWs, thus making it difficult to generalise readiness. However, specific skills, knowledge and competencies were identified as lacking amongst NQSWs, and that this negatively influences their readiness, emphasising the need for further research to divulge into possible individual components of readiness, or consider other perspectives on the readiness of NQSWs for practice. Possible future research that should be investigated includes:

- A qualitative study on the views of NQSWs in South Africa on their own perceptions of their readiness for practice;

- A comparative study between the views of social work supervisors and NQSWs in South Africa on their readiness for practice;

- A comparative study between NQSWs, supervisors and HEIs on the competencies deemed necessary for NQSWs entering practice;

- A national study on the application of the supportive function of supervision by social work supervisors, with the emphasis on NQSWs;

- Most importantly, the determinants of what constitute the professional identity of NQSWs should be a national research endeavour by all relevant stakeholders in the country.

5.4   KEY FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES IN THE READINESS OF NQSWS

It is evident that there are some NQSWs who are ready for practice and some who are not, based on the difference in opinions as to what 'ready' constitutes, the quality of education they received from the HEI that they attended, the previous practice experience that they gained throughout their studies, as well as their professional characteristics and personal background. Not all HEIs are preparing NQSWs sufficiently in the skills, competencies and knowledge that they need for entering practice, resulting in supervisors needing to educate NQSWs further. Supervisors are aware of the specialised type of supervision that NQSWs need, however, due to their own workload demands, they are not always able to provide this supervision, and focus sometimes merely on the managerial aspect, neglecting NQSWs' emotional and supportive needs. NQSWs also need to be open to learning and take ownership of their professional identity and development to enhance their own readiness.

The readiness of NQSWs should be a shared approach in which HEIs, supervisors, social service organisations, NQSWs, the Council for Higher Education, the National Department of Social Development, the SACSSP and ASASWEI, all need to take responsibility for. Endeavours to enhance the readiness of NQSWs must be a collective action, and it is suggested that this be formally prioritised in actions by relevant statutory bodies and professional associations such as the SACSSP and ASASWEI.

The following key findings may remain challenging if not appropriately addressed in future:

- Vast discrepancies exist amongst the education standards of HEIs. The substandard of the social work programmes (due to various reasons) offered at some HEIs affects the readiness of NQSWs to such an extent that they struggle to get employed.

- It is specifically the lack of effective practice education offered by some HEIs that hampers the readiness of NQSWs.

- Poor skills in report writing and knowledge of child protection work remain a challenge in the readiness of NQSWs.

- It appears that a focus on meso and macro practices in South Africa resulted in negligence of micro skills of NQSWs to such an extent that clinical, interpersonal communication of NQSWs in casework is being regarded as challenging, which affects their readiness for practice.

- The admission requirements of HEIs, and institutional assurance of acquired characteristics and values of social work students, are also aspects that remain challenging for the readiness of NQSWs.

- The fact that many NQSWs do not have drivers licences, is a practical but real challenge in the readiness of NQSWs for practice and their employability.

- Supervisors at social service organisations struggle to effectively attend to the supervision of NQSWs, owing to structural and systemic challenges such as insufficient resources and unmanageable workloads. The readiness of NQSWs will remain a challenge in future, if the mandatory and regulated supervision of NQSWs is not effectively addressed by the SACSSP, the National Department of Social Development and social service organisations.

- Ultimately, what constitutes specific determinants of professional identity of NQSWs, which is the undergirding of this research, remains a challenge in South Africa.

The findings of this research contribute to the social work profession to assist in the future preparation of NQSWs, to not only enhance their readiness, but to ensure that NQSWs remain in the profession as a result thereof. Therefore, the key findings of this research and identified challenges to the readiness of NQSWs will be disseminated directly to relevant stakeholders on different platforms, and by means of a research article for publication in a local social work journal.

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Themes for Interview Schedule:

1.   **Biographical Information:**

    Please clarify the following:

1.1.   Years of experience as a social work supervisor;

1.2.   How many NQSWs are you currently supervising?

1.3.   Describe the type of social service organisation that you work for:

- Is the organisation public or private?
- What type of work do you do/services do you offer at your organisation?

2.   **Readiness of NQSWs:**

2.1.   What do you define an NQSW being 'ready' to practice as?

2.2.   In your opinion, when is an NQSW not ready for practice (provide examples).

2.3.   How do you experience the readiness of most of the NQSWs that you supervised in the past recent years: are most of them ready or not ready? (motivate your answer and give an example)

2.4.   What specific expectations with regards to attributes and competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) would you currently (the Covid-19 pandemic included) look for when hiring an NQSW?

    2.4.1   Which competencies do you think NQSWs have?

    2.4.2   Which do you think they lack?

2.5.   Do you think that regular supervision sessions with NQSWs could positively influence NQSWs readiness for practice?

    2.5.1   Why do you think so?

2.6.   Do you think that HEIs are preparing NQSWs sufficiently enough to be ready for practice? Motivate your answer and provide examples.

2.7.   What specifically do you think HEIs are doing well in their training of social workers?

2.8.   Do you find a difference in the NQSWs who studied at different universities? (motivate your answer [thus why are you saying so?] and give examples, without identifying the universities/institutions)

3.   **Recommendations:**

3.1.   In your opinion, what do you think, in general, could improve the readiness of NQSWs?

3.2.   What are your recommendations to the following entities to assist in the readiness and preparedness of NQSWs?:

3.2.1. Higher Education Institutions

3.2.2. Social Service Organisations

3.2.3. Supervisors of NQSWs

3.2.4. NQSWs themselves

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

ANNEXURE 2

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Katelyn Wolfaardt, from the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as a possible participant because you are/were a supervisor at a social service organisation in the Western Cape, South Africa.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the readiness of newly qualified social workers for practice, based on the experiences of supervisors at social service organisations.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to be available for a telephonic interview at a convenient time agreed upon by both you and the researcher. Should you require any further information about the research you can contact the researcher via email at 20116233@sun.ac.za.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

No harm is foreseen for during or after the research, as the research study is considered low risk in terms of research ethical considerations (REC). All interviews are regarded as confidential and therefore, no personal details of participants will be included in the research. No discomforts are foreseen other than a possible time inconvenience. Discomfort may be discussed at any time during the interview and will be adequately addressed immediately.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

The possible benefits that may arise from this study includes the recommendations that will be made to Higher Education Institutions, NQSWs, supervisors of NQSWs and social service organisations regarding the preparation of NQSWs to be ready for practice.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

I will be responsible for all expenses involved in this research and therefore no form of payment will be required by you. You will not receive any remuneration for participating in this study.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information you share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected and will remain confidential. Interviews will be conducted privately; however, they will be recorded. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to these recordings. The data collected via recordings will be kept safe by storing all data and information on password-protected devices as well as immediately deleting recordings once the interview have been transcribed. You will remain anonymous and neither you nor the organisation you work for will be identified in the research report. If you are quoted in the final research report, this too shall be done anonymously.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this study if at any point you no longer want to continue with participating.

8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Katelyn Wolfaardt at 20116233@sun.ac.za and/or my supervisor, Professor Lambert Engelbrecht, the chairperson of the Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University at lke@sun.ac.za or by telephone on 021 080 2073.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I _____ *(name of participant)* agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by Katelyn Wolfaardt.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   **Date**

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator,** I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator   **Date**

ANNEXURE 3

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

14 May 2021

Project number: **22242**

Project Title: Readiness for practice of Newly Qualified Social Workers: Experiences of supervisors at social service organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa

Dear Miss KA Wolfaardt

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 04/05/2021 10:08 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
14 May 2021	13 May 2024

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (22242) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Research Protocol/Proposal	Research Proposal 20116233 KWOLFAARDT REC	03/05/2021	1
Budget	PRELIMINARY BUDGET	03/05/2021	1
Informed Consent Form	Informed Consent Form	03/05/2021	1
Privacy Impact Self-Assessment Report	Self Assessment Wolfaardt, KA, Miss [20116233@sun.ac.za] Outlook	03/05/2021	1
Data collection tool	Interview Schedule	03/05/2021	1

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.
The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2ⁿᵈ Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

As soon as Research Ethics Committee approval is confirmed by the REC, the principal investigator (PI) is responsible for the following:

Conducting the Research: The PI is responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC-approved research protocol. The PI is jointly responsible for the conduct of co-investigators and any research staff involved with this research. The PI must ensure that the research is conducted according to the recognised standards of their research field/discipline and according to the principles and standards of ethical research and responsible research conduct.

Participant Enrolment: The PI may not recruit or enrol participants unless the protocol for recruitment is approved by the REC. Recruitment and data collection activities must cease after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

Informed Consent: The PI is responsible for obtaining and documenting affirmative informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no

participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their affirmative informed consent. The PI must give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents, where required. The PI must keep the originals in a secured, REC-approved location for at least five (5) years after the research is complete.

Continuing Review: The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period.** Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is the PI's responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur.** Once REC approval of your research lapses, all research activities must cease, and contact must be made with the REC immediately.

Amendments and Changes: Any planned changes to any aspect of the research (such as research design, procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material, etc.), must be submitted to the REC for review and approval before implementation. Amendments may not be initiated without first obtaining written REC approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

Adverse or Unanticipated Events: Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research-related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to the REC within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. The PI must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants.

Research Record Keeping: The PI must keep the following research-related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence and approvals from the REC.

Provision of Counselling or emergency support: When a dedicated counsellor or a psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

Final reports: When the research is completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions), the PI must submit a Final Report to the REC to close the study.

On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits: If the researcher is notified that the research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, the PI must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

REFLEXIVITY REPORT

The practice of reflection is necessary in the field of qualitative research as it enhances accountability and validity, and thus is an ethical responsibility of a researcher (Mortari, 2015). Reflexivity can be explained as the recognition a researcher has on the manner in which their involvement could possibly influence the research process (Dodgson, 2019; Haynes, 2012; Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). It is the action of self-examining how the researcher's subjectivity impacted their study (Palaganas *et al.*, 2017). The researcher should identify any shared differences and similarities between themselves and their research participants, and should make readers aware of these (Dodgson, 2019). Reflexivity has been presented as a helpful approach utilised by researchers to reflect upon their role throughout the research process (Ruokonen-Engler, 2016). Using this approach, the researcher will address six questions as stipulated by these authors to actively participate in reflexivity.

1. What personal experience do I have with my research topic?

Throughout the process of completing my research, I qualified as a newly qualified social worker. However, I was not employed during this time, and therefore was not able to fully relate to or understand how an NQSW perceived readiness upon entering the profession after graduating. This assisted in me not having a biased opinion on what readiness should look like.

2. How did I come to study the specific topic in the field?

This topic was of interest to me, as after I graduated at the end of 2019, I started looking for a social work job, however, I was unsuccessful in doing so. Therefore, I was interested in investigating whether this had to do with the fact that I was an NQSW entering the field. Whilst completing my literature review, I realised that the readiness of NQSWs is a phenomenon that needs to be globally investigated due to the opposing views on whether or not NQSWs are ready for practice.

3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?

Whilst conducting this research, I was a newly qualified social worker with no working experience. This is the only similarity I shared with the topic being investigated as I had not ever entered the workplace to understand whether I, as an NQSW, felt ready for practice or not. However, I do have friends who qualify as NQSWs who have entered the workplace in the last

two years, and thus had knowledge of their experiences on whether or not they felt ready for practice.

4. How did I gain access to the field?

I was able to gain access through contacting participants who were in my own professional network. Some of these participants I knew personally, and others I had met professionally throughout obtaining my social work degree. Many participants also recommended other potential participants who met the inclusion criteria and who made contact with me to participate in my research.

5. How does my own position (age, gender, class, ethnicity, economic status, etc.) influence interaction in the field and the data collection process?

I was a newly qualified social worker whilst completing my data collection process, therefore, I was young as I had graduated less than two years ago. Most participants that I interviewed were much older than me, and at first, I found this quite intimidating, resulting in me feeling anxious and nervous. However, by making myself aware of this, after my initial interviews, I became much more relaxed and confident in my ability to interview participants. It allowed me to not enable age differences to negatively influence the research process by ensuring that I asked all necessary questions and explored topics further during the data collection phase of this research.

6. What is my interpretation perspective?

Due to the nature of this research being qualitative, my interpretation perspective was subjective. This was evident whilst analysing the data collected in which I found myself either disagreeing or agreeing with participants' narratives. This is a direct result of my perspective being ingrained throughout this research process, and not being disconnected or objective. However, I was made aware of this through practicing reflective journaling, and therefore, actively could ensure that when I analysed participants' narratives, that I used an impartial and non-prejudicial approach to do so.