

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise empirical findings and make major conclusions based on the review of literature and empirical evidence. The conclusions are geared towards ascertaining achievement of the research goal of this study, namely: to explore and describe the perspectives of South Africa's social service professionals to the emergence of Youth work practice as well as its future status. To achieve this goal and gain more insight into the problem, the researcher conducted a mixed methods research study which mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches, methods and procedures in sequence (Alasuutari, Bickman & Brannen, 2008:114; Bergman, 2008:53; Delpont & Fouché, 2011:434; Flick, 2008:42; Ivankova, Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:255; Singh, 2007:63). The aim was explore and describe the research problem by obtaining information on the ideas, perceptions, feelings, attitudes, knowledge, and experiences that the research participants have on the research topic.

In conclusion, the researcher deemed it crucial to conduct an evaluation of the extent to which utilisation of the above stated methods assisted in answering the identified core research questions that were highlighted in Chapters 1 and 5.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS

In evaluating the extent to which the research goal has been met, the researcher checked how research questions have been answered. The researcher also highlights how the answers to those questions helped in attainment of the research objectives.

- The first question explored **the factors that contributed to the emergence of Youth work in South Africa**. By answering this question, the researcher

provided background and historical analysis of how Youth work practice emerged in South Africa. This contributed to achievement of the first objective of this study, namely: **identifying, exploring, and analysing the factors that contributed to the emergence of Youth work.** The question on how Youth work evolved in South Africa was answered through revision of literature on the history of Youth work at national, regional and global context as well as the history of Youth work. The empirical investigation only focused on providing evidence at national level since the unit of analysis was South Africa.

The evidence gathered on the factors that contributed to the emergence of Youth work showed that the underlying contributory factors fall in two categories, namely: Social development contributory factor and Human resources and diversion contributory factor. Individually or combined, the Social development contributory factors contributed more to emergence of Youth work. This evidence refutes what has been mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study that the emergence of Youth work is chiefly due to political and economic climate. Instead, it seems to be a response to social problems that are caused by various circumstances including political ones.

In view of this empirical evidence, the researcher concludes that whereas a holistic approach that looks at young people in their social, economic, political, spiritual, and psychological contexts is important (The Presidency, 2009b:31; Merton & Payne, 2000:8-9), it is within the social context that Youth workers should engage young people as their primary clients (Foster, 2000 in Maunders, 2003:10; Sercombe, 2010:27, 88). This has implications for theoretical framework guiding youth development and Youth work, because in line with the assertion by Sercombe (2010:26), it means that the Youth worker-youth relationship is supposed to take place within the social context. Therefore, even though most theories are underpinned by an understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts within which young people live and operate (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:15; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2001a:4; Krauss & Suandi, 2008:12), the primary focus should be on translating that understanding towards resolution of young people's social problems.

- The second question assessed **the current status of Youth work in South Africa**. The aim of this question was to attain the second objective of **exploring the current scope and nature of Youth work services in South Africa**. In this regard, there was overwhelming quantitative and qualitative evidence that regarded young people as the primary client of a Youth worker. There was at the same time recognition of youth development as a cross cutting responsibility, that warrants intervention of a professional team. The implication of these findings is that, for other professionals who are rendering services to the youth, there would be a need to focus primarily on young people as the primary client. Although Youth workers primarily focus on young people as their primary client, it is not the case for professionals in other sectors. Therefore, evidence produced by this study on the respondents' opinion about Youth work being classified an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and Youth work is an opportunity for social service professionals and probably other professionals to make youth their primary client group. This evidence could be used as a benchmark by professionals in other sectors.

Furthermore, even though the contribution of Youth work to the development of young people is felt, it is important to also note the significance of the contributions of other professionals (Beker, 2001b:365). The fact that this study showed that social service professionals work collaboratively with other professionals in rendering services to the youth, would enable them to discuss and vent their feelings, encourage and support one another, maximise resource utilisation, improve coordination, maximise impact, promote accountability and give each other constant feedback in order to promote progress and positive learning experience for everyone involved (Anglin et al., 1990:127). This, according to Krueger (1990:76), could further assist different service providers to know and understand each other's area of expertise, enable them to constantly strive to place themselves in each other's shoes, minimise professional competition, maximise direct service as well as human resources exchange, and help them to successfully achieve more as a team than individual service providers could do alone, particularly because "*...young people need more than Youth workers*" (Sercombe, 2010:82).

- The third question investigated **the extent of involvement of South Africa's social service professionals in Youth work**. This question was asked to **gain an understanding of the current status of Youth work**. It assisted in achievement of the second objective, while setting the tone for the fourth one. The assumption made was that social service professionals are somewhat involved in provision of services to the youth. The quantitative evidence gathered backed this assumption and validated the need to respond to this question. The findings confirmed that social service professionals are involved in Youth work, particularly in collaborating with other professionals.
- It was further found that they are involved, more in direct service delivery than in indirect service delivery with specific evidence pointing poor involvement policy making. In relation to the advocacy theory that emphasises the role of service providers as being that of speaking and acting on behalf of the youth, non-involvement of social service professionals in policy making means that there would be no voice for the youth in policy making structures. This could further disadvantage the youth, hamper the ability to speak on behalf of them, and could also lead to futile mainstreaming efforts.
- The fourth question checked **the perspectives of South Africa's social service professionals regarding the future status of Youth work**. This question contributed towards attainment of objective 3, since it **determined whether Youth work should remain as an occupation, or recognised as a professional area of specialisation or an autonomous professional field of practice**. The researcher channelled the respondents towards focusing on these options, because of the on-going debate on professionalising Youth work and the need for evidence to guide policy direction in that regard.

In the qualitative part of the study, the evidence gathered was in support of Youth work as an area of specialisation, and also as a profession. The issue of Youth work remaining as an occupation did not arise. However, the quantitative findings showed overwhelming support (75%) for Youth work as an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and youth care work and limited support (8%) for Youth work as an autonomous profession.

In view of the quantitative findings that supported multi-disciplinary approach to youth development, whilst indicating that Youth workers are more skilled than the Social workers and Child and youth care workers in rendering services to the youth, the researcher concludes that social service professionals supports the option of Youth Work as an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and youth care work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the support for Youth work as an area of specialisation could positively be regarded as acceptance by social service professionals to focus on youth development as a special branch of their work and could also be seen as an acknowledgement that there is a need for specialised education and training in youth development to ensure quality service provision.

The evidence above validates the mainstreaming approach to youth development (Anglin et al., 1990:127; The Presidency, 2009b:33). Critically, the researcher concludes that, even though there was limited support for Youth work as a profession in the quantitative phase, qualitative evidence supporting this option should not be ignored especially given the fact that the findings of this study can only be generalised to social service professionals.

Other questions linked to specialisation and professionalisation related to a body responsible for recognition of Youth work as an area of specialisation or a profession. Whereas many respondents chose the SACSSP as the possible professional body, a small percentage of responses indicated the need for new regulatory body to be established for that purpose. Selection of the SACSSP is favourable for Youth work as an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and Youth work.

The other significant finding was on minimum entry requirement for Youth work. The responses show indicates the possibility of multiple entry points for Youth work qualification. The choice of a degree as minimum entry requirement (41%) supports the option of having Youth work as a profession, the choice of a qualification below the degree (41%) supports the Para professional route, and the choice of a post-graduate qualification (18%) supports the specialisation route. These responses are not consistent with the future classification of Youth work as an area of specialisation. The former two

responses could be an indication that the possibility of having Youth work as a profession could still be explored with the options of a profession and Para professional levels. This scenario is comparable to existing qualification levels of social service professions. However, in line with the findings of this study, efforts should be on introducing qualifications that supports the specialisation route. This would mean that the required minimum entry point for Youth work practice should be at post graduate level.

- The last question considered **the benefits of having Youth work as an autonomous profession and/or an area of specialisation**. This question was asked to contribute to achievement of objective 4 of **examining the benefits of Youth work as an area of specialisation or a profession**. The high positive rating of responses is equated to high benefits whilst the low rating of responses equates to low benefits. It is essential to note that in line with qualitative evidence obtained from the focus group participants citing the absence of non-benefits for recognising Youth work as an area of specialisation or a profession, quantitative evidence also supported this assertion, because all statements were ranked higher (above 70%), with most of the respondents strongly agreeing with the statements. It can thus be concluded that the benefits of having Youth work as an area of specialisation or a profession are high and therefore evidence suggesting retaining Youth work as an occupation should be refuted.

Overall, the researcher concludes that the findings truly reflect the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of social service professionals towards the emergence of Youth work.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

After analysing empirical evidence gathered, and in view of the implications of this study, the researcher makes the following specific recommendations:

- In addressing the needs of young people, service providers should realise that the primary sphere of intervention is the social context.

- ❑ Even though Youth work is considered as the only practice that focuses exclusively on young people, emphasis of the role of a multi-disciplinary team in provision of youth services should not be ignored, especially in view of the cross cutting nature of youth development.
- ❑ Collaboration amongst various service providers in government, non-government, and business sectors ought to be fostered and existing efforts should be applauded.
- ❑ The roles and responsibilities of Youth workers should be clarified, so that other multidisciplinary team members can understand how to relate them and to create awareness to the public.
- ❑ In multidisciplinary settings, Youth workers should assume the leadership role and be responsible for coordination of youth development services, to ensure that the youth ultimately receive a coordinated package of service. As coordinators, the Youth workers could play the role of a team leader.
- ❑ For successful teamwork to happen, there is a need for capacity in the form of personnel, skills, expertise and finances to be created and/or strengthened to enable the sectors involved to discharge effectively on their common youth development mandate.
- ❑ Given evidence produced by this study that most Youth workers are in the employ of non-government sector, predominantly as volunteers and activists, there should be concerted effort towards employing them in the public sector on a full-time basis. This would facilitate the mainstreaming of youth development and provide leadership in conceptualisation of policies and programmes.
- ❑ Advancement of youth development should be through translating political commitment to administrative actions including employment of Youth workers in government across all spheres (i.e., at national, provincial, local and district levels).

- The national Department of Social Development and the SACSSP in the context of reviewing the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978, should consider Youth work as an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and youth care work.
- The support for Youth work as an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and youth care work should be regarded as an opportunity by the social service professionals to acquire education and training, thus strengthening their capacity to deliver services to the youth effectively.
- The working conditions of those specialising in Youth work should be made to be attractive, competitive and comparable to other areas of specialisation in Social work and/or Child and youth care work by offering competitive and comparable incentives, preventing Youth workers from being looked down upon in multi-disciplinary teams, according them equal status, ensuring clarity and parity in roles, preventing high turnover of personnel, and recruiting people to study and select Youth work as an area of specialisation.
- The minimum entry requirements for practicing Youth work as an area of specialisation should be at post-graduate level.
- Future researchers should explore having Youth work as an area of specialisation for more helping professions in order to ensure horizontal integration of youth development in various domains.
- The findings of this study should not be generalised to other populations, in particular to service providers not yet recognised as social service professionals and other helping professionals involved in youth development space. They could be used as benchmark.
- There is also a need for future researchers to conduct a complementary study to explore the views of Youth workers on the same research phenomenon, because they are directly implicated.

- Measurement in this study deserve attention, because whereas the use of sub-scales with multiple items confirmed the reliability and validity of the measuring instrument, there were areas where some items did not belong to a particular sub-scale. It is recommended that future researchers load additional items on the sub-scales with few items (i.e., 1-2 items). This would ensure that the sub scales cover the content appropriately and achieve the required degree of internal consistency as argued by Huysamen (1990) in Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:147).
- Future research should concentrate on scale development as the area of focus for their research.
- Measuring the impact of Youth work practice as a youth development intervention should be considered as a possible area for research in the long term. That would require recruitment, involvement, and participation of young people and Youth workers as part of the research subjects. Based on such information, this field of practice could be strengthened and its benefit to the youth could also be increased.
- Youth workers need to be more involved and become the primary advocates for their own field of practice through creating awareness of the knowledge about their practice amongst comparable professions and society at large through taking charge of processes related to their work.

7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Youth work practice emerged when there is an increase of the youth population in South Africa and the need to address their problems in preparing them as future leaders. Although the South African government has made strides through policy development and establishment of appropriate institutions for youth development, there is a need to have skilled human resources to drive effective implementation of interventions. This research attempted to underscore the centrality of Youth work as a means to build required capacity to providers of youth development services, whilst in that regard. It has generated new knowledge, much of which has practical implications that would truly benefit humanity (Shaffer & Kipp, 2009:406). Evidence

produced include confirming that the stance adopted by the researcher earlier in Chapter 2, of the need to understand development of young people and interventions of Youth workers from a holistic and interdependent view rather than from a segmented approach (Chauhan, 2001:49; Park, 2004:50; Shaffer & Kipp, 2009:408).

As South Africa joins the rest of the world and embarks on the journey that intensifies interventions that seek to develop young people, it is important for policy makers to focus on strengthening interventions that would bring long-lasting effects. Youth work as an intervention should be given space to respond to the mounting challenges facing young people. This practice has proven to have the potential of making a significant contribution to the lives of young people (Spence, 2004:270). The finding suggesting that Youth work should become an area of specialisation, should be used to help enrich discussions and future policy direction. Therefore, as Youth work continues to evolve, so will all opportunities, challenges, and obstacles that accompany evolution of a new discipline, and thus it has to seek its identity as a youth centred practice (Beker, 2001b:365, South African Youth Workers Association, 2001:17; Sercombe, 2004:73). This is possible given that Youth work has over many years shown resilience in rising from structure and integration despite its lack of support from authorities, because it is a commitment by those involved to provide a service to young people as their primary clientele population (Charles, 2006:31; Maunders, 2006:31).

With the argument in this study having been the determination of the past influences, evaluation of the current status and exploration of the future prospects of Youth work practice, it was important to conduct this investigation given a continuous call at global level to advance youth development and accelerate empowerment of the youth. In following whatever course of action, there is a need to have the interests of the youth in mind. The results of this study yielded important information and also shed some light on what social service professionals aspire Youth work practice to be. They also provided detailed insight that could be used to provide policy direction for the youth sector. This came at an opportune time when there is a process of reviewing the Social Service Professions Act No. 110 of 1978 and determining the areas of specialisation, particularly within Social work. The use of the findings of this study could also serve to guide decision making in that area.