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### The process of social work intervention in addressing the substance use challenges of young people

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#### ABSTRACT

Social workers play a vital role in the provision of services to young people in South Africa who are experiencing substance use challenges. Importantly, social workers serve as the primary point of contact for young people seeking treatment for substance use challenges. This study sought to investigate the process of social work intervention in the provision of substance use services to young people. The data were collected from 11 social workers employed by the Department of Social Development at 10 service points in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. A non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to select 11 social workers. A qualitative research methodology was employed, incorporating explorative and descriptive research designs. Data collection was conducted through individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. For data analysis, the framework of Tesch's eight steps was utilised. The findings showed that the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people is comprised of seven essential components, namely intake, one-on-one therapy, family therapy, home visits, group sessions, referral to an inpatient treatment centre, and aftercare and reintegration services. The findings encourage thoughtful reflection within the social work community and offer new insights, paving the way for developing future policies and intervention strategies.

**Keywords:** intervention; process; social worker; substance use; substance use services; young people

## INTRODUCTION

Substance use among young people is a pervasive issue both globally and in South Africa (Masombuka, 2024). According to the World Drug Report (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022), young people globally continue to use more substances than adults do. Notably, the general population in many parts of the world is relatively young and consequently the extent of substance use among young people remains much higher than among adults (UNODC, 2018). Globally, aspects such as peer influence, easy access to newer synthetic substances and a desire for enhanced performance have been identified as contributing factors to young people's indulgence in substance use (UNODC, 2024).

Similarly, in Africa, substance use is increasing significantly (Khanyi & Malesa, 2022). Notably, the use of injectable substances in particular, including opioids, cocaine and amphetamines, is widespread across the continent (Jaguga et al., 2024). Alarming, 70% of individuals receiving treatment for substance use in Africa are under 35 years of age (UNODC, 2023). In a related study conducted in Zimbabwe, it was found that young people often engage in early substance use to deal with the stress and mood swings that come with the adolescent stage (Muwanzi & Mafumbate, 2018). Moreover, when anxiety is experienced, young people often resort to substance use because of a lack of healthy coping mechanisms, which frequently also leads to early sexual intercourse.

Counselling services for individuals with substance use challenges are generally more accessible in Africa than other types of interventions, such as in-patient treatment (UNODC, 2015). This finding points to an important aspect of the continent's approach to addressing substance use, calling for a more comprehensive and diverse approach. A recent study on substance use interventions in Africa demonstrated that brief interventions, primarily conducted by social workers, over one to four sessions and grounded in motivational interviewing and psychoeducational principles, are widely used across the continent (Jaguga et al., 2024).

The global and continental phenomenon of substance use among young people is also evident in South Africa. Worldwide, South Africa is ranked in the top 20 per capita alcohol consumption countries and it has the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Africa (Department of Social Development, 2020). Similarly, according to the report by the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU), substance use among vulnerable young people in South Africa is rising, exacerbated by the increased accessibility of various substances (SACENDU, 2024). This easy access makes it simpler for young people to experiment with substances, often without fully understanding the potential consequences. In South Africa, young people, often also referred to as youths, are classified as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Between 1996 and 2022 the number of young people in South Africa increased from 14,7 million to 21,6 million. This increase of 6,9 million individuals represents a significant 38,6% rise in the number of young people aged over 15 in South Africa over the past 26 years (Statistics South Africa, 2024). This growth highlights the need for targeted interventions to address young people's challenges. This study therefore aimed to gain greater insight into the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people.

Furthermore, young people in Gauteng are more exposed to the use of substances than those in other provinces of South Africa (Gauteng Department of Social Development, 2015). Approximately 61% of Tshwane's population is younger than 35, accounting for 36% of the total population (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). Tshwane, the administrative capital of South Africa, has a dynamic economy that, unfortunately, attracts local and international drug dealers (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). The presence of such dealers in the city highlights the need for ongoing efforts to ensure that substance use challenges are addressed. In particular, prevalence of nyaope/heroin, a potent mixture of drugs often referred to as a cocktail or designer substance, is alarmingly high, predominantly among young Black Africans in Tshwane townships (Nene et al., 2024). In response to the pressing issues related to substance use, the City of Tshwane launched a comprehensive harm-reduction programme in 2016. This initiative makes Tshwane the first municipality in South Africa to prioritise evidence-based strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of substance use (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, 2021).

Before South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the primary substances of use were alcohol, cannabis and methaqualone (Dykes & Casker, 2021). This period was characterised by relatively limited access to various substances, primarily because of strict regulations and socio-economic factors. However, with the transition to democracy and the subsequent opening of borders, South Africa witnessed a significant increase in not only substance use, but also in the variety of substances available (Dykes & Casker, 2021). This influx can be attributed to multiple factors, including the increased availability of various substances, changes in social dynamics and the impact of globalisation. These factors collectively facilitate the entry of new substances into the market.

In 2023, treatment centres across several provinces of South Africa experienced an increase in alcohol-related admissions (SACENDU, 2024). Nationally, for young people aged 18 and younger, cannabis emerged as the predominant substance, contributing to a staggering 78% of all admissions. This alarming statistic highlights the growing prevalence of cannabis use in this vulnerable age group. Furthermore, 3% of young people were admitted as a result of complications related to cocaine use, while heroin and other opiates accounted for 17% of admissions, illustrating the ongoing challenge posed by these narcotics. Meanwhile, methamphetamine ranked as the third most reported primary substance of use among young people, representing 6% of admissions across South Africa (SACENDU, 2024). These data highlight the urgent need for effective prevention and intervention strategies to address the rising challenge of substance use among young people across South Africa. This means that social work intervention is increasingly considered a valuable and practical approach to address the challenge of substance use among young people (Khanyi & Malesa, 2022). Social workers play a crucial role in providing support, resources and guidance to assist young people in addressing the complexities associated with substance use.

Section 2 of the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act 70 of 2008 outlines the essential services aimed at addressing substance use in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2008). These services encompass prevention campaigns, early intervention strategies, treatment programmes, reintegration into society and aftercare support to sustain recovery and

overall wellbeing. Essentially, prevention interventions are aimed at educating young people about the risks associated with substance use and helping them make informed choices (Madisha, 2019). Early intervention services are designed to identify and address issues before they escalate, offering support to at-risk people. For individuals already struggling with substance use, social workers facilitate treatment programmes that include in-patient, out-patient and community-based treatment where counselling, therapy and rehabilitation services are rendered to promote recovery. Aftercare services are also a vital aspect of support, helping young people transition back into their communities after treatment and ensuring that they have the resources, and receive the guidance they need, to maintain their sobriety. Reintegration support focuses on assisting these individuals in rebuilding their lives, including accessing educational and employment opportunities, fostering healthy relationships and promoting a sense of belonging. Through these comprehensive efforts, social workers are dedicated to empowering young people to overcome substance use challenges and lead healthier, more fulfilling lives (Madisha, 2019).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study employed a strengths-based approach as a theoretical framework. As Pulla (2017) noted, this approach emphasises the importance of identifying and utilising individual resources and intrinsic wisdom. Recognising the valuable resources available in young people's environment can significantly improve treatment outcomes. Shifting the focus from deficits to strengths allows social workers to enhance their assessments and support for young people with substance use challenges (Caiels et al., 2021). In line with a strengths-based approach, social work interventions should prioritise young people's competencies, skills and possibilities as opposed to failures, threats and difficulties to recover from the challenges of substance use. By focusing on young people's strengths and abilities, social workers can empower them to navigate their journey to recovery successfully. By creating a positive, supportive environment, social workers can help these young people build resilience and develop coping strategies to overcome substance use challenges.

## **RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGNS**

This study explored the process of social work interventions in providing services to address substance use among young people. A qualitative research approach with an explorative and descriptive research design was employed to provide knowledge and insight into the process of social work interventions in providing substance use services to young people. Adopting a qualitative research approach in the study aided data collection by giving participants ample time to describe their experiences and opinions concerning the process of social work interventions in providing substance use services to young people. Kumar (2018) noted that qualitative research often follows an open, flexible, unstructured approach to enquiry, exploring diversity, and describing feelings, perceptions and experiences. This is reflected in this study, as the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people was analysed from the perspective of the participants' worldview. In addition, an explorative and descriptive research design was utilised to explore and describe the process of social work intervention in addressing substance use issues among young people.

## POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The population for this study consisted of social workers from the Department of Social Development within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, specifically social workers who provide services to address substance use. The Department of Social Development in South Africa is the country's custodian of social work services (Masombuka, 2021). Social workers from the Department of Social Development play a critical role in providing substance use services to young people in South Africa. Thus, these social workers at the Department of Social Development were vital informants with unique and expert knowledge about the process of substance use intervention (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In qualitative research, it is not feasible to include the entire community or population; hence, a sample is drawn (Babbie, 2017). The principle of data saturation was utilised for this purpose, meaning that data collection continued until no new information was obtained. Data saturation was reached after the 11<sup>th</sup> interview with the Department of Social Development social workers within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, as no new information emerged.

A purposive sampling method was used to select 11 social workers from 10 service points of the Department of Social Development in Gauteng, located in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. The Department of Social Development established the 10 service points in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality to serve as central locations where communities can access various social services, including services to address substance use. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this research, because it guides the selection of relevant subjects for the study (Rahi, 2017). The inclusion criteria for the sample included social workers employed by the Department of Social Development at any of the 10 service points, with at least two years of work experience and who could converse in English. Regarding work experience, Shadung (2024) underscored the significance of having experienced and qualified social workers in the field, as their expertise can be immensely beneficial in social work initiatives and across a range of other social service environments, such as dealing with substance use. Before the commencement of the study, approval was sought and obtained from the provincial office of the Department of Social Development in Gauteng. To ensure that no coercion was applied in this study, an experienced independent person facilitated the participants' signing of the informed consent documents.

## DATA COLLECTION

In this study, individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews, based on an interview guide, were employed as the data-collection method. The use of semi-structured interviews in the qualitative study put participants in the position of experts on their lives by asking them to share their insights into the service and their experiences of the process of the social work intervention regarding their substance use. In addition, it also allowed the researchers, as the primary data-collection instruments, to explore and ask follow-up questions during the interviews. Creswell and Poth (2023) emphasised the researcher's crucial role in qualitative research, acting as the primary instrument in designing the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. This approach allows participants to share their insights, while the researcher meticulously collects the data that accurately reflect their perspectives. With the

participants' consent, all interviews were digitally recorded; the transcripts were then placed in a locked filing cabinet and on Microsoft OneDrive, accessible only to authorised people.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Because of the qualitative nature of this study, the data-analysis process was guided by Tesch's framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This framework provided a systematic approach to analysing the data, facilitating the identification and interpretation of seven key themes and patterns that emerged during the research. During the data-analysis process, the services of an independent coder were obtained, and after that consensus-seeking discussions on the themes presented as research findings were held with researchers.

## **MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Issues of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Turale, 2020) were taken into account to ensure the study's trustworthiness. The study's credibility was established by applying listening, observation, probing, restating and summarising skills during the data collection. This rigorous methodology ensured that participants could articulate their experiences clearly and comprehensively. An account of the research methodology adopted for the study was provided to enhance transferability. Both researchers and the independent coder coded the data to improve dependability. To ensure confirmability, the researchers gathered data based on participants' self-reports about their experiences and perceptions of the topic under investigation. As such, the study's confirmability was achieved through the researchers' analysis of the data throughout the process, while an independent coder maintained an audit trail of verbatim descriptions and identified themes.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Health Research Ethics Committee at North-West University approved the study, and the ethics number NWU-00025-18-S1 was allocated. Formal approval was also sought from the Gauteng Department of Social Development. The principle of informed consent was upheld by ensuring that participants were fully aware that their involvement was voluntary and based on their personal choice (Mathibela, 2024). Written consent was sought from all participants prior to commencement of the study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used instead of participants' real names so that they could not be linked to the data collected. Permission was requested from potential participants to forward their contact details to the professional independent person, who later emphasised that participation in the research was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The discussion of the findings generated from the data analysis with 11 social workers from the 10 service points of the Gauteng Department of Social Development in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality is presented below. An overview of the themes follows the presentation and discussion of the biographic data of the research participants.

## **Biographical data of participants**

The biographical data of participants in terms of their work experience, race and gender are outlined below.

### ***Work experience as a social worker at the Department of Social Development***

The biographical data showed that participants' work experience within the Department of Social Development ranged between a minimum of two and a half years and a maximum of 28 years. Although the sample inclusion criteria were limited to participants who had provided services at the Department of Social Development for more than two years, some participants had previous social work experience before joining the Department of Social Development. Thus, the participants' professional background was expected to contribute significantly to the depth and quality of insights gathered throughout the study.

### ***Race***

The racial profile showed that all participants were Black Africans. The participation of a single racial group in the study may be linked to the historical impacts of the apartheid system in South Africa (Masombuka, 2021). This legacy has presented considerable challenges in hiring social service practitioners from other racial groups in areas that were formerly designated for Black Africans. Most of the 10 service points of the Department of Social Development are situated within these historically designated Black townships in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (Masombuka, 2021).

### ***Gender***

The biographical profile reflects that most of the participants were female. Only one male participated in the study. Currently, there is an absence of research conducted in South Africa that explores gender differences among social workers, specifically within the field of substance use (Shadung, 2024). This lack of research hinders a deeper understanding of how gender dynamics may influence social work intervention, processes and challenges in the provision of substance use services to young people.

## **Results**

Participants outlined the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. A series of interventions intended to empower young people in their efforts to overcome the challenges posed by substance use was described. These steps focus on providing support, resources and guidance to help young people navigate the challenges and build healthier, more resilient lives. Seven themes emerged: intake, one-on-one therapy, family therapy, home visits, group sessions, referral to an in-patient treatment centre, and aftercare and reintegration services.

### ***Theme 1: Intake***

Several participants described the intake as the first step in the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. The participants, social workers, use the intake process to build rapport and conduct a comprehensive assessment.

Moreover, these assessments assisted social workers in determining whether the organisation can provide the appropriate substance use services to young people. This step is considered pivotal in the social work intervention process, because it allows social workers to establish the history and reasons behind young people's decision to seek help. Below are selected examples of the participants' expressions:

*Our intervention starts with the intake, getting to the story and background information from the young person. Through the intake, we can determine the kind of intervention appropriate and required by the young person. (Social worker 5)*

*It is customary to start with intake as it helps us as professionals to determine the appropriate intervention the client requires. (Social worker 3)*

*Our intervention starts at the intake level, in which the young person opens a file to officialise the relationship. (Social worker 8)*

Consistent with the above findings, the Department of Social Development (2013) developed the Framework for Social Welfare Service to guide the implementation of the social welfare intervention and process in South Africa. According to this framework (Department of Social Development, 2013), it is mandatory for social workers as social welfare providers to ensure that critical information about the client is captured during intake. Shadung (2024) described the intake as a process in which the client system makes the initial contact with the social work service. According to Sekudu (2015), intake is an essential phase in the process of social work intervention, as it helps to assure young people that they will be empowered to overcome their substance use challenges. Thus, even though the intake marks the first encounter between the young people with substance use challenges and social work service, it is pivotal for the social worker to show competence by demonstrating basic communication skills as well as the values and principles enshrined in the profession.

### ***Theme 2: One-on-one therapy***

Participants stated that providing one-on-one therapy with young people struggling with substance use is essential in the intervention process. According to the participants, one-on-one therapy allows them to assess the extent of the substance use problem and develop the appropriate individualised intervention strategy. The following are selected views expressed by the participants.

*One-on-one therapy is provided to assess the reasons which lead to the substance use problem of the young person. (Social worker 2)*

*Individual therapy is integral to the intervention; through it, we establish whether the young person will require in-patient or out-patient treatment services. (Social worker 4)*

*One-on-one therapy is conducted with the young person to assess the duration of substance use, the type of substance, as well as the motive to reach out. (Social worker 11)*

Sekudu (2015) characterised the above-mentioned approach as casework, a structured social work method in which a social worker engages directly with an individual and their significant others – such as family members or close friends – to provide tailored interventions. This

process often involves assessing the client's unique circumstances, understanding their specific challenges and implementing strategies to address them. Similarly, Chukwu et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of this type of intervention, noting that it plays a crucial role in helping clients navigate and overcome various psychosocial challenges. By offering support and resources, social workers enable young people to adapt more effectively to their environment, ultimately leading to successful treatment outcomes.

### ***Theme 3: Family therapy***

Family therapy plays a crucial role in the process of social work interventions aimed at addressing substance use challenges among young people. This therapeutic approach involves young people and their families in the recovery process, acknowledging that substance use can significantly affect family relationships. Through family therapy, participants can engage in open communication, explore the underlying issues contributing to the substance use, and work together to rebuild trust and harmony within the family unit. The goal is to help families understand the effects of substance use not only on young people but also on their families; this understanding will in turn foster healthier relationships and improved support systems as young people navigate their path to recovery. The following are selected responses of the participants to the questions on this issue.

*Family therapy is conducted to encourage problem family members and young people to work jointly to solve problems instead of blaming each other. (Social worker 6)*

*As part of the intervention process, both the family and young person are invited to a joint session to allow them to resolve family conflicts and disappointments as a result of substance use problems. (Social worker 7)*

*As part of the intervention, we gather both the young person and family in a session to allow them a conducive space to vent out their differences and allow them to mend their relationship. (Social worker 1)*

Groenewald and Bhana (2016) had called for evidence-based strategies that promote the family as an important ally in treating a young person misusing substances. Similarly, a study conducted in Pretoria, South Africa, highlighted the crucial role of family therapy for families with young people receiving treatment for substance use (Mzolo, 2015). This study, in line with these findings, emphasises that family therapy not only provides valuable support for the young person, but also teaches family members effective strategies to cope with the challenges associated with substance use. This approach ultimately empowers families to better understand and address the complexities of substance use, facilitating a more positive outcome for everyone involved.

### ***Theme 4: Home visits***

Participants also describe a home visit as an integral part of the process of social work intervention in the provision of substance use services to young people. Home visits are important, especially with families of young people who are unreachable or unable to visit the social worker's office. Participants' comments echoed this view.

*A home visit is an essential intervention to build meaningful relationships and gain valuable insights into the family circumstances surrounding the young person. (Social worker 9)*

*In cases where none of the young person's family members are uncontactable and unable to make it to our office, we conduct home visits. (Social worker 3)*

*In most instances, a home visit is an exceptional intervention conducted when the young person's family cannot visit our office. (Social worker 5)*

Dhludhlu and Lombard (2017) had also emphasised that home visits are part of the intervention process for social workers in South Africa. Unfortunately, the lack of resources within the Department of Social Development undermines the effectiveness of these social work initiatives. In South Africa, it is reported that four social workers must share a single vehicle for their home visits, resulting in significant logistical challenges. This arrangement restricted the social workers' mobility and reduced the time for comprehensive interventions with families of young people. Consequently, their interactions with clients suffered, potentially impeding their ability to provide support and interventions (Dhludhlu & Lombard, 2017). Amid the organisational challenges, Shadung (2024) confirmed that social workers conduct home visits as part of the social work intervention process in providing substance use services to young people.

### ***Theme 5: Group sessions***

As part of social work intervention, participants reported that group sessions are conducted with young people so they can learn from others in similar situations. In addition, group sessions are used by participants as a platform to educate substance users about the in-patient treatment processes. Participants shared the following views on this.

*Group sessions are conducted to allow individuals to share different experiences about the substance use problem. (Social worker 10)*

*Our group sessions focus on educating users about the treatment journey and allowing them to support each other in common situations. (Social worker 11)*

*Two group sessions are conducted to prepare members for an in-patient treatment programme. (Social worker 1)*

Similarly, in a study by Chukwu et al. (2017), social workers often felt that substance use-related problems cannot be handled on a one-on-one basis only. Therefore, a recommendation is made for social workers to bring people with similar challenges together in a group setting. This would allow group members to share experiences and work towards finding solutions to their shared problems. Qalinge (2015) describes group work in social work as a method with which social workers assist members united by the purpose of eliminating their common obstacles and improving their situation.

### ***Theme 6: Referral to an inpatient treatment centre***

Referring young people to an in-patient treatment centre is another component in the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. Depending on

the outcome of the social worker's assessment, a young person might be referred for admission to an in-patient treatment facility. Once young people in this area are referred, they will spend a six-week stay at the Dr Fabian and Florence Ribeiro Treatment Centre, a state-owned establishment located in Cullinan, east of Tshwane. The centre offers a range of evidence-based treatments, including individual and group therapy. The following are selected responses.

*Once we have established that the young person requires in-patient treatment, an application is sent to our counterpart centre for consideration. (Social worker 2)*

*We do referrals for in-patient treatment to Dr Fabian and Florence Ribeiro Treatment Centre. Subsequently, the user will be admitted for six weeks. (Social worker 6)*

*If the person is completely dependent on substances and is willing to undergo a six-week in-patient treatment programme, a referral is sent to the centre for approval. (Social worker 10)*

Shadung (2024) points out that most substance use services for young people in South Africa are provided on an out-patient basis. This is primarily because of a lack of public in-patient treatment centres. Consequently, individuals in need of in-patient treatment often face a waiting period of approximately three months, requiring persistent follow-ups to gain admission to these public facilities. Masombuka (2021) added that South Africa lacks sufficient public government-funded in-patient treatment facilities. Despite a significant rise in substance use cases in South Africa, access to treatment services remains limited (Department of Social Development, 2020). This scarcity results in extended waiting lists for those seeking immediate admission. Consequently, social workers often encounter delays of approximately three months before their clients can receive the treatment they need. This highlights a critical challenge in assisting young people.

### ***Theme 7: Aftercare and reintegration services***

Participants emphasised that aftercare and reintegration services include engaging in group sessions designed for young people on their journey to recovery. In addition to these sessions, home visits by the social workers play a vital role as they allow for a comprehensive assessment of the family dynamics and living conditions following in-patient treatment. A key focus of these services is to motivate and prepare young people to enter the job market, providing them with essential skills and support as they transition to a more independent life. The following comments by the participants echo this understanding.

*After completing a successful six-week in-patient treatment programme, we invite the young people to an aftercare group session held once a month. During these sessions, we help them draft their curriculum vitae and encourage them to search for employment. (Social worker 5)*

*After the young person completes their in-patient treatment, we schedule a home visit to evaluate the family's overall wellbeing and adjustment. During this visit, I engage with family members to discuss their experiences and feelings since the treatment. I observe the home environment, assess their challenges and provide support and resources to help them navigate this transition effectively. (Social worker 7)*

*We conduct group sessions with the young person after successfully completing the in-patient treatment programme. (Social worker 10)*

Mahlangu and Geyer (2018) called for the family integration of a recovering substance user during the aftercare and reintegration services. The substance use problem could be perpetuated in the family and still cause significant damage to the family relationship. This is why aftercare and reintegration services provide the family and recovering substance users with an opportunity to jointly embark on a healing journey after successful in-patient treatment. Mpanza et al. (2021) found that in South Africa there are often inconsistencies in the provision of aftercare and reintegration services regarding home visits, family intervention, family reintegration services and individual therapy. Such inconsistencies can hinder effective outcomes for young people transitioning back into the community after treatment.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. The study revealed that at the beginning of the intervention process, young people undergo an intake process, where the most appropriate type of substance use treatment is determined. Madisha (2019) emphasised that social workers in South Africa initiate their intervention process with a thorough intake procedure. This crucial first step involves collecting extensive information about the client, including their background, needs and specific circumstances. By doing so, social workers can better understand the client's situation. This lays the foundation for tailored and effective interventions that address the individual's unique challenges. The study also showed that one-on-one therapy is an integral part of the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. One-on-one therapy allows the social worker to assess young people's needs and develop an appropriate individualised intervention plan. Van Breda and Addinall (2021) identified that the primary modality of practice for clinical social work in South Africa primarily involves one-on-one interactions with clients. Their study also found that 52% of social workers reported that individual therapy constitutes at least 70% of their clinical practice time. This highlights a substantial emphasis on personalised therapeutic interventions among social workers, reflecting the priority placed on individualised intervention within their professional activities.

This study has highlighted the importance of family therapy in the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. By engaging families in therapy, social workers can address the complexities of substance use, foster open communication and create a supportive environment that promotes recovery (Mathibela, 2024). This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of young people's challenges, but also encourages collaboration among family members, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of the intervention. Accordingly, Payne (2014) confirmed that in addition to one-on-one counselling, family therapy is appropriate when individual problems derive from interactions with significant others.

This study also found that home visits form part of the process of social work intervention in the provision of substance use services to young people. Mpanza et al. (2021) highlighted the

importance of home visits to families of young people as an integral component of the comprehensive services for substance use intervention in South Africa. These visits are important in reaching families of young people, especially those who may struggle to access services, allowing social workers to provide personalised support in the homes of young people. By engaging directly with families in their home environment, social workers can better assess the needs of young people and their families, and provide tailored interventions. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of substance use interventions, but also addresses the unique challenges faced by individuals within their specific communities. In addition, the study showed that young people are engaged in group sessions as an essential component of the social work intervention process related to substance use services. These sessions serve to foster peer support, promote open dialogue about the challenges associated with substance use, and equip participants with effective coping mechanisms.

It is also evident from the study that referrals to in-patient treatment centres are crucial in supporting young people with substance use challenges. Social workers conduct thorough assessments to ensure that young people receive the most appropriate type of intervention for their unique situation. Depending on the assessment results and the severity of the substance use problem, young individuals may be referred for in-patient treatment. In-patient treatment plays a critical role in this process by providing a well-structured and supportive environment that fosters intensive therapeutic engagement away from the familiar pressures of home. This immersive setting is instrumental in promoting healing and equipping young individuals with the necessary tools for successful recovery. Shadung (2024) confirmed that social workers are crucial in assessing and referring young people for admission to in-patient treatment facilities in South Africa. As part of the application process for these treatment centres, social workers complete and submit the necessary documents, including a psychosocial report, as required by the centre's manager. An in-patient treatment programme in South Africa typically lasts six weeks (Masombuka, 2021). The study also found that aftercare and reintegration services play a crucial role in the social work intervention process aimed at providing comprehensive substance use services to young people. These services support young people's journey to recovery by facilitating their transition to the family and community after treatment. Mpanza et al. (2021) found that in South Africa there is a lack of aftercare and reintegration services for recovering substance users who have completed the in-patient treatment programme. Consequently, recovering substance users frequently tend to relapse.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The perspectives and insights shared in this study were gathered exclusively from social workers employed by the Gauteng Department of Social Development, specifically within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. As a result, the findings from this study cannot be universally applied to all contexts; instead, they can be utilised in similar settings where comparable conditions exist. This limitation highlights the importance of taking into account the specific circumstances of the research when drawing conclusions or making recommendations based on these findings.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study provides significant insights into the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people. The findings highlighted the multifaceted nature of the process of social work interventions in the context of substance use among young people. The study therefore concludes that the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people is not uniform; instead, it varies across different social workers and service locations within the Department of Social Development. This lack of standardisation manifests in different approaches and practices, which can lead to discrepancies in the intervention provided. A recommendation is made to standardise the process of social work intervention in providing substance use services to young people, as the standardisation of the process of social work intervention will ensure that young people receive a consistent and coherent service to address their substance use. By developing a uniform process, social workers will be better equipped to provide customised interventions that address the specific needs of young people. The insights gained from this research are valuable and are expected to inform future studies, particularly those that explore the social work interventions in providing substance use services to young people.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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