POLICE SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

Marili Williams

The core business of the South African Police Service (SAPS) is "to create a safe and secure environment for all citizens of South Africa" (SAPS, 2011:i). Social workers applying occupational social work practice fundamentals are expected to address both the organisational wellbeing of the SAPS and the social wellbeing of the personnel, but as a secondary entity within a structured, semi-military environment. This article elaborates critically on the position of police social work and argues why social workers employed by the SAPS should be acknowledged as specialists in the field of occupational social work.

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INTRODUCTION

Social workers appointed to the South African Police Service (SAPS) are highly conversant with the diverse occupation-specific responsibilities police officers are expected to perform. The mandate of police services worldwide is to ensure the safety and security of all people, and the vision statement of the SAPS is in line with this mandate: "to create a safe and secure environment for all the people in South Africa" (SAPS, 2011:i). The SAPS, as part of the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster, continues to position its service delivery model to achieve the outcome that "all people in South Africa are and feel safe" (SAPS, 2014:1). These expectations in themselves place an enormous demand on the capabilities and coping mechanisms of police officers (Easton, Van Laar & Marlow-Vardy, 2013:135), and social workers are well aware that vocation is an integral part of human functioning and has a significant impact on an individual's overall wellbeing (Basińska & Wiciak, 2013:247).

The exposure of police officers to the vast scope and stress of police work, such as attending to shooting incidents, strikes, murder scenes, domestic violence, armed robberies or fatal vehicle accidents to name a few, may have a lasting effect on their social wellbeing (Gumani, Fourie & Terre Blanche, 2013; Karaffa, Openshaw, Koch, Clark, Harr & Stewart, 2014:2). The wellbeing of police officers not only has an impact on the SAPS, but also an involuntary ripple effect on the wellbeing of the very communities they serve.

Police officers are traditionally expected to be resilient, robust and always able to cope with their work demands. It is suggested that there are links between the prevalence of illness and absenteeism within a police organisation and the nature of their work (Easton *et al.*, 2013:135). The SAPS employs social workers to concentrate on and empower police officers to deal with and/or improve their social wellbeing and coping ability as unique individuals (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:2).

However, the SAPS social workers are not only responsible for enhancing and maintaining the social wellbeing of police officers, their immediate family members and support personnel. They also have the responsibility of contributing significantly to organisational wellbeing by means of advocating/proposing/suggesting policy changes, enhancing human capital development and updating the operating procedures, training and development procedures/interventions of the SAPS (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:3).

It is therefore argued that the scope of social work in the SAPS calls for social workers to become, and to be regarded as, specialists in the field of occupational social work. They have to be able to balance and assimilate organisational, work-person, promotive and restorative interventions that contribute to the optimal functioning of the organisation, the police officers, their immediate family members, support personnel and the community at large.

The author therefore first presents a condensed historical overview of social work services in the SAPS to date. This is followed by an elucidation of the extent of police social work (PSW), the practice model and practice process that are being implemented based on occupational social work fundamentals, and a discussion of the viability of social workers employed by the SAPS to register as occupational social workers. The difference between PSW and forensic social work is also highlighted, as the SAPS employs people in both specialities although each has its own organisational and management structures. This article aims to illustrate a conceptual framework on how occupational social work is successfully implemented in a government department such as the SAPS.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

This short historical overview covers the timeline from 1952 to date. Between 1952–1994 the SAPS was known as the South African Police (SAP). The South African Police Act (Act 68/1995) was promulgated on 4 October 1995 in terms of which the former SAP became the SAPS (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:1).

From 1952 to 1995 four significant phases were evident: the pre-social work phase, the welfare officer phase, the transitional phase and the structural repositioning phase (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:1-3).

The pre-social work phase (1952-1969) was a period in which the then SAP acknowledged that the spiritual needs and social difficulties of police officers needed attention. The SAP requested a certain minister to hold church services and attend to the social problems of police officers on a contractual basis. Subsequently, a minister was permanently appointed to attend to police officers' spiritual and social problems (Dippenaar, 1988:244,295; Joubert & Grobler, 2013); however this was only in place in the head office region of the SAP. Police stations in the rest of South Africa had to rely on their own initiatives in this regard.

During 1969 the then Minister of Police approved the appointment of welfare officers because of the increasing number of social problems in the SAP (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:2). These officers reported to the Chaplain Services and they were nominated based on certain criteria, such as having 9-12 years of service in the SAP, holding the rank of warrant officer or lieutenant, and being knowledgeable on the SAP structure, culture and activities.

However, also during this period the SAP realised that the services of qualified social workers were needed instead, but a prerequisite was that the appointed social workers first had to attend the basic police training course before being sanctioned to practise social work in the SAP. In 1991 social work became autonomous, with its own occupational class as part of the Human Resource Management structures (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:3).

In the transitional phase (1995) a social work section was established in the SAP, which included the approval of 29 posts for social workers; the component of which Social Work Services (SWS) was an autonomous section was called the Helping Professions.

This component also included sections for Chaplain Services and Psychological Services (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:2). During 1996, with the appointment of a national director for the SWS, the section also managed subsections that were responsible for rendering Forensic Social Work Services and HIV and AIDS/Disability awareness.

Soon after this, as a result of organisational changes that took place when the name of the SAP force was changed to SAPS, the repositioning phase of the Section SWS took effect as the SAPS considered outsourcing services such as social work. However, with a strategic repositioning and redirection of social work service delivery towards implementing occupational social work principles, a further 203 social work posts in SWS were approved in 2002 (Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:3). This also led to the structural repositioning of the Subsections Forensic Social Work Services and HIV and AIDS/Disability awareness, as they no longer fell within the ambit of occupational social work principles.

The Section SWS rendered services on a continuous basis to police officers and their immediate families, and also made significant contributions to the organisational wellbeing of the SAPS. During 2007 a SAPS management decision was made that the then Helping Professions in the SAPS (social workers, chaplains, psychologists and psychometrists) needed to work in a more integrated manner. This brought changes in the approach to service delivery to SAPS employees and the organisation. The Helping Professions, meaning the Sections SWS, Chaplain Services and Psychological Services, became known as the Component Employee Assistance Services (EAS) (SAPS, 2009:50; SAPS, 2008:65). Besides each profession's required duties, employees were also required to fulfil police-related duties, which were not solely within the scope of the specific professions.

This name change brought further complications. It was misinterpreted, as the understanding was that traditional Employee Assistance Programme principles would be applied. Upon realising that, for example, social workers render services not exclusively associated with employee assistance programmes, the SAPS again changed the name and structure of services rendered by the three Sections to the Component Employee Health and Wellness (EHW). The idea was to align it with the Department of Public Service and Administration's (DPSA) EHW strategic framework for the public service, and henceforth it included Sections such as Sports and Recreation and Quality of Work Life, catering for needs associated with HIV and AIDS and disability-related issues (see South Africa, 2008:1).

The above scenario once again affected the autonomy of the occupation specifics for social workers, as all the professions were expected to work in integrated task teams where each profession was expected to do similar work, irrespective of whether the employees were social workers, chaplains or psychologists. The SAPS management only acknowledged in 2011 that although the EHW services of the SAPS consist of social workers, psychologists, psychometrists, counsellors and chaplains, a multidisciplinary approach should be followed, recognising each profession's distinctive role and responsibilities within the SAPS (SAPS, 2011:4).

THE PRESENT SCENARIO

The Section SWS is structurally and integrally part of the SAPS Component EHW within the broader Human Resource Management environment of the SAPS. The Section SWS therefore operates within the SAPS EHW multidisciplinary team framework, and currently 212 social workers are employed countrywide in the SAPS. However, the Section SWS re-aligned its social work service delivery approach in terms of its practice model based on the fundamentals of the speciality field of occupational social work. A discussion on the extent and practice model of PSW follows.

THE EXTENT OF POLICE SOCIAL WORK (PSW)

The extent of PSW is rooted in the following three factors.

- PSW pursues both a systemic and a developmental approach which requires social workers employed by the SAPS to grant equal attention to the employees, the organisation and the broader environment when devising needs-based interventions or activities (including participation in community-related activities driven by other divisions of the organisation), irrespective of whether they are at a micro, meso or macro level.

- The social workers' client system consists of the employer (the SAPS), employees (police officers and support personnel), their immediate families and the broader community within which police services are rendered (involvement with community-related incidences such as natural disasters, debriefing of community members etc.). Police social workers recognise the reciprocal impact and interaction of this system.

- Social workers remain appreciative of the impact that changes in the market economy, political arena or social challenges, either nationally or internationally, may have on the organisation, its employees, their families, stakeholders and communities (South Africa, 2010: Regulation 5(2)).

Considering the above, it is clear that PSW is aligned to applying occupational social work principles to attend to the organisation's wellbeing as well as the social wellbeing of police officers, their families and support personnel, and to influence communities at large. Using this approach, police social workers are doing ground-breaking work to become registered occupational social workers. A discussion of the PSW practice model follows.

THE POLICE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE MODEL

The PSW practice model is grounded in the definition of occupational social work promulgated in the South African Government Gazette (South Africa, 2010: Regulation 5(2)). It states that occupational social work is "a specialised field of social work practice which addresses the human and social needs of the work community within a developmental approach through a variety of interventions which aim to foster optimal adaptation between individuals and their environment" (South Africa, 2010:3). Therefore, the current social work service delivery model in the SAPS gears police social workers towards specialisation and registration as occupational social workers.

The author acknowledges the role that the South African National Defence Force's (SANDF) Social Work Department played in devising a model for practising occupational social work within the South African military environment (Bouwer, 2009:396; Kruger & Van Breda, 2001:948). Some of the attributes were adapted based on their perspective on occupational social work and its implementation within the SAPS. The SANDF approach is unique and even more so the SAPS scenario – this is significant, as any occupational social work practice model must be tailored for specific industrial scenarios, but certain principles will remain fundamental.

It is strongly argued that the practice model followed by the SAPS in terms of occupational social work can add significant value to the status of specialisation of social workers who are employed by other government departments/industries and even internationally, and who are tasked to render social work services to the employer, employees and their families.

It is noteworthy that during the past two decades occupational social work practice models directed services to either the employee as client or the organisation as client (Balgopal, 1989:437; Bates & Thompson, 2007:273; Caraphina, 2007:338; Googins & Davidson, 1993:479). During the 2000s this notion was slowly replaced by the perspective that occupational social work should direct its focus of service delivery to the relationship between the organisation, the employee, the family and the community (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001:948).

Lately, occupational social workers have also been encouraged to devote attention to the interface between business and society by engaging employees as citizens (Caraphina, 2007:339). This is an important area, as the police officers of SAPS originate from the very communities they must serve. They also bring to the SAPS their particular community's norms, values, standards and experiences, which in themselves can influence the organisation's culture and wellbeing.

The PSW practice model consists of four intervention focus areas: (1) organisational (workplace) interventions; (2) work-person interventions; (3) promotive interventions and (4) restorative interventions. These four intervention focus areas are never regarded in isolation, but integrate influences from the economic, community, political or environmental arenas. Details of each of these four intervention focus areas follow, but first an illustration of the PSW practice model is provided (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
POLICE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE MODEL

(Source: Adapted from SAPS, 2013:2 and Bronfenbrenner (1979) in Watling Neal & Neal, 2013:723-725).

Organisational (workplace) interventions – these interventions allow the police social workers to mainstream organisational consulting as purveyors of expertise. The interventions refer to conducting work-focused assessments to determine the needs of all client systems (data sources), analysing their reciprocal connection and impact within the organisation. The current initiatives and involvement by social workers in organisational interventions include their active participation in, and execution of, the following: organisational policy development and evaluation; police practice and programme development/programme evaluation (i.e. deployment programmes, pre-selection and recruitment programmes and tertiary preparation and maintenance programmes); work process design; promoting/challenging workplace culture (transfer policy and substance-dependence policy); the enhancement and enforcement of human rights practices (sexual harassment programmes); and social justice and productivity (Bouwer, 2009:390; Cherin, 2000:31; South Africa, 2010: Regulation 5(2); Van Breda, 2009:287; Van Breda, 2007:4).

The police social workers are required to compose workable and/or scientifically based informed recommendations with regard to creating better work-life conditions, increasing productivity, achieving high performance, enhancing job satisfaction and reducing the risk of employee attrition. In taking proactive steps, police social workers ensure the integration of relevant strategies to improve the quality of the work life of police officers, thus enabling the organisation to fulfil its vision and mission. This in itself ensures that police officers notice that the organisation values their contributions

and has their wellbeing as a priority (Ajala, 2013:47; Hannif, Burgess & Connell, 2008:272; Kalliath & Kalliath, 2012:730; 734; Sinha, 2012:31).

Police social workers can further contribute towards expanding the organisation's understanding of accountability to society and the environment by evaluating the interface and impact of the organisation in the community, and initiating community-directed interventions to ensure a socially responsible organisation (Bouwer, 2009:390; Dry & Nqweniso, 2009:363; South Africa, 2010: Regulation 5(2)).

Work-person interventions – the assessment of the needs/challenges experienced by the various client systems (data sources) in the workplace and the nurturing of the mutual relationship between them. Since 2012 social workers have been required, as per the SWS Standard Operating Procedures, to compile work community profiles (based on community work principles), with the purpose of determining the person-in-work's social/organisational needs and continually monitoring the relationship between the job context of the police officer, his or her working conditions, and the impact of changes in the workplace (SAPS, 2012). Based on the results, each social worker is able to determine the priorities and goal-driven interventions for a particular police station, formation of police stations or groups of police officers/families/individuals that must be implemented over a period of time. The social workers have to set targets and report on a monthly basis on the outcomes and impact of the interventions conducted.

Analysing the results of work community profiles led to the establishment of national specialisation desks such as the Substance Dependency Desk (with a ring-fenced approved budget) and the Sexual Harassment Desk. The profiles also play a significant role in determining the annual performance plan of the Section SWS, which is aligned with the strategic plan and priorities of the SAPS. The Section SWS is required to report on evidence-based practices, progress and outcomes on a quarterly and annual basis.

It is important for employees to be satisfied with their work life, given the amount of time and energy they spend at the workplace (Abdeen, 2002:9). Employees are regarded as the hidden value of any organisation, and it is therefore imperative for a social worker applying occupational social work principles to ensure that job satisfaction, levels of productivity, attitudes, staff turn-over, discipline issues and absenteeism are closely monitored in order to devise a strategic direction for the organisation and to implement targeted interventions for optimal results (Ajala, 2013:52; Chandrasekar, 2011).

Promotive interventions – Police social workers present proactive, needs-based interventions promoting/enhancing the social functioning and wellbeing of the organisation, employees, families and the community. These types of intervention are unlike most social work programmes, as they differ in the sense that they target all employees, not only those with problems (Root, 2000:13). Promotive interventions are applied at micro, meso and macro levels focusing on the individual (employee), group (teams/units), organisational and/or community levels (Bronfenbrenner (1979) in Watling Neal & Neal, 2013:723-725). The SAPS supports the promotive interventions and they are often linked with organisational activities such as strategic planning sessions, meetings, skills development activities and recreational activities. Typical

SWS promotive programmes include enhancement of personal social functioning, substance dependency, colleague sensitivity, anger management, self-management, preparation for retirement and personal financial management.

Research conducted by Ajala (2013:5) on quality of work life and employees' wellbeing indicated that a "high level of organisational support reduces risk of lower quality of life and promotes good health and wellbeing of employees". Promotive interventions concentrate on improving the quality of employees' work life, contributing to greater organisational effectiveness; on the other hand, the employees experience the interventions as uplifting, enabling them to cope better and to contribute to a more positive working environment (Adhikari & Gautam, 2010:41; Gayathiri & Ramakrishnan, 2013:6; Zare, Haghooyan & Karim, 2014:43).

Restorative interventions – these are problem-solving services provided to employees and families, promoting family wellness in relation to the impact of employment based on a short-term intervention model (South Africa, 2010: Regulation 5(2)). The often unpredictable job demands – such as long hours, shift work, divided commitment between work and family roles, high levels of stress, difficult collegial relations and health issues – experienced by police officers may repeatedly cause strain in their personal relationships (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006:64; Karaffa *et al*., 2014:1; Liberman, Best, Meltzer, Fagan, Weiss & Marmar, 2002:421; Miller, 2007:21).

The police social worker directs attention to the non-work-related challenges experienced by the police officer and his or her family. Police officers are generally resistant to seeking the services of social workers, although they may agree that there is a justifiable need (Karaffa *et al*., 2014:10). Restorative interventions are specifically directed, in a collaborative manner, towards restoring the involved person or persons' problem-solving and coping skills on the understanding that each client has strengths, abilities and resources. In a sense these types of intervention are positive in nature, as the ultimate goal is to revamp the level of wellness of the individuals and the family with a positive ripple effect into the community (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001:949; Stutterheim & Weyers, 2004:7).

Now that the Police SWS practice model has been discussed, it is also important to point out the practice process followed by the social workers in conducting social work services.

POLICE SOCIAL WORK SERVICES PRACTICE PROCESS

By following an all-encompassing practice process, social workers are able to determine not only the real social needs of the organisation, employees and families, but also determine, draw up and execute targeted intervention plans to address identified needs in a holistic manner by means of integrating the service delivery area as effectively as possible (SAPS, 2013:2). The main point of departure for effective service delivery is to obtain information from data sources. The data sources can be a combination of stakeholders, management, employees, human resources, medical aid, health-risk profile, labour, social workers, chaplains and psychologists; information is obtained by means of work-focused assessments, surveys, audits, questionnaires and needs analyses.

The information drawn from the data sources enables the social workers to compile profiles such as organisational, work-person, family and work profiles.

These profiles assist in identifying priorities for service delivery and enable the social workers to draw up and implement targeted intervention plans. Proper reporting takes place through standardised record-keeping reporting mechanisms. The outcome of interventions will indicate whether the specific intervention/service can be terminated or must be re-evaluated, redirected and continued. The social worker is able, by means of a multi-level, integrated practice process, to address the social wellbeing of police officers and the organisation's wellbeing in a more scientific manner (SAPS, 2013:2). Figure 2 depicts the practice process followed by the social workers.

FIGURE 2
POLICE SOCIAL WORK SERVICES PRACTICE PROCESS
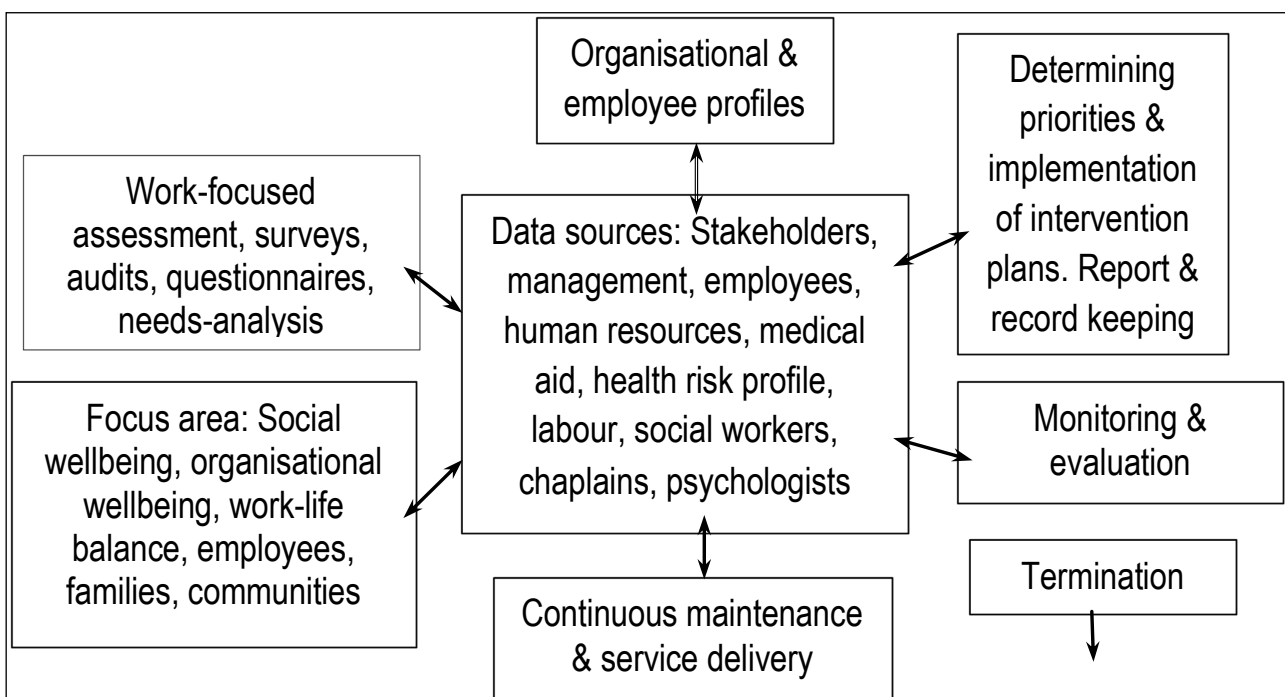
(**Source**: SAPS, 2013:2)

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL SOCIAL WORK AND FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK IN THE SAPS

The SAPS also employs social workers who render forensic social work services when police officers (detectives) investigate criminal cases where children are the victims. The broad definition by the National Organisation for Forensic Social Work (1997) illustrates the domain of forensic social work: "[it] includes social work practice which in any way is related to legal issues and litigation, both criminal and civil".

These social workers are appointed by the SAPS and placed at Detective Services, where they report to the relevant management structures. The main focus areas of these social workers are:

- systematically assessing/evaluating the child victim so that the resulting information can be used in court or by legal authorities;

- testifying in courts of law as expert witnesses;

- providing consultation, education or training to police officers, attorneys, law students and paralegals (Green, Thorpe & Traupmann, 2005:144; SAPS, 2008).

It is clear that one group of social workers focuses on the employer and employees, whilst the social workers doing forensic social work focus on child victims, detectives and courts of law as client systems. Within the SAPS the two speciality areas do not interfere with each other, as the boundaries, roles and responsibilities are guided by the relevant reporting and placement structures.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main priority of social workers employed by the SAPS and placed at SWS is to render services based on occupational social work principles. Their client system is the organisation itself, all employees and their immediate family members. These social workers operate within the organisational structure of the Component EHW, where they are required to work within a multidisciplinary team including psychologists, chaplains, psychometrists and counsellors. Definite professional boundaries exist between the professions, but a multidisciplinary working relationship is maintained and respected.

In pursuing both a systemic and a developmental approach, Police SWS illustrates that it is possible to strike a balance in addressing the respective wellbeing needs of employees, the organisation and the broader environment when implementing needs-based interventions, irrespective whether they are pitched at a micro, meso or macro level.

Social work service delivery has escalated in the past five years from a micro level to meso and macro levels. This would not have been possible without the SAPS buy-in and support by management.

Police SWS concedes that the SAPS cannot function as an entity on its own without acknowledging that internal and/or external changes (economic, political or social challenges, either nationally or internationally) will influence the overall wellbeing of the organisation, its employees and communities in one way or another.

Both the practice model and the practice process can be successfully implemented by social workers rendering occupational social work services within other government departments, industries and internationally.

The intervention focus areas are multi-level, integrated approaches to rendering needs-based social work services with a focus on improving the wellbeing of the organisation, employees, families and the community at large.

The SAPS social workers placed at SWS are geared towards registering as occupational social workers, as the work they are doing warrants recognition as occupational social work.

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