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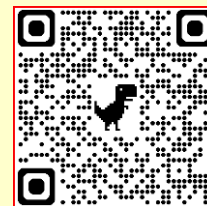
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Social Work In Action: Success Stories From Eswatini's Social Work Day Celebrations.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact and effectiveness of social work interventions in Eswatini through a collection of success stories presented during the country's Social Work Day celebrations in 2024. By showcasing the achievements and experiences of social workers and their clients, this research highlights the value and significance of social work in addressing various socio-economic challenges. The success stories cover areas such as child protection, mental health, community development, and support for vulnerable populations. Through qualitative analysis, this study identifies best practices, lessons learned, and areas for improvement in social work practice in Eswatini. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on social work in Africa and demonstrate the critical role of social workers in promoting social justice, human rights, and sustainable development.

KEY WORDS: Social work, Eswatini, success stories, child protection, community development, social justice, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Social work is a vital profession that aims to improve the well-being and quality of life of individuals, families, and communities. In Eswatini, social workers play a critical role in addressing various socio-economic challenges such as poverty, gender-based violence (GBV), and mental health issues. Despite their significant contributions, social workers often face challenges such as limited recognition, high caseloads, and inadequate resources. The annual Social Work Day in Eswatini provides an opportunity to raise

awareness about these contributions and challenges, while also celebrating the profession. This study documents and analyses the success stories presented during the 2024 Social Work Day celebrations in Eswatini to highlight the positive impact of social work interventions.

BACKGROUND

The Kingdom of Eswatini faces numerous challenges that impact the well-being and quality of life of its citizens. Social work as a discipline focuses on addressing societal issues and promoting social

change through various interventions and services (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014, Mugumbate and Maushe, 2014). In many countries, social work is an essential component of the social welfare system, and its impact can be seen through the success stories of individuals and communities (Fabricant & Burghardt, 1992). Eswatini is experiencing high rates of HIV/AIDS, slated at 24.8% (UNAIDS, 2024); widespread poverty, with over 60% of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020); gender-based violence and child abuse (Muzondo and Chidyausiku, 2023) and limited access to education, healthcare, and social services, particularly in rural areas (United Nations, 2023). In response to these challenges, social workers in Eswatini implement poverty reduction programs and economic empowerment initiatives targeting the marginalised. They also provide counselling and psycho-social support services to individuals, families and communities affected by HIV/AIDS and those experiencing GBV. Social workers in Eswatini also advocate for the rights of women and children and facilitating access to education, healthcare, and social services in the kingdom. Despite the critical work of social workers in the developing countries like Eswatini, the profession faces numerous challenges including limited resources and funding, high caseloads, lack of recognition and appreciation and limited opportunities for professional development (Chidyausiku et al. 2024).

The Eswatini Social Work Association in collaboration with Eswatini Medical Christian University (EMCU) Department of Social Work recognized the need to promote the value and significance of social work in the country, leading to the launch of the first-ever social work day celebrations in 2019. This initiative was highly applauded by many social work stakeholders and was put on the university calendar. This marked the journey towards yearly celebrations of the social work day in the country. In 2024, the celebrations were divided into two events; media engagement and the commemorations. Eswatini Medical Christian University, University of Eswatini and the Deputy Prime Minister's Office held series of radio and television sessions in March 2024 to amplify the significance of social work in socio-economic development. The 2024 commemorations which were held in retrospect on 2 August attracted a number of civil society organisations and media personnel. Some of the organisations which attended include: Taiwan Fund for Children and Families (TFCF), George Town University, Swatini Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA), Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF), Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation, Umhluma Women and Youth Foundation, Lidwala Insurance, Pasture Valley Children's Home, SOS Children's Villages, Salvation Army and Family Life Association of Eswatini (FLAS) among others. The event was themed "Shared Future for Transformative Change: Buen Vivir". It brought together social workers, professionals from related fields, and community members to share success stories, discuss challenges and opportunities to recognize the contributions of social work in national development. The annual social work day celebration serves as a reminder of the impact of social work and the need for continued support and recognition of this profession.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applies the strengths-based approach (Saleebey, 2006) as its primary theoretical framework. This approach emphasizes the inherent strengths and resources of individuals, families, and communities, rather than focusing solely on their deficits or problems. In the context of social work in Eswatini, the strengths-based approach is particularly relevant as it aligns with the

profession's core values of empowerment, self-determination, and respect for diversity (Gray, 2011). By focusing on success stories and positive outcomes, the study aims to uplift the achievements of social workers and their clients, demonstrating the potential for positive change even in challenging circumstances.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social work plays a crucial role in addressing social challenges globally and particularly in the Global South, where socio-economic issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and GBV are prevalent (Mugumbate & Maushe, 2014). African scholars have highlighted the importance of culturally relevant social work practices that consider the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of African countries (Midgley, 2014). In Eswatini, social work interventions have proven effective in improving the well-being of individuals and communities, particularly in areas such as child protection, mental health, and community development (Eswatini Government, 2018). However, the profession faces challenges related to limited resources, high caseloads, and lack of professional recognition (Lymbery, 2001).

Research from the Global South emphasizes the need for documenting and sharing success stories in social work to demonstrate the profession's impact and promote its value (Fabricant & Burghardt, 1992). Success stories can serve as powerful tools for inspiring and motivating social workers, as well as for advocating for increased resources and support for the profession (Gray, 2011). However, there is a lack of documented success stories in social work practice in Eswatini, making it difficult to promote the profession and demonstrate its impact. This study aims to address this gap by documenting and analyzing the success stories presented during Eswatini's 2024 Social Work Day celebrations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the success stories of social work interventions in Eswatini.
2. To understand the challenges faced by social workers in Eswatini.
3. To provide recommendations for improving and expanding social work services in Eswatini.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the success stories of social work interventions in Eswatini?
2. What challenges do social workers face in Eswatini, and how have they been addressed?
3. What recommendations can be made for improving and expanding social work services in Eswatini?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to document and analyze the success stories presented during Eswatini's 2024 Social Work Day celebrations. The data collection methods included:

- **Semi-structured interviews:** Interviews were conducted with representatives from five different civil society organizations (CSOs), social workers, and social work students. These interviews provided in-depth insights into the experiences of social workers and the impact of their interventions.
- **Focus group discussion:** A focus group discussion was held to gather additional insights and validate the findings from the interviews and presentations.

- **Thematic analysis:** Thematic analysis was used to identify and code themes, patterns, and categories from the recorded presentations, interviews, and focus group discussion. Success stories were categorized into themes such as child protection, mental health, community development, and support for vulnerable populations.

Peer debriefing was conducted with the researchers to ensure objectivity and consistency in data analysis. Informed consent was obtained from participants before recording presentations, conducting interviews, and holding focus group discussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured for all participants. The study was approved by the Eswatini Medical Christian University Research Ethics Board.

RESULTS

The analysis of the success stories presented during the 2024 Social Work Day celebrations in Eswatini revealed several key themes:

Theme 1: Child Protection

Social workers in Eswatini play a critical role in child protection by developing and implementing policies and laws that safeguard children's rights. They work closely with law enforcement agencies, schools, and healthcare providers to identify and address cases of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Social workers also facilitate foster care and adoption services for children who cannot remain with their families (Fabricant & Burghardt, 1992).

One participant noted:

"Social workers in Eswatini are responsible for identifying children in need of care and providing them with a wide array of protection services, including counselling, family support, and foster care."

Theme 2: Mental Health

Social workers in Eswatini have made significant strides in promoting mental health by establishing support groups for people living with HIV and mental health conditions, providing counselling services to survivors of GBV, and creating a helpline for mental health emergencies. They also collaborate with psychologists, psychiatrists, and medical doctors to provide comprehensive care for individuals with mental health issues.

A representative from a civil society organization shared:

"Our social workers have managed to establish counselling services and support groups for survivors of gender-based violence and people living with HIV and AIDS. We have also created a helpline for mental health emergencies."

Theme 3: Community Development

Social workers in Eswatini are actively involved in community development by addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and access to education and healthcare. They collaborate with local organizations and government agencies to develop and implement community-based programs that promote social and economic well-being (Midgley, 2014).

One participant stated:

"Social workers in Eswatini work closely with community members to identify and address social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and access to essential services. They provide support and resources to vulnerable populations, contributing towards community development."

Theme 4: Support for Vulnerable Populations

Supporting vulnerable populations, including people living with HIV/AIDS, older adults, and individuals with disabilities, is a core focus of social work in Eswatini. Social workers provide a range of services, including counselling, case management, and psychosocial support, to help vulnerable individuals and families address their specific needs and challenges.

One participant remarked:

"Social workers in Eswatini work closely with vulnerable populations to provide them with the resources and support they need to improve their quality of life and become more self-sufficient."

Theme 5: Research and Advocacy

Social workers in Eswatini are increasingly engaged in research and advocacy activities to inform and improve the services provided to vulnerable populations. By conducting research and collecting data, social workers can better understand the needs of the populations they serve and develop evidence-based interventions. They also advocate for policy changes that promote social justice and protect the rights of vulnerable groups (Mugumbate & Maushe, 2014).

DISCUSSION

The success stories related to child protection reveal that social workers in Eswatini are instrumental in safeguarding the rights and welfare of children through the development and implementation of policies and laws. This finding echoes the work of Fabricant and Burghardt (1992), who emphasize the importance of legal frameworks in protecting vulnerable populations. Social workers in Eswatini collaborate with law enforcement, schools, and healthcare providers to address cases of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. These collaborative efforts are consistent with the strengths-based approach, which encourages leveraging the strengths and resources of various stakeholders to address complex social issues (Gray, 2011). Moreover, the emphasis on child participation in decision-making processes aligns with literature that underscores the importance of empowering children to be active participants in their own welfare (Humphries, 2004). By ensuring that children's voices are heard in matters that affect them, social workers in Eswatini are promoting self-determination, a core principle of the strengths-based approach (Saleebey, 2006). This empowerment not only protects children's rights but also fosters their development as active citizens who can contribute to their communities.

The success stories related to mental health interventions underscore the critical role that social workers play in addressing mental health challenges in Eswatini. Social workers have established support groups for people living with HIV and mental health conditions, provided counselling services for survivors of gender-based violence, and created a helpline for mental health emergencies. These efforts are particularly significant in a context where mental health is often stigmatized, and access to mental health services is limited (Chidyausiku et al. 2024; Healy, 2001). The strengths-based approach is evident in these mental health interventions, as social workers focus on building resilience and tapping into the strengths of individuals and communities to promote mental well-being. By establishing support groups, social workers create spaces where individuals can draw on their collective experiences to cope with mental health challenges (Chidyausiku et al. 2024). This aligns with Kisthardt's (2009) argument that the strengths-based approach fosters connections between individuals and their communities, allowing them to access resources and support that promote recovery.

and well-being. Furthermore, the collaboration between social workers and mental health professionals, such as psychologists and medical doctors, reflects the holistic approach advocated by scholars in the Global South (Midgley, 2014). This interdisciplinary collaboration ensures that individuals receive comprehensive care, addressing both their psychosocial and medical needs. The integration of mental health services into broader social work interventions also aligns with global best practices, which emphasize the importance of addressing mental health as a key component of overall well-being and community development (Gray, 2011).

The role of social workers in community development is a key theme emerging from the success stories, and it highlights the profession's focus on promoting social change and empowering vulnerable groups. Social workers in Eswatini address issues such as poverty, unemployment, and access to education and healthcare by working closely with community members and local organizations. This approach is consistent with the strengths-based framework, which emphasizes the importance of community engagement and collaboration in achieving sustainable development (Saleebey, 2006). Research by Midgley (2014) underscores the importance of community-based social work in the Global South, where social workers often operate in resource-constrained environments. The success stories in Eswatini demonstrate how social workers, by collaborating with local organizations and government agencies, can pool resources and expertise to create more effective and sustainable development initiatives. This aligns with the literature on social development, which advocates for a bottom-up approach that empowers communities to take ownership of their development processes (Midgley, 2014). Additionally, the emphasis on skills development and capacity building for marginalized groups, such as women and people with disabilities, reflects the strengths-based approach's focus on empowerment (Saleebey, 2006). By equipping individuals with the skills and resources needed to become self-sufficient, social workers in Eswatini are promoting long-term sustainable development, as well as reducing dependency on external aid. This approach also aligns with Mugumbate and Maushe's (2014) argument that social work in Africa must prioritize empowerment and capacity building to address the deep-seated issues of poverty and inequality.

Social workers in Eswatini play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable populations, including people living with HIV/AIDS, older adults, and individuals with disabilities. The success stories highlight the provision of direct services such as counselling, case management, and psychosocial support, which are essential for helping vulnerable individuals and families meet their specific needs. This focus on direct service provision is consistent with the work of Humphries (2004), who emphasizes the importance of addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable populations while also advocating for broader systemic change. The strengths-based approach is clearly evident in the way social workers in Eswatini engage with vulnerable populations. Rather than viewing these individuals as passive recipients of aid, social workers work to empower them by providing education, training, and resources that help them improve their quality of life and become more self-sufficient. This aligns with the principles of empowerment and self-determination, which are central to the strengths-based approach (Saleebey, 2006). By focusing on the strengths and capabilities of vulnerable individuals, social workers in Eswatini are helping to create a more just and equitable society. Furthermore, the advocacy work undertaken by social workers on behalf of vulnerable populations reflects the profession's commitment to social justice and human rights (Gray, 2011). Social workers in Eswatini advocate

for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in government programs and participate in policy development to ensure that their needs are addressed. This advocacy work is essential for addressing the structural inequalities that contribute to the marginalization of these populations and is consistent with the strengths-based approach's focus on systemic change (Reisch & Andrews, 2001).

The involvement of social workers in research and advocacy is another key theme emerging from the success stories. Social workers in Eswatini are conducting research to better understand the needs of vulnerable populations and to develop evidence-based interventions. This focus on research is consistent with the literature, which emphasizes the importance of data-driven decision-making in social work practice (Thyer, 2013). By conducting research, social workers in Eswatini are ensuring that their interventions are informed by the latest evidence and are tailored to the specific needs of the populations they serve. The strengths-based approach is also evident in social workers' advocacy efforts. By advocating for policy changes that promote social justice and protect the rights of vulnerable groups, social workers in Eswatini are working to create a more inclusive and equitable society. This advocacy work aligns with the strengths-based approach's focus on systemic change, as social workers seek to address the root causes of social issues rather than simply treating the symptoms (Saleebey, 2006). Moreover, their involvement in policy development ensures that the voices of marginalized populations are heard in decision-making processes, further promoting self-determination and empowerment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The success stories shared during the Social Work Day celebrations provide several key recommendations for improving and expanding social work services in Eswatini:

- **Increased collaboration:** Social workers should continue to collaborate with healthcare providers, educators, and other professionals to provide comprehensive support to individuals and communities in need.
- **Culturally relevant interventions:** Social work interventions should incorporate cultural and traditional practices to ensure their effectiveness and relevance in the local context.
- **Ongoing training:** There is a need for ongoing training and professional development for social workers to enhance their skills and competencies.
- **Professional recognition:** Greater recognition of the social work profession through policies such as the enactment of a social work registration law could promote the appreciation of social workers and their contributions.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role that social workers play in addressing various social challenges in Eswatini. The success stories presented during the 2024 Social Work Day celebrations demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of social work interventions, showcasing best practices, lessons learned, and areas for improvement. The findings underscore the importance of community engagement, client empowerment, and collaboration with stakeholders in achieving positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

DECLARATIONS

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