

Working difficultly hard: Complexities of medical social work within multi-professional settings in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study investigates the complexities of practising as a medical social worker in the Zimbabwean health sector. The aim of the study, therefore, was to identify the challenges faced by medical social workers within multi-professional settings. A qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. The study further utilised a phenomenological research design. This is because it offered an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of professional medical social workers. The study targeted qualified medical social workers and social work students on internships in the hospital. The study, therefore, had 6 primary participants and 3 key informants. The key informants included a doctor, a nurse and an administrator. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. From the findings, the study established that medical social workers face the challenges of power dynamics, high caseloads, lack of resources, misunderstanding of the role of medical social work and professional mistrust among many others. The study made various recommendations to deal with challenges faced by medical social workers. The study recommended the need to recruit more social workers, to have clear guidelines on medical social work, and to develop an inter-professional collaboration committee at public hospitals for instruction on the expectations.

Keywords: challenges hospital medical social work multi-professional Zimbabwe