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Social work in the context of child protection in Seychelles: educational preparedness from a global and local perspective

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ABSTRACT

Child protection's complexity requires localized understanding within social work. This paper focuses on the child protection system in the Republic of Seychelles and evaluates social workers' preparedness within this context. Through a historical analysis of social work in Seychelles and an exploration of the current child protection system with an emphasis on the educational readiness of social workers for child protection work, this study investigates the unique challenges/opportunities in this field. This study uses an exploratory case study method to analyze the educational preparedness of social workers in child protection work and identify key strategies for improving practice outcomes in Seychelles. Findings show that the education of social workers, especially at the bachelor's degree level, is more tuned to generic training in the social work profession than specializations in specific fields of practice like child protection. Recommendations for enhancing social work practice in Seychelles and other similar contexts are given, highlighting the need for further research.

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Introduction

The complexity of child protection requires a local approach based on local knowledge, which is also applied in the individual approach of social workers (Healy & Meagher, 2007). Recent revisions to the Children's Act in Seychelles highlight the urgency of addressing child abuse and sexual abuse (Child Law Reform Committee [CLRC], 2021). This article assesses social workers' preparedness in this context, focusing on preparedness in education.

The review of the Children's Act followed a high-profile criminal case that highlighted the need for strategic reforms in child protection (Seychelles Nation, 2020). The Children's Law Reform Committee, which was set up to review the Children's Act, recommended reviewing qualification requirements for those working with children, emphasizing increasing educational requirements (CLRC, 2021). In addition to the Children's Act, Seychelles has a child protection policy as a legal guide to keeping children safe. The legislation sets forth the principles, values, and beliefs that are adhered to in the fight to keep children safe from all forms of abuse (Social Service, 1989). The child protection policy in Seychelles currently focuses on raising awareness, empowering

children, supporting victims of abuse, and responding sympathetically to concerns about abuse (Social Service, 1989). Child protection practices vary internationally due to socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts (Gilbert et al., 2011).

This study aims to evaluate the educational readiness of social workers in Seychelles for child protection work and identify areas for development. The study first explores globalization's impact on social work (Dominelli, 2010), then provides a historical analysis of social work and the current child protection system in Seychelles, and finally examines the roles of child protection social workers.

Aim and objective

The aim of this study is to analyze case studies on the educational readiness of social workers for child protection work and formulate critical areas for development for practice in Seychelles. The central question of the analysis is, *'How does social work education in Seychelles prepare social workers for specific demands in child protection work, and what recommendations can address gaps to enhance their effectiveness in the field?'*

Global and local nexus: globalization and social work practice

Globalization is significantly affecting social work practice by introducing global standards. However, as has been demonstrated, social work is socially constructed and requires local adaptation (Lyon, 2006; Navratil, 1998). The mechanical application of global standards in different social and cultural settings may render practices ineffective and even exacerbate inequalities instead of the intended assistance to those in need (Jurčević & Živković, 2011). Besides, literature remarks that globalization highlights the birth of new imperialism (Siebert, 2019). In this line, globalization benefits those who are more prominent and influential at the expense of endangering the country's local populations. This inevitably widens the gap between richer and poorer segments of a country's population and between richer and poorer nations, affecting the quality of life of those in these situations (Went, 2004).

Global standards in social work education, as outlined by international organizations, emphasize understanding socioeconomic and historical contexts and developing competencies for professional interventions (IFSW et al., 2012). Despite the drive for education based on standardized competencies, local cultural contexts must be considered (Han et al., 2016). In Africa, including Seychelles, social work education often lacks theories and models that reflect local contexts (Veta & McLaughlin, 2022). This study explores the need for local understanding of social work, particularly in child protection in Seychelles (Nicette Georges, 2019).

Social work in Seychelles and the birth of child protection system: historical analysis

In an article titled 'Social Work in Seychelles,' Eve Road (1973) mentioned that when she arrived in Seychelles in 1971, there were no family allowances or ordinances to protect children. However, there was just an orphanage managing

a small grant, which acts as a reception center, caretaker, boarding outplaces, or permanent home due to the kind heart of the mother superior. No discernible policies were in place to guide social service provision (Road, 1973). The catholic church, the leading religious organization, was one of the channels through which social work was practiced. The church cared for parishioners, assisted them with food, and offered counsel for marital and other social issues in families and society.

However, after gaining independence in 1976, many things started evolving, but the church and the family remained the primary means through which support was extended to people. The Seychellois lived in closely knitted communities and had large families, including the extended family. Family support included assistance in sharing food with those family members who did not have it and caring for the disabled and elderly. Although it is known that social service in Seychelles has evolved over the years with social protection policies in place for its citizens, more research needs to be done in this area, and more materials/studies have been published in this light.

According to popular opinion, the Seychelles Nations (a popular newspaper), the concept of social development was adopted by Seychelles in 1995 following the World Summit on Social Development, which was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, that same year (Seychelles Nation, 2014). Social development is about putting 'people at the center of development,' prioritizing, putting people first, and mitigating the impacts of development on their well-being through policies, programs, and activities. Coined to address the issue of poverty, unemployment, social disintegration, gender inequality, social distress, and instability in families, as well as anti-social behavior, the social development concept is directed at empowering the population to make positive life choices and promoting their full participation in the society (Seychelles Nation, 2014).

The concept of social development has been incorporated in the National Action Plan on Social Development 2005–2015, with the main aim of attaining social sustainability at three levels: empowerment at the individual level, social inclusion, and security (Seychelles Nation, 2014). The Department of Social Affairs is implementing the Action Plan in the Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development, and Sports. Although some crucial reforms have been undertaken since 2008, the State remains an essential basic social service provider, guaranteeing fair and equitable access to quality education, health care, and other essential services for the whole population. The question here is how equitable and accessible the state provides social services. Generally, healthcare in Seychelles is almost free in state or public hospitals, and education at primary and secondary levels is virtually free for Seselwa citizens in public schools. Nevertheless, when it comes to access to unemployment benefits, access to housing benefits, or qualifying for any form of financial support, it typically seems questionable who gets support for being in need. Seychelles is a growing country with a growing economy, and we agree with a Kuznets-type analysis that says that as a country grows, it becomes more unequal (Bhorat et al., 2017). Research mentions that inequality manifests in several ways: access to social services, infrastructure, quality of education, and earnings (Bhorat et al., 2017). With an observable divide between the rich and poor, the state's role in providing social services needs further exploration to assess the equitable distribution of services. There is also a Social Services Division, which is the service-oriented division within the Social Affairs Department responsible for promoting the well-being of

children, families, disabled persons, and persons placed on probation orders. The following figure summarizes other services that developed in line with child protection.

Apart from the sections mentioned in the figure above, the family squad works with the child protection unit to investigate abuse cases. The workers of the family Squad of the Seychelles police go through regular police training as persons working in the field. However, they are also expected to gain some knowledge of child protection, which they might acquire at the diploma level at the National Institute of Health and Social Studies (NIHSS). Operating under the Department of Social Affairs within the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, the child protection unit has witnessed an increase in the number of abuse (neglect, physical and sexual abuse) cases since the onset of COVID-19.

The abuse cases persist due to socio-cultural reasons. For example, a major social problem in Seychelles is the use of illicit drugs (Orock & Nicette, 2021). In 2018, the Seychelles News Agency (SNA) reported that there was an increased rate of the use of heroin (Seychelles News Agency, 2018). A survey done by the Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation (APDAR) in 2017 showed that the population of heroin users aged 15 years and above is around 5000 people (Seychelles News Agency, 2018) out of the country's 95,000 people. Orock and Nicette (2021) identified that the increased use of cocaine and other illegal drugs in Seychelles has negative consequences for the health of the persons involved, their families, as well as society. Studies have shown that sexual abuse is a direct effect of drug and alcohol use, which also results in other delinquent behaviors (Dembo et al., 1990). Therefore, in Seychelles, child abuse cases persist because of this ongoing social problem. Another example is the fact that despite the elimination of corporal punishment in the Children's Act in the country, physical abuse continues to persist in some areas as some believe culturally that beating is the best way to correct children. That is, parents believe in punishment to correct the child. Besides, an increase in separation between couples (divorce) is a reason for child neglect cases in the country. This is because, in the case of separation, couples have difficulties making proper arrangements to give quality care to their children. Sometimes, children who are not of age (below 18) are left alone to cater for themselves or younger ones as parents do not take responsibility for them.

In addition to the above socio-cultural issues influencing child abuse in Seychelles, the child law reform committee in 2021 they are acknowledged that in Seychelles, sexual abuse cases are underreported in the country (CRCL, 2021) due to the socio-cultural context associated with issues of 'victim shaming.' According to the Child Reform Law Committee (CRLC), following commentary on social media relating to sexual abuse cases, there exists a culture of 'victim shaming' in Seychelles (CRLC, 2021) in which the victims of sexual predators are blamed, with little understanding of the psychological manipulation that sees adults preying on immaturity and youth for sexual gratification.

Seychelles child protection unit: an overview of key structures

In Seychelles, the child protection unit is managed by a principal social worker who is responsible for the coordination and investigation of all child abuse cases in the country, and the section works in collaboration with the police as well as other partners (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs Seychelles, 2005). In the *'Working Together document for*

Child Protection’ produced by the Ministry of Social Development and Culture at the time in Seychelles, emphasis is laid on collaboration between agencies to protect children, so all other organizations working with children in the country collaborate with the child protection unit to keep children safe (Ministry of Social Development and Culture, Social Service, 1997). The team’s principal and other social workers work closely to execute the tasks discussed in the next section.

According to a document titled ‘*Child Protection: A Historical Perspective*’ produced by the then Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (now known as Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs) in June 2005, the critical structures in child protection included the National Commission for Child Protection which comprise many stakeholders from different agencies including the Attorney General’s Office and other state departments as well as faith organizations. The National Commission for Child Protection, with stakeholders from the Ministry of Education, Health, Youth Affairs, Social Affairs, and the Attorney General’s Office, deliberate on policy matters and contribute to policies that protect children from abuse. In addition, another fundamental structure in the child protection unit is the interagency committee (a ‘clearing house’ for all cases of sexual abuse and other severe abuse). As mentioned earlier, the interagency committee set up in 1999 comprises professionals from all sectors of the country working together to ensure the best interests of the children with whom they work. One coordinating strength of the interagency committee is that this collaboration between professionals of different agencies has been extended to working groups that develop a Risk Assessment Framework. This tool assists people working closely with children in identifying children who may be at risk of harm early so that quick interventions can be carried out without delay. Another critical structure in child protection is the social service committee chaired by the Director of Social Service, who considers reports and recommendations to the courts and family tribunal in cases of custody, access, compulsory care, maintenance, adoption, and guardianship. Finally, the family tribunal (the last essential structure in Child Protection) was created to give relief with minimum delay in cases of custody, compulsory care, access, and maintenance and is also vested with the powers to make protection orders in cases of domestic violence (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2005).

Considering that a principal social worker manages the Child Protection Unit and works in collaboration with other social workers, it is evident that the main actors within the unit are social workers, and it is crucial to discuss the roles of social workers within the Child Protection Unit.

The role of social workers in child protection

Child protection social workers (also called child welfare workers in some countries) fill many roles within the child protection unit. These roles include case management, advocacy, investigating child abuse and neglect, doing home visits, and identifying community resources. However, before delving into the role of CPSWs, it is essential to mention that typically, when a child abuse case is reported in Seychelles, there are specific measures that the social worker takes which are guided by the child protection policy in place that provides procedures for child protection. It is crucial to note that cases might be handled differently depending on the type of abuse reported.

Firstly, when a case is reported or referred to the child protection unit, the principal social worker receives it and assigns it to a social worker within the unit. The CPSW then gets the case and contacts the parents or guardians of the child or the person in charge of caring for the child to establish the case together with the child being present. In case of physical abuse where the abuser is the mother and refuses to consent, the social workers can ask for the father's consent or, in the last case scenario, contact the AG's office for a general order to proceed if the physical abuse requires immediate attention and parents are not giving consent.

After establishing the case through consent, both the parents and the child are informed about the child protection procedures, which include a medical examination to confirm abuse (in case of rape or physical abuse) and a police statement. Before proceeding to a police statement, the CPSW, in some cases of high risk, can request for removal of the child from the house, or the perpetrator might be asked to leave the house by court order. During the police statement, the child's statement, the parents' statement, and the statements of other witnesses are being registered through an interview by the child protection policy at the Police Squad. The Police Squad does the police statement (interviews and pictures are taken as evidence to be presented in court) with child protection police in the presence of child protection social workers. Court proceedings are attended by the victim, perpetrator, and all those involved in the case. A defense lawyer is assigned to the victim. The Child Protection Policy 2012 and the Children Act 2021 in Seychelles govern the whole process and have procedures that the child protection social workers follow.

Investigating child abuse, neglect and doing home visits

The first role that is essential and sensitive for CPSWs in Seychelles is investigating child abuse and neglect and doing home visits. This role is complicated because Seychellois or 'Sesewal' people live in closely knit communities, and given the island's small population, each person knows almost everyone else. So, doing investigations for CPSWs is sometimes challenging as the person involved in the case might be known to the CPSWs or might be a relative. As such, ethical issues are questionable in this context. Nonetheless, they still must perform their duties amid all challenges and be professional. When CPSWs go into the homes to assess the safety and needs of a child, the goal is to ensure that every need is fulfilled (Benbenishty et al., 2015). In assessing and evaluating children's needs and their homes, the CPSW must remain vigilant as they consider the child's environment because predators in the home are usually the primary guardians or caretakers during initial home visits (Radey et al., 2017). However, when CPSWs conduct unannounced home visits requiring quick responses to determine a child's safety, they are under tremendous stress (Brassard & Fiorvanti, 2015).

Case management and advocacy

In the case management role, CPSWs in Seychelles ensure that records and files are up to date with minimal errors. In this light, those who carry a considerable caseload risk falling behind as they try to maintain records. On the other hand, advocating for children and their families is another essential role of CPSWs

(Greenbaum et al., 2015), which CPSWs in Seychelles perform. Williams (2018) found evidence that child welfare social workers are advocates for those who are most vulnerable, and these social workers become important support members for families. Study shows that the amount of advocacy a child protection social worker employs for a client to ensure the client's safety needs are met is immeasurable (Bragin et al., 2015).

Identifying community resources

The final role that CPSWs carry out is locating community resources (such as counseling assistance, food assistance, utility assistance, locating a provider, transportation, child-care assistance, and shelter) for children and families. Child protection social workers must attempt to find resources in the clients' community. These professionals may be stressed and overwhelmed if they lack resources (Donisch et al., 2016).

After establishing the historical context of social work and child protection in Seychelles, as well as exploring the child protection unit and roles of child protection social workers, this paper moves on to explain the method used to evaluate the educational preparedness of social workers for child protection practice in Seychelles.

Methodology

This study uses an exploratory case study design (Creswell, 2014) to assess the educational preparedness of social workers in Seychelles for child protection work. We focused on exploring literature that contains studies on the educational readiness of child protection social workers for child protection work (Priya, 2021). This research focused on exploring literature that contains studies on the educational readiness of child protection social workers for child protection work. An exploratory case study method is implored. A case study can be exploratory (Yin, 2014), whose purpose is to study a phenomenon with the intention of 'exploring' or identifying fresh research questions that can be extensively used in subsequent research studies. In exploring specific literature case studies in this research, we aim to do research that could further build on developing the content of social work education in Seychelles.

Search and selection technique

We used electronic databases such as Google Scholar and Social Work Abstracts to select text for this exploratory case study review. A computerized search of these electronic databases showed many publications on social workers' educational readiness for practice in child protection work. However, considering sampling is essential in case studies (Priya, 2021), we had to delineate the choice of case studies used for this paper. Sampling occurs whenever data is gathered from a fraction of a studied population, allowing the researcher to make probable inferences about the larger universe without studying every member (Cargan, 2008). In this case, we use specific studies conducted on the educational readiness of social workers in different countries as samples to understand better the situation of social workers' preparedness in child protection in Seychelles. Scholars like Miles and Huberman (1994) say, '*You cannot study everyone everywhere doing*

everything.' These authors posit that the following factors should be considered in a qualitative sample plan:

- (a) Is the sampling relevant to one's conceptual frame and research questions?
- (b) Can reliable descriptions or explanations be produced using the sampling plan selected?
- (c) Is the sampling plan feasible regarding time, money, workforce, and access to people under study?
- (d) Is the sampling plan effective enough for its findings to be generalizable to the entire universe of the population from which the sample is obtained?

In line with Miles and Huberman (1994), our search had to derive the inclusion and exclusion criteria in this case study review. Inclusion criteria included articles on social workers' educational training, specifically in child protection work. Another inclusion criterion was that the case study articles had to be peer-reviewed, in English, and published in a scholarly journal. Additionally, only articles between the years 2000 and 2020 were included. The following keywords were used to search in the databases mentioned above: 'case study,' 'educational preparedness' (including 'training'), 'social workers,' and 'child protection work.'

The search yielded 2500 case study articles. After all duplicates and articles that needed to be peer-reviewed were removed, 150 articles were left. At this stage, non-English language articles were excluded, leaving 130 articles, especially as authors needed help understanding the language. Furthermore, a thorough examination of titles and abstracts led to the exclusion of more articles as we used purposive sampling methods to select three case study articles, which were studies conducted on the educational readiness of social workers in child protection work. The need for sampling in case study research cannot be over-emphasized (Priya, 2021). Purposive sampling is done deliberately, with some focus or purpose in mind (Punch, 2005, p. 187). With this focus study, we are analyzing the educational preparedness of social workers in child protection in Seychelles. In addition, given that the purpose of this case study is to provide an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon (Lee et al., 2010), it was a better option to choose only 3 case studies for an in-depth exploration of the research questions of this study. The case studies are drawn from studies conducted in other countries: the United Kingdom (Wales), Europe (Sweden), and Australia, which in this study are interpreted and analyzed to inform practice in Seychelles. Therefore, a multiple case study design (with three case studies in different parts of the world) is used to analyze the phenomenon. Multiple-case study design, however, has a distinct advantage over a single-case study design as they are generally considered more compelling, robust, and worthy (Priya, 2021). While the case studies chosen could be regarded as Western examples, their contextual uniqueness and transferability to this research must be considered. Figure 1 shows the Birth of Social work and child protection in Seychelles. Figure 2 shows selected case studies.

Limitations in case study method

Scholars have identified some limitations of the case study method. One such limitation is a generalization. One author says case studies are unique and atypical, and finding a 'typical' case whose findings can be generalized is tricky and arduous (Mitchell, 1983).

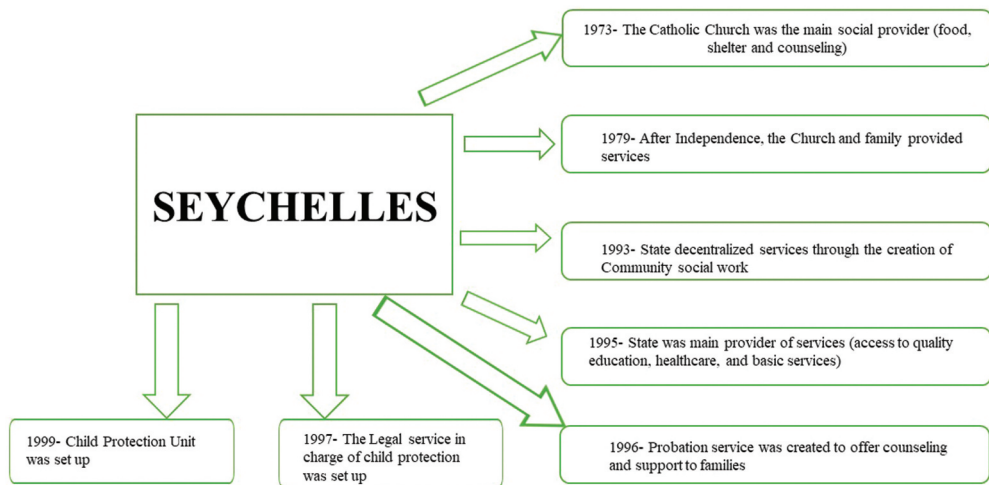


Figure 1. Social work and the birth of CP in Seychelles

Case Study	Author	Country	Title
Case Study 1	Pithouse & Scourfield, 2002	Wales (UK)	Ready for Practice? The DipSW in Wales View from the Workplace on Social Work Training
Case Study 2	Healy & Meagher, 2007	Australia	Social Workers Preparation for Child Protection: Revisiting the Questions of Specialization
Case Study 3	Tham & Lynch, 2014	Sweden (Europe)	Prepared for Practice? Graduating Social Work Students' Reflections on their Education, Competence and Skills

Figure 2. Summary of case studies selected.

However, Yin (2014) highlights that case studies allow for analytical generalizations in which a previously developed theory is used as a template to compare the empirical results of the case under study. In this study, previously developed theories on the educational readiness of child protection social workers in the case studies are used to compare with social work education in Seychelles. An author like Priya (2021) mentions that generalizations strengthen the explanatory power of a case study, and most importantly, classic case studies from the literature have enabled researchers to study cases in

very different places and, at other times, to find similar processes and explanations operating. Therefore, case studies cannot be denied being used to build grand abstract theories to construct knowledge of the social world (Priya, 2021). It is with this in mind that we present our findings below.

Findings

Generic/Generalist versus specialist social work educational preparation

Case studies 1 and 2 above highlight the argument between generic versus specialist education for social workers. Both case studies emphasize the need for social work education to train its students to be specialists rather than in generic competencies. Some scholars have highlighted the need for specialists in the child protection field of practice (Healy & Meagher, 2007). In line with this, the study participants, who were social work graduates, mentioned that they were inadequately prepared to work in child protection. In case study 1, conducted in Wales, for example, graduates of a Diploma of Social Work program perceived that their education had equipped them with various generic practice competencies (Pithouse & Scourfield, 2002).

In the same light, the study in Australia by Healy and Meagher (2007) presents interviews with 28 senior personnel in child and family welfare agencies to analyze perceptions of the educational preparation of social workers for this field of practice in Australia. The results show that child welfare workers are irresolute about the value of social work programs as preparation for tertiary or statutory child protection practice, which involves investigation, assessment, and intervention in child abuse and neglect. Could this mean that social work programs must be tailored to meet unique needs for readiness in child protection work? The authors, therefore, argue that the social work profession must better balance generic and specialist aspects to prepare graduates for practice in specialist fields of high social work involvement, particularly in tertiary child protection work (Healy & Meagher, 2007).

Educators' and employers' relationship role in preparing SWs for practice in CP

The relationship between educators and employers is crucial in supporting students transitioning into the career world. Case study 3 by Tham and Lynch (2014) argues the importance of educators' and employers' relationship. The authors conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews in Sweden with 13 graduating social work students on their education, competence, skills, and expectations for their future roles as social workers. Findings indicate that students perceived themselves as unprepared for most social work positions and expressed their expectation to receive considerable support and guidance in their workplaces. The authors further these discussions by comparing theory/research and practical skills/field placement teaching in Swedish social work education. They conclude that a closer relationship between social work educators and employers during qualifying and post-qualifying learning is essential, and they also need to begin training in relationship-building skills at an early stage in social work education (Tham & Lynch, 2014). Therefore, they express the need for a strong

relationship between social work educators and employers to equip and support social work students' transition into the workplace and practice.

Discussion

The generic/generalist and specialist debate in social work education is not new. The assumption underlying the generic is that social work has a standard basis for applying values, knowledge, and skills to various situations (Stevenson, 2005). Generalist knowledge and skill embody a 'foundation upon which professional and intellectual coherence specializations can be built' (Stevenson, 2005). Specialist practice can mean a division of labor or superior knowledge and skill about a client group, problem area, methods, or setting. The specialist practitioner can be at the front line, or specialism can extend up the organization (Parsloe, 2000). Authors like Trevithick (2011) emphasize that 'superior knowledge and skill' is acquired through extensive practice experience and additional training. This training may be in a particular theory or practice approach or about a specific client group or problem area and includes learning consolidated through critical reflection, ongoing and relevant practice experience, and access to regular quality supervision (Trevithick, 2011).

In the same line as in the case studies presented above, some authors have highlighted the need for specialist training over generalist training in social work education. For example, in the United Kingdom, scholars like Laming (2009) remark that students cover too much ground in social work education without learning the skills and knowledge to support any client group well. In a report, Laming questioned the generic nature of the new social work degree programs in the United Kingdom, mainly how they prepared students and newly qualified social workers (NQSW) in child protection (Laming, 2009). Laming concluded that 'without the necessary specialist knowledge and skills, social workers must not be allowed to practice in child protection' (Laming, 2009), and in one of the 58 recommendations put forward, Lord Laming called for a significant change in the relationship between generic and specialist training. This leads us to question if social workers in Seychelle are prepared for practice in child protection. Do social workers in Seychelles receive generalist or specialist training? The following section attempts to answer the raised questions.

How prepared are social workers in Seychelles for child protection role

Social workers in Seychelles occupy significant roles in child protection. Still, the question is: How well prepared are social workers in Seychelles for child protection work? The tension between generic orientation in the social work profession and its qualifying programs and the requirement for specialist knowledge in child welfare practice has been identified as one of the barriers to the social work professional practice in child protection (Healy & Meagher, 2007). Seychelles social work education (higher education degree bachelor's program) has been characterized by a generic orientation whereby the social work profession acknowledges a broad range of methods and fields as legitimate terrains of social work intervention.

In Seychelles, the social work degree (which exists only at the bachelor's level) involves a minimum of 4 years of study and trains generalist social workers for work in

government and non-government organizations. Besides, the bachelor's degree program allows students to gain two-on-one placement experience (Year 2 semester two and Year 3 semester two, respectively) in any field of practice that interests them. The curriculum provides general training for social workers in social work professions. The bachelor's degree program has no specifications for an in-depth concentration in any practice field or social work. The only attempt to provide specialist study in child protection is at a lower qualification level, a diploma level at the National Institute of Health and Social Studies (NIHSS). At the NIHSS, a diploma course in social work has as a requirement course 'Specialist Practice 1: Child Protection and Juvenile/Probation/Justice'. However, the content of Specialist Practice 1 and the course is questionable, and the only way to assess this content is to conduct research with graduates from the program working in child protection. Social work education in Seychelles is much at its early stage, with only two institutions offering social work programs of study (the bachelor's degree program offered by the University of Seychelles and the Diploma in Social Work offered by the National Institute of Health and Social Studies). With the generic orientation of social work education in Seychelles, the lack of specialization at the higher educational levels, and the presence of specialists in child protection at the tertiary level (to gain a diploma), one would only question the preparedness of social workers for practice in the child protection field.

Scholars like Pithouse and Scourfield (2002) question whether the generic orientation of qualifying social work programs (like that offered in the bachelor's degree program at the University of Seychelles) adequately prepares social workers for child protection work, especially for tertiary practice. Such research suggests that professional qualifying programs facilitate the development of generic professional skills like critical thinking (Gibbons & Gray, 2004) rather than specialist skills. The importance of specialist skills in child protection cannot be overemphasized. Just like the case studies above, another study in America of 279 recent social work graduates found that those who had specialized in child welfare expressed greater job satisfaction than those who had not, whether they were employed in statutory or voluntary child welfare agencies (more from Franklin & Eu, 1996).

The implied meaning of bringing the above case studies into this article is to show the necessity of including a more structured higher qualifying program with specialist training in child protection to better equip social workers in Seychelles for practice in this area. As Olive Stevenson (2005) reminded us of years back, 'the fundamental principle of a common, "generic" base to social work does not in any way imply that further specialism is unnecessary, any more than in the practice of medicine' (Stevenson, 2005). In addition, social work students can do only one field practice or internship in this context; therefore, a strong relationship between social work educators and employers is needed when students transition from school to the workplace, so they can get sufficient support to better adapt at work. This mentorship and support will further enhance the development of specialized skills in child protection work.

While there is this ongoing debate on specializing in social work for effective practice in the child protection field, there is also the need for social work practice in Seychelles to match global standards. Globalization has generated debates on social work education and training, highlighting the importance of unifying social work by creating

international education standards to facilitate communication between universities and formulate common evaluation criteria for social work practice across diverse contexts (Jönsson, 2014). However, this has raised questions about the sociocultural context that creates different forms of social work practice, policies, and methods particular to specific regions and localities (Jönsson, 2014).

A comparative analysis of social work education in Seychelles and other sub-Saharan African countries

Across Africa, social work education and training vary considerably within and across countries (Sewpaul & Lombard, 2004). According to Sewpaul and Lombard (2004), many African countries offer social work programs at the diploma and certificate levels, while some have moved toward providing a four-year or three-year bachelor's degree in social work. While some African universities offer courses related to welfare policy, care of older people, and child and domestic abuse, others aspire to form recognized social work programs as separate and independent schools or within other existing departments (Sewpaul & Lombard, 2004). As of the year 2003, 23 of the 53 countries in Africa have schools that are affiliated with the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW Directory, 2003 cited in Sewpaul & Lombard, 2004), and South Africa was the only country in Africa to have a National Qualifications Framework in place within which national standards for social work education and training have been formulated and approved as per statutory regulations.

Seychelles and South Africa are both found in the African region. Social work education is far more developed in South Africa than in Seychelles. According to Sewpaul and Lombard (2004), South Africa was the first country in Africa to begin formal social work education and training. Some differences and similarities can be seen in the social work education and training programs in both South Africa and Seychelles. The difference is seen in the availability of social work education and training programs. In South Africa, social workers undertake a 4-year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) undergraduate degree. This degree is offered at 18 universities, unlike in Seychelles, where there is only one university with a bachelor's degree program and a lower diploma program provided by the National Institute of Social Studies.

However, the social work education programs in South Africa and Seychelles are similar in the fact that the degree programs in social work are primarily generic, starting with an introduction and contextualization of social work, then emphasizing legal or statutory elements, the social worker as a professional, and then theories and interventions that can be adapted to work with children (Svensson et al., 2022). Furthermore, Svensson and colleagues highlight that even though child protection is dealt with in the curricula in South Africa, the depth and breadth of the content were questioned (Svensson et al., 2022). This raises the question of how social workers can use generic knowledge in specific practice fields and local contexts.

From the differences and similarities above, South Africa has more social work training programs at a higher level (bachelor's degree level) than Seychelles. However, these social work education programs/trainings need to provide specialization in child protection work. This makes both South Africa and Seychelles similar as their social work education training programs are more generic or generalist.

Apart from South Africa and Seychelles, other countries in sub-Saharan Africa highlight the need for specialist training in child protection. A recent study was done in Kenya by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (2020) that aimed to establish the extent to which social workers' knowledge level influences child protection interventions in the Kajiado North sub-county shows that there is a need for specific training (Protection, 2020). According to this study, knowledge level influences child protection interventions, and social workers need the right skills and values to guarantee appropriate child protection. In this line, the researchers conclude that there is a need to develop a curriculum specific to child protection and therefore recommend that the curriculum be developed in collaboration with the state agencies charged with the protection of children alongside all other stakeholders (Protection, 2020). It is essential to mention that social work education in Kenya has grown significantly over the years from the first training center offering a diploma-level program established in 1962 (WaMungai et al., 2014) to a degree level (bachelor) in social work being presented at the University of Nairobi's Department of Sociology (now the department of Sociology and Social Work) in 1976 and a master's program offered by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in 2014 (Wairire, 2014).

In Nigeria, a study on the early development of social work education at the University of Benin (the first university to establish a postgraduate program in social work) in Nigeria showed that most social work programs contained sociological content (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012). Some authors, like Okoye (2013), mentioned that from observations, it was rare to have qualified personnel teaching social work courses, as many were sociologists with no field experience. The University of Benin and Nsukka, leading Universities in social work, all traveled the same path with a heavy emphasis on social problems, deviance, and criminology to prepare social workers for work in the correctional field (Amadasun & Gray, 2023). In line with the casework focus, courses on marriage and the family, including family planning, were offered (Amadasun & Gray, 2023) with no course on child protection. The need for more focus on special child protection training from the beginning of social work in public universities or other training institutions has implications for preparedness in the field. It is in line with the above that authors like Canavera et al. (2020) mentioned a need for more precise objectives for the social work profession in Nigeria and many other West African countries, which has significant implications for social work training.

Considering the above issues, professionals in the sub-Saharan African region (whether they are countries from the East like Kenya, Seychelles or from the South like South Africa or the West like Nigeria) have continually expressed the need for locally developed principles and training materials to address the unique needs of their respective countries (Canavera et al., 2020). Therefore, professionals in the sub-Saharan region of Africa want specialized training to 'equip them to deal with local realities' (Amadasun & Gray, 2023).

Practical implications for Seychelles

The present analysis has implications for social work educational preparedness and practice in the context of child protection in Seychelles.

Curriculum review and development

Revise the social work curriculum at the bachelor's level to include specialized courses in child protection, enhanced field training, and trauma-informed care workshops. This requires consultations with stakeholders, including educational institutions, the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs, and relevant directorates (Navrátilová & Navrátil, 2020).

Continuing professional development

Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for practicing social workers through workshops, seminars, or short courses on up-to-date practices and emerging issues in child protection (Truter & Fouché, 2019).

Collaboration and benchmarking

Collaborate with countries and institutions with advanced specialized training in child protection, such as universities abroad or organizations like UNICEF, to facilitate knowledge and skill transfer (Canavera et al., 2020).

Context-specific models

Develop social work theories and models that reflect Seychelles' unique sociocultural context. Conduct research with educational institutions and practitioners to build context-specific theories and incorporate indigenous content into the curriculum (Nicette Georges, 2019).

Policy review

Revise child protection policies to reflect specialized training needs, encouraging educational institutions to offer specializations in child protection (CLRC, 2021).

Balancing global and local practices

While adhering to global standards, ensure practices are adapted to local contexts for effective child protection (Jönsson, 2014).

Further research

Conduct research to identify specific gaps in the educational preparation of social workers for child protection in Seychelles. This can shape future education, training programs, and policies (Sewpaul, 2006).

While the above suggestions or strategies could enhance social work education, particularly in child protection work practice in Seychelles, it is worth mentioning that there could be potential challenges in implementing the above strategies. For example, in Seychelles, like other African countries, one main challenge in child protection social work is the need for resources, especially financial resources.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to assess the educational readiness of social workers for child protection work in Seychelles. To achieve the aim of this study and answer the research question, we analyzed the historical development and current state of social work in the context of child protection in Seychelles using the exploratory case study method. Findings show that the education of social workers, especially at the bachelor's degree level, is more tuned to generic training in the social work profession than specializations in specific fields of practice like child protection. A further comparison between Seychelles, South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria illustrates the generalist nature of training offered in the field. This highlights the need to rethink social work education in child protection work in Africa and the need for further research in this area to provide ways to improve the curricula. Given that research identifies that social workers' specialist training in child protection will promote efficiency in practice, recommendations for social work education and practice in Seychelles are made. The recommendations highlight issues relating to curriculum review and development, continuing professional development, collaboration and benchmarking, context-specific models, policy review, global standards, local practices, and research. Hence, the paper concludes by suggesting further research, which is necessary to understand the specific gaps in the educational preparation of social workers for child protection roles in Seychelles. Such research could help shape future education, training programs, and policies.

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