

The Brain Drain of Social Workers in Zimbabwe: A Threat to the Provision of Quality Child Protection Services

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Abstract

This paper examines social workers' perspectives on the impact of the brain drain in social work on providing child protection services. Using purposeful sampling, the data was collected from 15 social workers in the child protection department of Zimbabwe's Department of Social Development (DSD). Using descriptive phenomenological design, the study demonstrated the urgent need to address the social work brain drain, leading to a significant shortage of qualified and experienced social workers, compromising child protection service standards. Using descriptive phenomenological analysis (DPA), the study also found that the brain drain has disrupted the continuity and consistency in the provision of child protection services. Findings showed that social workers' high brain drain has resulted in a lack of institutional memory and expertise, making it difficult for the Department of Social Development to solve complex child protection cases, putting children at risk. Further revelations indicate that the brain drain has resulted in high levels of burnout due to heavy caseloads, negatively affecting the quality of services. I also highlight that Zimbabwe's social work brain drain has significantly impacted the country's ability to uphold children's rights, particularly in providing, protecting, and participating rights. Addressing the social work brain drain and mitigating its long-term consequences requires immediate and proactive measures such as improving working conditions, providing professional development opportunities, implementing supportive policies, and enhancing recruitment and retention strategies. Finally, the study emphasizes the impact of brain drain in Zimbabwe on the fulfillment of children's provision, protection, and participation rights.