

RAISED BY THE HERD:

Insights from African Elephants for the Support and Continuing Professional Development of Newly Qualified Social Workers in South Africa

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Date: 11 September 2025

ASASWEI Conference 2025

Advancing Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice, Peace building, and Sustainable Development through teaching, research, and practice



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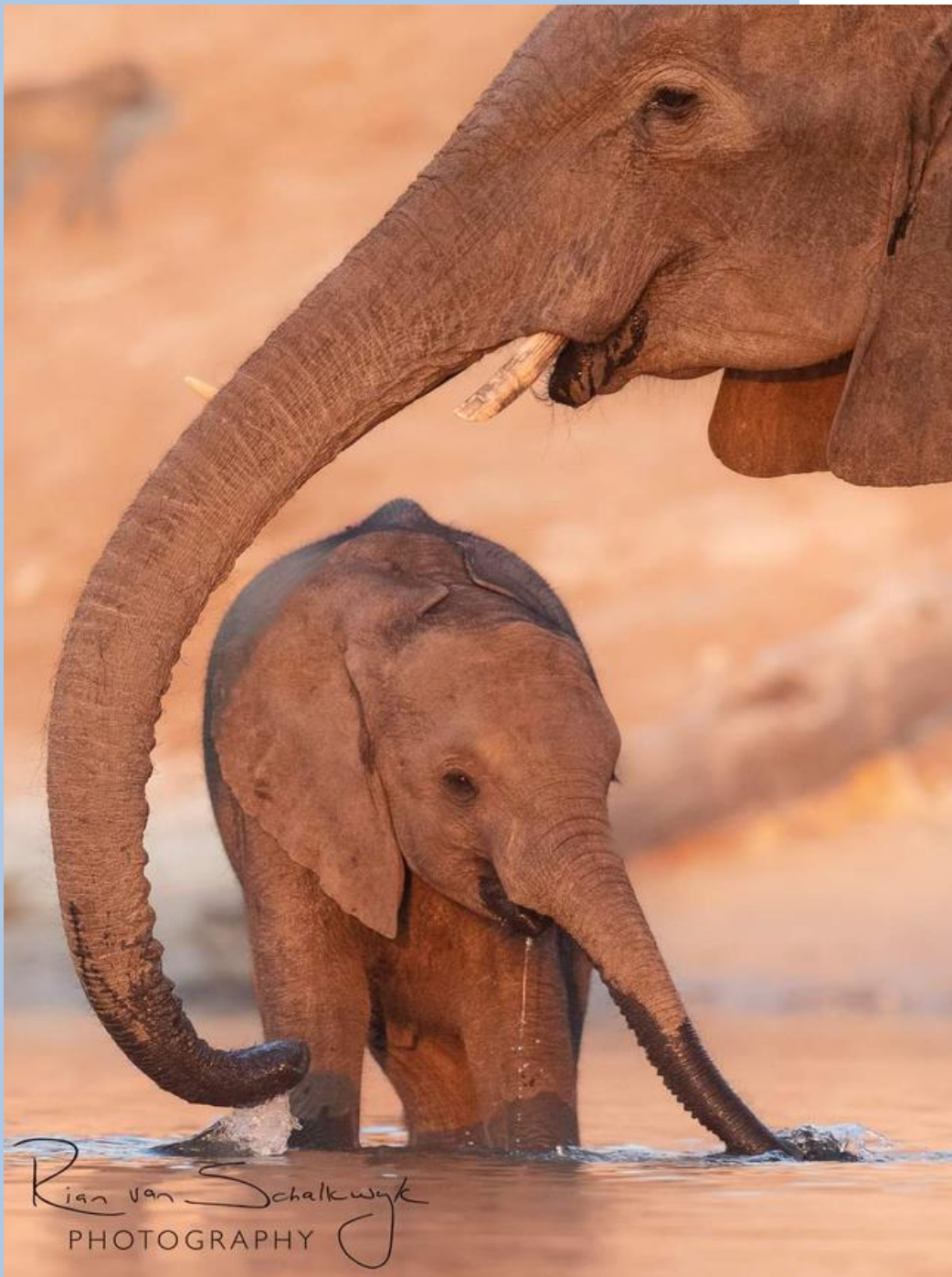
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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



BSW DEGREE: 4 years with practice modules, in South Africa

NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKER (NQSW) CHALLENGES:

- theory–practice gap, limited supervision, high caseloads, scarce resources, low pay, and job insecurity

GLOBAL PARALLELS:

- lack of specialist skills, poor induction, burnout, and identity development needs

ANALOGY OF ELEPHANT CALF-CARE: reflects NQSWs' need for structured support

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Theory of Collaborative Advantage (TCA)

ELEPHANTS RAISED BY THE HERD

EXTENDED CARE: (up to 10 years): reduces stress, builds stability

ALLOMOTHERING: Cooperative care from non-mothers strengthens the herd

SOCIAL BONDS & PLAY: foster emotional, social, and cultural development

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: highlight teamwork and decision-making

STRESS RESPONSE (cortisol): Cooperative care reduces stress during challenges



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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research question

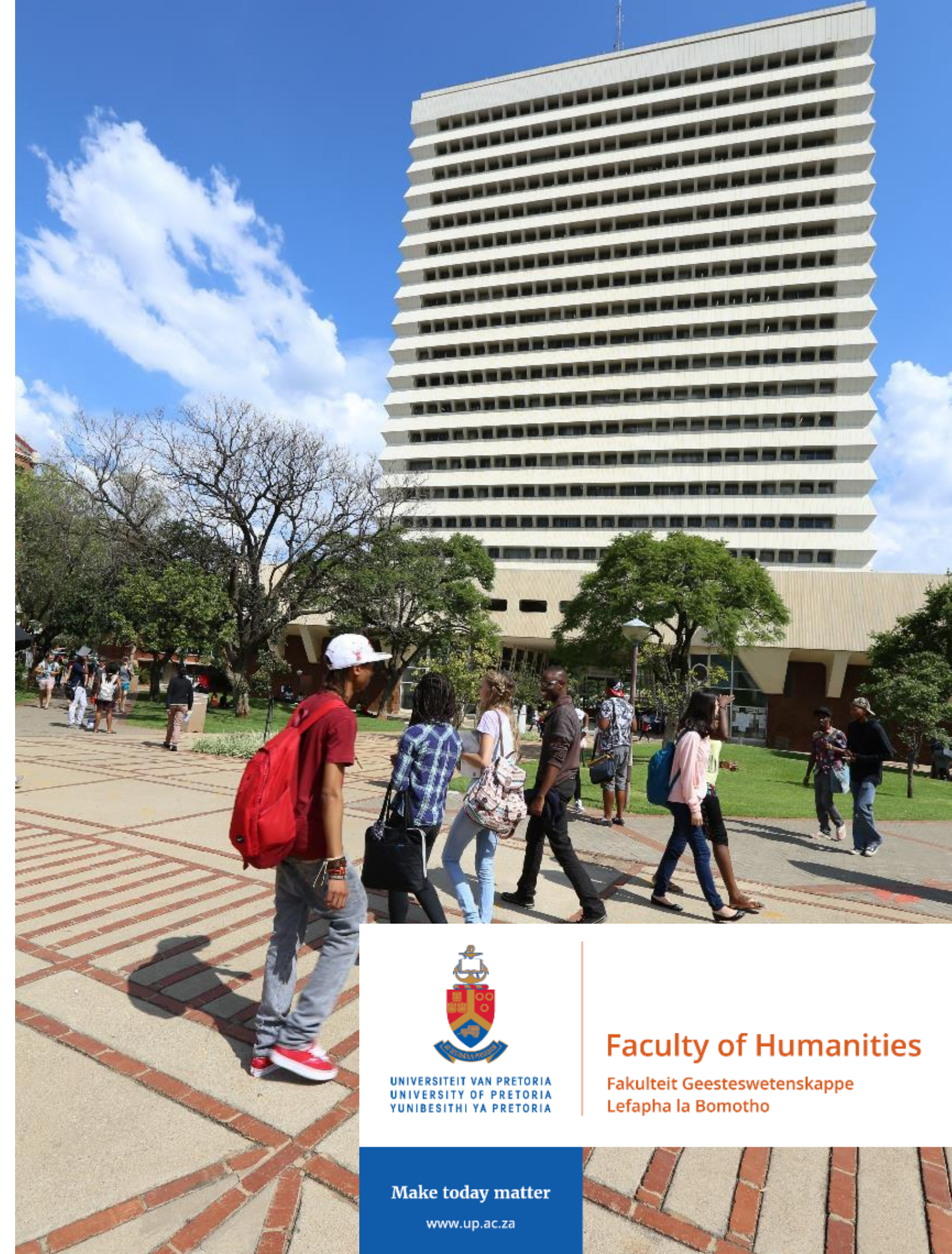
What are the barriers to, and initiatives for addressing NQSWs' support and development needs in South Africa?

APPROACH & DESIGN

- Quantitative, cross-sectional survey

POPULATION & SAMPLING

- NQSWs (≤ 3 years post-BSW, SACSSP registered, 6m–3y employed).
- Participants: $N = 39$ (from 8 provinces)



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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

- Adapted questionnaire (England and New Zealand studies)
- Web-based (QualtricsXM)

DATA ANALYSIS

- Data from Qualtrics: SPSS v29
- Mainly descriptive statistics
- Content analysis

RIGOUR

- Content validity: literature and expert input.
- Pilot-tested with 4 NQSWs and refined for the SA context.

ETHICS

- Low risk; counselling support available
- informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality
- Ethical clearance: Univ. of Pretoria (HUM003/0722)

RESULTS

1. Profile of participants

AGE: Most participants between 23–30 years

GENDER: Predominantly female ($f=35$) vs male ($f=4$)

LANGUAGES: 8 represented; top 3: Afrikaans ($f=16$), SeSotho ($f=7$), English ($f=5$)

EDUCATION: BSW ($f=36$); Master's ($f=3$)

EMPLOYMENT: Predominantly ($f=22$) in statutory positions

Figure 1: Fields of service delivery of NQSWs

FIELDS OF SERVICE DELIVERY	<i>f</i>	% ^a
Children and families (including child protection)	26	16.0
Children in foster care placements	23	14.1
Family preservation	20	12.3
Community work/development	14	8.6
Young people (adolescents)	13	8.0
People who misuse drugs, alcohol, or other substances	8	4.9
People experiencing forms of Gender-based violence	8	4.9
Couples in counselling	8	4.9
Children and families (excluding child protection)	7	4.3
Children in Child and Youth Care Centre (CYCC)	7	4.3
People who use mental health services	7	4.3
People with physical disabilities or sensory impairments	5	3.1
Early childhood development centers	4	2.5
Other (not specified)	4	2.5
Older persons	4	2.5
People with learning disabilities	2	1.2
People who have committed offenses	2	1.2
Refugees and/or asylum seekers	1	0.6

^a Percentages do not add up to 100% due to more than one response allowed.



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RESULTS

2. Workplace support initiatives

Mentorship

Caseload

Induction /
Orientation

Supervision



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MENTORSHIP

- Half of the participants had no mentorship
- Small percentage HAD; only during induction, probation
- 13 participants: mentorship
THUS mentorship not universally available

CASELOAD

- Gaps in aligning cases vs skills
 - 22 participants: some skills considered
 - 15 participants: inconsistent skills consideration
- Handing over of cases:
 - Process sufficient ($\neq 17$),
 - Process inadequate ($\neq 15$)

Mentorship



Caseload



Induction / Orientation

RECEIVING INDUCTION: 26 participants (of n=38) had some form of induction,

- while 12 participants did not receive any induction or orientation

CONTENT OF INDUCTION/ORIENTATION:

- Emphasis on understanding organisation: policies and procedures; dealing with confidentiality and understanding job description
- Professional and personal development: stronger emphasis on supervision than CPD



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FREQUENCY: 36 participants answered the question regarding supervision

- Majority ($f=21$) formal supervision: ONCE a month
- 10 participants: LESS frequent than once a month
- 5 participants: BI-WEEKLY or WEEKLY

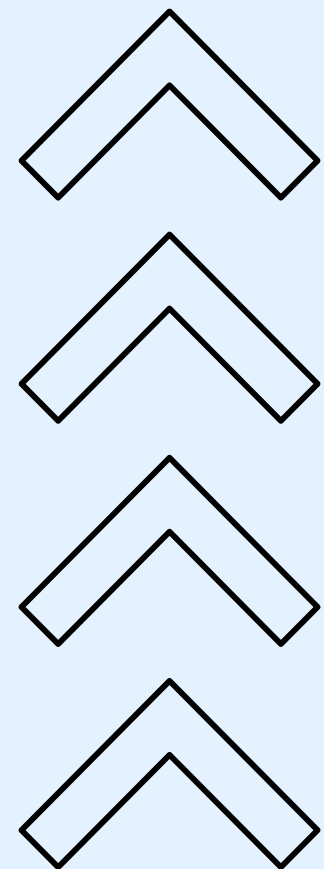
CONTENT: more than one answer allowed

- Strong focus ($f=19-29$): advice, guidance, support, encouragement, appreciation, closing files, reviewing of cases
- Less focus ($f=7-18$): reflection, self-awareness, performance, training needs, workplace policies; applying theoretical approaches



Supervision

3. Learning and development of NQSWs



TRAINING COURSES

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR DEVELOPMENT

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



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TRAINING COURSES

Training is VALUED

- **In-house training:** generally positive to neutral or poor,
- **External training:** higher group: very good to neutral

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

- 16/39 participants have a PDP
- 9 of the 16 participants discussed CPD with supervisors

LOW utilisation of PDPs



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SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Collaborative and interactive methods dominate:

- Co-working on cases: most common (f=19)
- Group sessions (action learning/support groups): next (f=18)
- Shadowing experienced colleagues: least used (f=10)



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

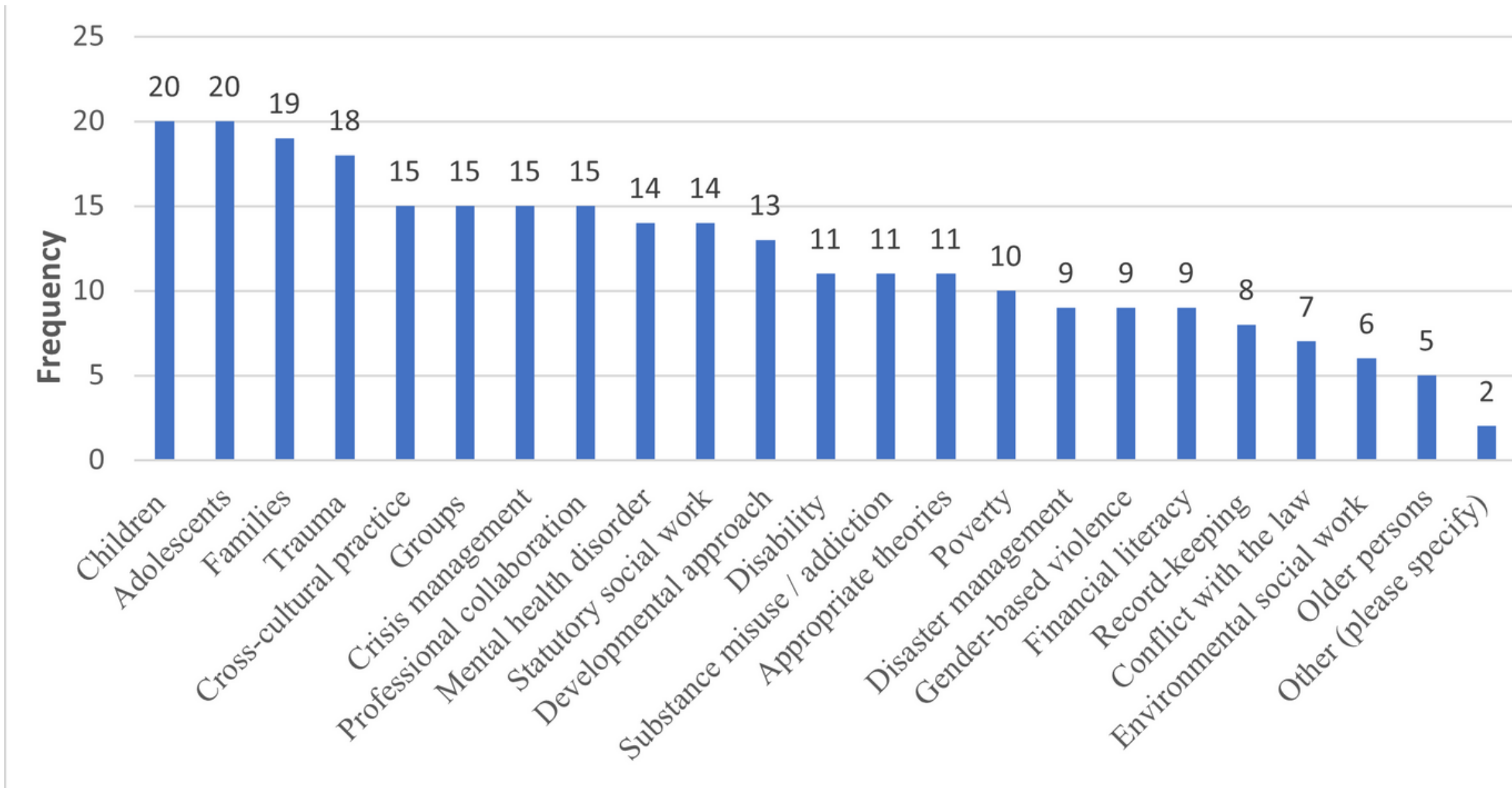


Figure 2: Areas required for Professional development

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- LISTENING SKILLS (35.5%)
- Effective service user engagement (16.1%)
- Adaptability (12.9%)



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FINDINGS

Lessons from elephants, Insights for NQSWs

EXTENDED SUPPORT MATTERS

- NQSWs need a longer transitional period

ALLOMOTHERING PARALLELS MENTORSHIP

- NQSWs need induction, supervision, and mentoring beyond probation

STRESS AND RESILIENCE

- Workplace support reduces stress, builds confidence, and strengthens skills

LEARNING THROUGH INTERACTION

- Co-working, supervision, and training develop competence and flex-skills



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FINDINGS

Collaboration for Sustainable Development

SUPPORT

- Limited mentorship beyond probation
- Just over 50% NQSWs receive monthly supervision
- Induction provided, but PDPs and training discussions are underused
- Support: linked to practice quality, however, nearly half received limited or no support

FLEX-SKILLS

- Listening, engagement, and adaptability are key needs

TCA LENS

- Call for shared responsibility: Government, NGOs, employers, professional bodies, NQSWs

- Herd cooperation sustains calves;
- Collaborative workplace support sustains NQSWs



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Collaborative approach to support and develop NQSWs
- Acknowledging barriers during the transitional period and enhancing support
- Provision of customised levels of training, with a focus on practice-based learning

RECENT ARTICLE

Raised by the Herd: Insights from African Elephants for the Support and Continuing Professional Development of Newly Qualified Social Workers in South Africa,

Authors: Leanne Jordaan and Stephan Geyer

Link to the complete article:

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/SWPR/article/view/17759>

With special thanks to Rian van Schalkwyk: Elephant photos



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**“If I have seen further,
it is by standing on the
shoulders of giants.”**

John of Salisbury, 1159



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