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# An Outcome Study of Graduates from the School of Social Work, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1988-1992 +

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## **ABSTRACT**

Social work practice in Zimbabwe is in the midst of change, moving away from its colonial legacy of social work as an instrument of social control to a model that is increasingly developmental with a focus on social change (Kaseke, 1991). As a result of such changes, assessing the outcome of social work education and training in Zimbabwe becomes particularly critical at this time. The outcome study reported here is a follow-up of work completed by Brand (1983) of the employment and educational experiences of Diploma students between 1971 and 1981 at the School of Social Work in Harare.

## **Objectives and Methodology of the Study**

The School of Social Work was established in 1964 and is an affiliate college of the University of Zimbabwe. Currently offered are a one-year Certificate in Social Work, a three-year Diploma in Social Work, a Bachelor of Social Work degree, a Bachelor of Social Work Honours degree and a Master of Social Work degree.

Outcome or baseline studies are rapidly becoming an integral component in the continuing development of social work education programmes. This increasing emphasis on outcome assessment allows programmes to develop in such a manner that more fully meets the changing social needs of their surrounding communities and the demands of ever-diversifying client populations. Outcome studies should ideally be carried out every ten years or so, and given the changes occurring in Zimbabwe it appeared appropriate to undertake another study as soon as possible.

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+ This article was developed from a research study carried out through the School of Social Work, Harare in July 1995.

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This study expanded on the one carried out by Brand, and followed not only the Diploma graduates, but also the Bachelor, Honours and Masters graduates. The Certificate graduates were excluded because these students tend to have rather different motives and backgrounds than the Diploma and Degree students.

Specifically the objectives of this outcome study were to:

1. describe the graduates' type of employment;
2. examine the factors affecting the graduates' job selection and their job satisfaction;
3. present the graduates' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their social work training;
4. assess the relevance of the social work courses at the School for the graduates' work in Zimbabwe; and
5. compare the employment experiences of the recent graduates with those included in the Brand study.

A questionnaire, to be self-administered, was developed in September 1994 and pretested on selected graduates at the beginning of October. After consideration of the responses received, the questionnaire was revised and mailed in mid-October to graduates successfully completing the Diploma and Degree programmes between 1988 and 1992.

The questionnaire included questions on basic demographics (age, gender, qualifications and employment status and location), the type of positions held, reasons for choosing this position, salary and job satisfaction ratings. In an effort to help the programme determine the relevance of the coursework offered, the respondents were asked to rate which courses had proven to be the most beneficial in their employment since graduation. The questionnaire used a combination of modified closed-ended questions and Likert scales. A cover letter plus a stamped-addressed envelope were sent out with the questionnaire.

The total population of those graduating between 1988 to 1992 was 174 graduates. The following 35 were then excluded: twenty-five foreign graduates (candidates from the sub-region include those from Ethiopia, Lesotho, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and the Sudan). Also excluded were five Zimbabweans living abroad; four deceased graduates and one graduate who is a member of the research team. Using contact tracing, it was possible to obtain the current work addresses of the 139 former students of the School of Social Work. By mid-December 1994, 70 graduates had responded, representing an 50% overall response rate. Two respondents returned their questionnaires after the deadline, leaving them ineligible for inclusion in the data analysis.

The majority of questions were addressed to all 70 respondents. However, at one point in the questionnaire, only respondents answering positively for presently holding a social work position ( $N=60$ ) were asked to respond. Hence the "Results" section will specify whether questions were considered by either 70 or 60 respondents.

## Description of the Graduate Sample

See Table 1 for a summary of the sample characteristics.

**Table 1      Sample Characteristics**

| Gender | N  | %     |
|--------|----|-------|
| Male   | 40 | 57,1% |
| Female | 30 | 42,9% |

### Age

|        |                |
|--------|----------------|
| Range  | 22 to 51 years |
| Median | 27 years       |

### Qualifications

| Qualifications                    | N  | %     |
|-----------------------------------|----|-------|
| Diploma of Social Work            | 56 | 80%   |
| Bachelor of Social Work (General) | 29 | 41,4% |
| Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) | 12 | 17,1% |
| Master of Social Work             | 6  | 8,2%  |
| Other qualifications              | 19 | 26%   |

### Employment Status

| Employment Status                         | N  | %     |
|---|----|-------|
| Presently employed in Social Work         | 60 | 86%   |
| Male                                      | 34 | 56,6% |
| Female                                    | 26 | 43,3% |
| Urban                                     |    | 61,0% |
| Rural                                     |    | 38,0% |
| Unemployed Involuntarily since graduation |    | 30%   |

### ***Gender and Age***

Of the total number of respondents, 40 (57,1%) were male and 30 (42,9%) were female. The youngest respondent was aged 22 years of age and the eldest 51 years of age. The median age was 27 years, slightly younger than those in the Brand study where the median was 31 years for men and 29 years for women. There has been a noticeable shift in the ages of students pursuing social work studies. In the past and as captured in Brand's study there were more mature students, a factor which can probably be attributed to the fact that there were limited opportunities for people to pursue careers of their choice. A sizeable proportion of students, particularly before 1982, were either former school teachers or nurses. The massive expansion at secondary school level has resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of school leavers. The School of Social Work, like any other tertiary institution, is therefore under pressure to absorb some of these school leavers.

In order to draw some comparisons with the Brand study, and in line with other outcome studies in social work, gender will be used as a major independent variable in this study.

### ***Qualifications***

Of the total number of respondents, 56 (80%) had a Diploma from the School of Social Work. Twenty-nine (41,4%) also had a Bachelor of Social Work General degree, and 12 (17,1%) the Honours degree. A total of 6 (8,2%) respondents had attained the Master of Social Work qualification.

The large number of Diploma holders is largely due to the fact that the Diploma is the basic professional qualification in Zimbabwe and that one has to work for a minimum period of one year before coming back to enrol on the Bachelor of Social Work (General) degree. Many of the School's graduates work for more than one year before coming back to do the degree. Only candidates with good results at the Diploma can proceed to the Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) degree straight from the Diploma but the numbers are usually small.

Respondents were asked to indicate any other qualifications (and the year of graduation) in addition to those obtained through the School of Social Work. Nineteen respondents (26%) of those qualifying between 1988 and 1992 had other qualifications, some of these non-social work oriented. Interestingly, quite a number of these "other" qualifications were obtained either simultaneously during studies at the School or a short time after graduation. These included certificates in accounting and bookkeeping; diplomas in personnel management and public relations; diplomas in journalism and communication; post-graduate certificates in project planning, monitoring and evaluation, and certificates in Women's Law and Family Therapy.

The other qualifications obtained by these graduates are intended to increase their marketability within a shrinking job market. The varied nature of these qualifications is indicative of the diverse fields in which social workers practice.

### **Job Market**

Eighty six percent (60) were presently employed in social work positions, with 61% in urban areas and 38% in rural areas. Almost a third of all respondents (30%) had, at some stage, been unemployed involuntarily, with 20% stating they had been unemployed for a period of one to six months, and 4.3% being unemployed for periods of over six months. There was no statistically significant difference between men and women regarding involuntary employment.

## **Results**

### **Type of Position**

The majority of the 60 respondents currently holding social work positions (55%) worked in government agencies versus 21.7% working in non-government agencies, 10% in private organisations, 3% in parastatals, and 10% in "other" organisations. See Table 2 for a break down of type of position by gender.

**Table 2**

Types of Positions by Gender

| Employment setting | Male |      | Female |      | Total |      |
|--------------------|------|------|--------|------|-------|------|
|                    | N    | %    | N      | %    | N     | %    |
| Government         | 17   | 50,0 | 16     | 50,0 | 33    | 55,0 |
| Non-Government     | 4    | 11,8 | 9      | 34,6 | 13    | 21,7 |
| Private            | 5    | 14,7 | 1      | 3,8  | 6     | 10,0 |
| Parastatals        | 2    | 5,9  | 0      | 0,0  | 2     | 3,0  |
| Other              | 6    | 17,6 | 0      | 0,0  | 6     | 10,0 |
| Totals             | 34   | 100  | 26     | 100  | 60    | 100  |

These are somewhat similar findings to the Brand study, although the total percentage employed in government organisations appears to be increasing (45,3% in the Brand study), and decreasing in the private sector (22,1% in the Brand study).

The government, through the Department of Social Welfare, has historically been the biggest single employer of graduates from the School of Social Work. The activities and functions of the Department of Social Welfare represent the traditional domain of social work. The increase in the number employed in government can perhaps be attributed to the policy of decentralisation which has necessitated the creation of offices in every district.

### **Tasks**

When questioned about the major tasks in their present position, respondents could answer all applicable answers unlike the Brandt study where respondents were asked to identify "the major task." Although this makes comparison rather more difficult, it seemed to be more realistic reflection of the graduates jobs than having them identify only one task. In addition, other tasks were added in order to reflect changing tasks in social work and these included: youth work, work with disabled, psychiatric work, work with elderly, and work with refugees. The results from this question are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3**

| Tasks                   | Ranking | %    | Ranking | %    |
|-------------------------|---------|------|---------|------|
| Child & Family Services | 1       | 68,0 | 5       | 10,2 |
| Public Assistance       | 2       | 60,0 | 3       | 10,7 |
| Elderly                 | 3       | 58,3 | N/A     | N/A  |
| Disabled                | 4       | 56,6 | N/A     | N/A  |
| Liason & Coordination   | 5       | 51,6 | 7       | 4,2  |
| Personnel               | 6       | 36,6 | 1       | 20,5 |
| Corrections             | 7       | 33,3 | 2       | 15,4 |
| Research                | 8       | 28,3 | 9       | 3,2  |
| Education & Training    | 9       | 28,3 | 4       | 10,5 |
| Refugees                | 10      | 25,0 | N/A     | N/A  |
| Psychiatric             | 11      | 25,0 | N/A     | N/A  |
| Medical                 | 12      | 23,3 | 12      | 2,1  |
| Housing & Urban Devt.   | 13      | 20,0 | 6       | 5,3  |
| Project Management      | 14      | 20,0 | 10      | 2,6  |
| Rural Devt..            | 15      | 18,3 | N/A     | N/A  |
| Youth                   | 16      | 15,0 | N/A     | N/A  |
| Recreation              | 17      | 13,3 | 11      | 2,1  |

Sixty eight percent of the respondents claimed a primary task as working in child and family services, 60% in public assistance, 58,3% with the elderly, 56,6% with the disabled, 51,6% with liaison and coordination, 36,6% in personnel management, and 33,3% in corrections. In some respects this is a similar distribution of tasks as in the Brand study with the exception of the new tasks. Public assistance and child and family services are still the more prevalent tasks, although in the Brand study personnel management and corrections were ranked even higher. Medical social work, particularly when added to psychiatric social work, seems to be a more common task than ten years ago, when it was cited the least of any task.

Public assistance and child and family services are still prevalent because these represent the major functions of the Department of Social Welfare, which as pointed out earlier on is the biggest single employer of social workers.

The high ranking of personnel management in Brand's study can be attributed to the fact that the period 1979 to 1981 was a period of change occasioned by the need to create a new social order. Many organisations, particularly in the private sector were keen to appoint blacks as personnel managers in order to improve industrial relations at the workplace and also as a way of responding to the aspirations of the black majority. It was therefore politically prudent to do so. In recent years, there has been a decline in the numbers employed in personnel management largely as a result of reorganisation in industry necessitated by the economic reform programme. Medical social work and psychiatric social work are more prominent now because of reorganisation within the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare which has warranted the creation of social work posts at provincial hospitals. Previously, these were confined to central hospitals only.

### ***Administration and Supervision***

Administrative positions were held by 13,3% of the 60 respondents, with 33,3% providing direct service and 56,6% stating they did both. Equal numbers of men and women held administrative roles, but almost twice as many women as men did direct service. However almost twice as many men as women stated that they did both direct service and held administrative roles, resulting in men having more administrative positions than women. The prevalence of men in administrative positions, particularly in government, can be attributed to the fact that most of the administrative positions are in offices located away from the capital city and major towns. Married women find it difficult to leave their families in the capital city or in the major towns. Many women are therefore forced by circumstances to forego promotions in the interest of family welfare. On the other hand, men are more mobile and are more willing to accept promotional posts in the rural areas or small towns.

See Table 4 for a display of these results.

**Table 4**

**Administrative Positions by Gender**

| Type           | Male |      | Female |      | Total |      |
|----------------|------|------|--------|------|-------|------|
|                | N    | %    | N      | %    | N     | %    |
| Administrative | 4    | 11,8 | 4      | 15,4 | 8     | 13,3 |
| Direct Service | 7    | 20,6 | 12     | 46,1 | 19    | 31,7 |
| Both           | 23   | 67,6 | 10     | 38,5 | 33    | 55,0 |
| Total          | 34   | 100  | 26     | 100  | 60    | 100  |

Sixty-five percent stated they worked in supervisory positions. More men (24) than women (15) were in supervisory roles, although not statistically significant, this difference was more marked than in the Brand study. See Table 5.

**Table 5**

**Supervisory Positions by Gender**

|                 | Male |      | Female |      |
|-----------------|------|------|--------|------|
|                 | N    | %    | N      | %    |
| Supervisory     | 24   | 70,6 | 15     | 57,7 |
| Non-supervisory | 10   | 29,9 | 11     | 42,3 |
| Total           | 34   | 100  | 26     | 100  |

### ***Salaries***

Salaries differed significantly for the 60 respondents holding social work positions, with the largest proportion (38,4%) falling in the Z\$25 000 to Z\$34 999 salary range (ed note: \$Z10 = approx \$US1). Twenty-five percent earned less than Z\$25 000; and 18,3% earned from Z\$35 000 to over Z\$45 000. There was no statistical difference between men and women in the distribution of salaries, although more women than men fell in the Z\$35 000 - Z\$40 999 range in this study than in Brand's where men appeared to be receiving higher salaries than the women. The lack of statistical difference between men and women in the distribution of salaries can be attributed to the Equal Pay Regulations (1980) which made it mandatory for employers to provide equal pay for equal jobs. Prior to this men earned more than women in the same jobs.

**Table 6****Salaries by Gender**

| Salary              | Male |      | Female |      | Total |      |
|---------------------|------|------|--------|------|-------|------|
|                     | N    | %    | N      | %    | N     | %    |
| Less than \$25,000  | 11   | 32,3 | 4      | 15,4 | 15    | 25   |
| \$25,000 - \$34,999 | 13   | 38,2 | 10     | 38,5 | 23    | 38,3 |
| \$35,000 - \$44,999 | 3    | 8,8  | 8      | 30,8 | 11    | 18,3 |
| \$45,000 and above  | 6    | 17,7 | 5      | 19,2 | 11    | 18,3 |
| Total               | 39   | 100  | 26     | 100  | 60    | 100  |

**Reason for Choosing Present Position**

The 60 respondents were asked to identify the reasons they chose their present position (the respondents were able to choose all answers that they felt were pertinent to their choice of job). The greatest proportion cited "*uses my social work training*" (72,8%); 60% because the training met the job requirement; 55,7% because the job was relevant to issues of concern; 48,5% because the position was challenging; and 35,7% because there was a lack of better job prospects elsewhere. These results differ somewhat from those reported by Brand, where the challenging nature of the job was the most frequently cited, and "*well paid*" was ranked as a more important factor than in this study.

Perhaps, the challenging nature of the job was cited more frequently in Brand's study than in this study because at the time of Brand's study many organisations were initiating programmes to bring about the empowerment of marginalised groups and to bring about their reintegration into the mainstream of society and in harmony with the euphoria for independence. The euphoria has disappeared now and social workers are more realistic about what they can do. The choices open to social work graduates now are limited and they have easier access to jobs that require the utilisation of social work training. See Table 7 for a display of these results.

**Job Satisfaction**

The questionnaire asked all 70 respondents to evaluate various job satisfaction factors, using a Likert-type scale, with numbers from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (very dissatisfied). Table 8 displays the findings from this question.

**Table 7**Reasons for Choosing Position

| Reasons                                     | <u>Present study</u> | <u>Brand Study</u> |         |      |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|---------|------|
|   | N                    | %                  | Ranking | %    |
| Uses my social work training                | 51                   | 72,8               | 2       | 47,8 |
| Suitability of training to job              | 42                   | 60,0               | 5       | 29,3 |
| Relevance of job to issues of concern       | 39                   | 55,7               | 3       | 35,9 |
| Challenging nature of work                  | 34                   | 48,5               | 1       | 52,0 |
| Lack of better job prospects elsewhere      | 25                   | 35,7               | 7       | 19,6 |
| Personal reasons                            | 17                   | 24,3               | 8       | 14,1 |
| Well paid                                   | 13                   | 18,6               | 4       | 29,3 |
| Agreement with agency policy                | 10                   | 14,3               | 9       | 8,7  |
| Favourable impression of those in authority | 4                    | 6,6                | 10      | 7,6  |
| Good chance for promotion                   | 3                    | 4,2                | 6       | 28,3 |

**Table 8**Very satisfied      Very unsatisfied

| <u>Job Satisfaction</u>     | Very satisfied |        |        |        |        | Very unsatisfied |        |        |        |        | Missing |      |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------|
|                             | 1<br>N         | 1<br>% | 2<br>N | 2<br>% | 3<br>N | 3<br>%           | 4<br>N | 4<br>% | 5<br>N | 5<br>% |         |      |
| Job Security                | 34             | 48,6   | 18     | 25,7   | 7      | 10,0             | 1      | 1,4    | 4      | 5,7    | 6       | 8,6  |
| Supervision of work         | 11             | 15,7   | 26     | 37,1   | 17     | 24,3             | 6      | 8,6    | 3      | 4,3    | 7       | 10,0 |
| Level of interest           | 14             | 20,0   | 22     | 31,1   | 20     | 28,6             | 4      | 5,7    | 1      | 1,4    | 9       | 12,9 |
| Managerial responsibilities | 10             | 14,3   | 16     | 22,9   | 19     | 27,1             | 12     | 17,1   | 6      | 8,6    | 7       | 10,0 |
| Salary                      | 5              | 7,1    | 14     | 20,0   | 17     | 24,3             | 10     | 14,3   | 17     | 24,3   | 7       | 10,0 |
| Promotion prospects         | 2              | 2,9    | 13     | 18,6   | 24     | 34,3             | 10     | 14,3   | 14     | 20,0   | 7       | 10,0 |
| Perks/benefits              | 2              | 2,9    | 11     | 15,7   | 15     | 21,4             | 10     | 14,3   | 24     | 34,3   | 8       | 11,4 |

The graduates seemed to be most satisfied with their job security with 74,3% very satisfied or satisfied (ranked 1 or 2), the majority also seemed to be very satisfied or satisfied with the supervision of their work (52,8%) and their level of interest in their work (51,4%). However, 48,6% were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the perks and benefits they received, and 38,6% were similarly dissatisfied with their salaries.

The dissatisfaction with perks/benefits and salaries is particularly true among social workers employed in government. This is however not peculiar to social workers as the problem of poor salaries and perks/benefits affects the majority of civil servants. However, the advantage of working in government is that there is job security. Job security is very critical in Zimbabwe today because of the economic structural adjustment programme which has forced enterprises to retrench workers, thus creating job insecurity.

When job satisfaction ratings were analysed by gender it was found that generally there were no statistically significant differences with one exception. Women were more dissatisfied than men with their promotion prospects (chi square = 13.7, significant at the .01 level).

### ***Coursework***

All respondents (70) were asked how useful their courses had been to their employment, and they were asked to rank each one from 1 to 5, with 1 being most useful and 5 being least useful. When rankings 1 and 2 (very useful and useful) were combined, courses in casework ranked the highest, according to 70% of the respondents. Basic psychology ranked second highest, with 68.6% of respondents, with courses in casework ranking third (67.1%). Courses in research, anthropology and planning were ranked lowest.

These results are similar to Brand's, and in fact to outcome studies outside of Zimbabwe (for example, Marlow, 1987). There seems to be a certain universality about the popularity of casework (or practice courses in general and fieldwork) and the unpopularity of research.

The popularity of casework can therefore be attributed to the fact that it is the most widely used method of social work in Zimbabwe and has a long established tradition. An overwhelming majority of social workers in Zimbabwe practice in casework settings. On the other hand, the unpopularity of research appears to stem from the perception that research is difficult. This unpopularity is further exacerbated by the fact that most social work organisations do not routinely carry out research and in instances where they do so they often ask consultants (usually without social work background) to carry out the research.

### ***Benefits of the Programme***

The same scale used for coursework was also used for the question about perceived benefits of the programme. An overwhelming number of respondents (95.6%) felt the increase in their knowledge base was a very useful or useful aspect (ranked 1 or 2) of the programme. This was followed by 84.2% claiming that the practical skills they attained as being very useful or useful, their exposure to new areas of social work was a benefit claimed by 81.4%, with higher aspirations for future study (80%) and increased competence on the job cited by 78.5%. These findings

appear to correspond to the graduates' responses for why they chose their present position. Overall the job training seemed appropriate for their jobs.

Benefits found least useful (ranked 4 or 5) were: access to benefits (41,5%); increased promotion opportunities (28,6%) and increased salary potential (25,8%).

### ***Weaknesses of the Programme***

Programme weaknesses were also evaluated using the same scale as in the previous two questions. See results displayed in Table 9.

**Table 9**  
Programme weaknesses

| Weaknesses                   | Great weakness |        |        |        |        | Not a weakness |        |        |        |        | Missing<br>N % |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|
|                              | 1<br>N         | 2<br>% | 3<br>N | 4<br>% | 5<br>N | 1<br>N         | 2<br>% | 3<br>N | 4<br>% | 5<br>N |                |
| Administrative support       | 14             | 20,0   | 9      | 12,9   | 15     | 21,4           | 17     | 24,3   | 9      | 12,9   | 6 8,6          |
| Hostel accommodation         | 10             | 14,3   | 11     | 15,7   | 12     | 17,1           | 14     | 20,0   | 13     | 18,6   | 10 14,3        |
| Time given to F/W            | 5              | 7,1    | 13     | 18,6   | 16     | 22,9           | 14     | 20,0   | 18     | 25,7   | 4 5,7          |
| Relevance to S/W in Zimbabwe | 5              | 7,1    | 10     | 14,3   | 11     | 15,7           | 15     | 21,4   | 25     | 35,7   | 4 5,7          |
| Fieldwork supervision        | 6              | 8,6    | 7      | 10,0   | 16     | 22,9           | 24     | 34,3   | 14     | 20,0   | 3 4,3          |
| Library resources            | 2              | 2,9    | 9      | 12,9   | 18     | 25,7           | 23     | 32,9   | 15     | 21,4   | 3 4,3          |
| Practical skill development  | 5              | 7,1    | 6      | 8,6    | 14     | 20,0           | 15     | 21,4   | 28     | 40,0   | 2 2,9          |
| Quality of teaching          | 2              | 2,9    | 7      | 10,0   | 15     | 21,4           | 24     | 34,3   | 20     | 28,6   | 2 2,9          |
| Type of teaching             | 4              | 5,7    | 5      | 7,1    | 19     | 27,1           | 17     | 24,3   | 22     | 31,4   | 3 4,3          |
| Theory development           | 1              | 1,4    | 7      | 10,0   | 13     | 18,6           | 17     | 24,3   | 29     | 41,4   | 3 4,3          |
| Relevance to S/W practice    | 4              | 5,7    | 2      | 2,9    | 6      | 8,6            | 19     | 27,1   | 34     | 48,6   | 5 7,1          |

Those aspects of the programme cited as the greatest weakness (ranking 1 or 2) included: administrative support (32.9%); hostel accommodation (30%); time given to fieldwork (25.7%) and relevance to social work in Zimbabwe (21.4%).

It should be pointed out that the School of Social Work is not a government institution and therefore does not receive an administrative grant from the government. It relies entirely on the fees it charges and also on donor support. Consequently, the resource base of the School is weak and this impacts negatively on the School's capacity to provide administrative support to the students. On the issue of hostel accommodation, students have not liked the idea of self-catering as it robs them of their study time. The rationale for introducing self-catering was to encourage students to live cooperatively and to provide them with an opportunity to pool their resources together, particularly given the low support levels granted by government. There is now a new hostel built by the School of Social Work in 1994 with a 'pay as you eat' facility. The new hostel also provides a more comfortable accommodation for the students.

On the issue of relevance to social work in Zimbabwe it is perhaps helpful to note that the School of Social Work puts more emphasis on social work education as opposed to training. Training is more specific and tries to prepare students for specific jobs in the field. Social work education on the other hand, is broader and exposes students not only to what is happening in the field but also to what should happen. Thus social work education should not only be influenced by current practice patterns and models but should seek to influence changes in the practice patterns and models. The ultimate aim however is to ensure that practice patterns and models remain responsive to local needs.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The research method used in this study resulted in the following limitations:

1. Due to the use of mailed questionnaires the return rate was limited to 50%. Cost and time limitations prevented second mailings. Although one authority states that a response rate of at least 50% is adequate for comprehensive analysis and reporting (Rubin & Babbie, 1993), a larger response rate would have resulted in greater confidence in the validity of the findings. There is always the possibility that the respondent pool is simply not representative of the entire population. One factor in which this was clearly the case was gender, as respondents included a higher proportion of women than in the total population of graduates. With outcome studies there is always the possibility that those not responding tend to be unemployed or underemployed, and the more successful in finding appropriate employment are those who respond.

2. The use of a questionnaire with more open-ended questions may have given more in-depth information concerning various areas, for example, more qualitative data on the graduates' experiences working for different types of organisations, and fuller reflections on their job satisfaction and perceived strengths and weaknesses of the programme.
3. Some of the questions did not exactly duplicate those in the Brand study leading to problems in the direct comparison of the results. However, this was deemed necessary in order to incorporate content that reflected more recent developments in the field. In addition, this study included degree graduates, whereas the Brand study included only diploma graduates, hence comparisons between the two studies are further limited. The inclusion of more qualified graduates could result in some bias, for example, a greater proportion occupying administrative positions and perhaps a lower likelihood of unemployment.

## **Discussion**

It was heartening to see gender in various areas not play as pivotal role in the job market as one may surmise. However there appears some concern from the women regarding their promotional prospects, although currently salaries appear to be comparable.

In addition, men appear to still hold a greater proportion of administrative positions and are still more likely to be in supervisory positions. This appears to be a universal concern in social work, particularly when the majority of clients served are often women.

The results on involuntary unemployment leads to the conclusion that graduates are increasingly affected by the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. The 1990s have brought major retrenchments and the freezing of vacant positions. In addition the future of graduates has been affected by peace negotiations across the borders in both Mozambique and South Africa. In Mozambique thousands of refugees who were in border camps have returned home, which has meant that there is no need for social workers to be employed by the agencies which previously served the camps. With the recent changes in South Africa, some international organisations have closed their Zimbabwean offices and relocated to South Africa, resulting in further retrenchment of Zimbabwe social workers.

In order to adapt to these fluctuations in the job market it may become even more necessary for graduates to augment their social work training in other fields. The twenty-six percent of respondents already gaining these additional qualifications will likely increase. Unless of course the social work training itself can be expanded

in these areas, perhaps some consideration could be given to including more content on computers, bookkeeping, writing budgets, etc.

Important to note is that although the graduates generally found their training appropriate and considered this an important factor in their choice of job, the implications of the 50% response rate have to be considered. It is quite possible that a high proportion of those not responding were unemployed and/or found their social work training not useful or appropriate. Future follow-up studies need to pursue this possibility by ensuring a higher response rate.

Although the curriculum is becoming increasingly indigenised, there is still work to be done to ensure that the programme is even more responsive to the needs of the Zimbabwe people. This concern was expressed by quite a sizeable proportion of the graduates. Again, those who did not respond to the survey would be suspected of thinking that the programme is not very responsive to the needs of Zimbabwe, particularly as suspected, these non-respondents are unemployed. Mupedziswa (1992) points out "*...the profession must become more aggressive, and more adventurous, if it is to be taken seriously and indeed if it is to become more relevant.*" The School is moving in this direction and efforts have been made recently to incorporate areas of concern for social work into the curriculum, for example content on AIDS and refugees. Much of the effect of these changes will not be reflected in this study, but it can be anticipated they will impact more on later graduates. Such work along with advocating for higher salaries will ensure a healthy future for social work in Zimbabwe.

It is perhaps pertinent to point out that the School of Social Work continues to review its curriculum to ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of Zimbabwe. The School of Social Work plans to discontinue the Diploma programme in the next year and introduce a straight Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) degree. This new degree will bring with it a new course configuration, particularly in the fourth year in order to ensure relevance or appropriateness of social work education. New courses will include Project Planning and Management, Child Welfare Policy and Practice, Management of Social Work Organisations and Residential Social Work. These changes would make the School's graduates more competitive on the job market. The School of Social Work has also found it necessary to introduce short post-qualifying courses in the areas of Juvenile Justice, AIDS Counselling and Project Planning and Management for the benefit of social workers in the field. This enables social workers whose training never encompassed these areas to up-grade their skills and update their knowledge. Overall the School's programmes are increasingly focusing on social development and this calls for a shift in the practice patterns and models for social workers.

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