

**POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK  
SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND  
SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES**

by

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the above dissertation/ thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

03/02/2018

Date

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my father, the late Mmbengeni Richard Mbedzi Nemasetoni. He was my pillar of strength and always believed in me. It is so sad that he passed on before he could celebrate this enormous achievement with me.

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## ABSTRACT

The drastic readjustments brought on by the ending of a love relationship make divorce one of the most stressful events that divorced persons may face. Divorced persons often experience the negative consequences of divorce including, amongst others, an increased level of unhappiness, greater physical and psychological distress, less support systems, lower life satisfaction, elevated risk of suicide, asocial behavioural problems, and a decline in the standard of living. Therefore, expounding on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and determining divorced persons' needs with regard to social work services were of critical importance in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

A qualitative research approach was employed, guided by an explorative, descriptive, and contextual research design. A sample of 20 participants, comprising 10 divorced persons (males and females) from different ethnic groups and 10 social workers employed at different organisations (including governmental, non-governmental and private practice) in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, was drawn through purposive and snowball sampling. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and analysed following Tesch's eight steps (in Creswell 2009:186) framework. Guba's model (Krefting 1991:215-222) was applied for data verification.

Amongst others, the study found that divorced persons experience loneliness, stigma, financial hardships, lack of support, loss of self-esteem and companionship, loss of trust in the opposite sex, anger, regret, suicidal thoughts, rejection, challenges related to children, and post-divorce adjustments. Most of the divorced persons did not know about the social work services available to them. There are social workers employed at different organisations who provide mediation and parenting plan services to divorced persons, but most of them do not deal with cases related to divorced persons. Although there are social workers who believe that the counselling services provided to divorced persons are helpful, most of them were

not entirely satisfied and feel that they could do more by involving group work and community work methods of social work practice.

Based on the research findings, recommendations pertaining to social work practice, social work training and education, social welfare policy, and further research were put forward.

### **KEY TERMS**

Divorce, divorced person, policy guidelines, post-divorce experiences, social welfare policies, social work, social workers, social work practice guidelines, social work services.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>BSW</b>	Bachelor of Social Work
<b>CMR</b>	Christelike Maatskaplike Raad
<b>DSD</b>	Department of Social Development
<b>EAP</b>	Employee Assistance Programme
<b>ESKOM</b>	Electricity Supply Commission
<b>FAMSA</b>	Families South Africa
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HPCCC</b>	Hartbeespoort Parent and Child Counselling Centre
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals

<b>MSW</b>	Masters in Social Work
<b>NASW</b>	National Association for Social Workers
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organisations
<b>NPOs</b>	Non-Profit Organisations
<b>PCA</b>	Person-Centred Approach
<b>SANDF</b>	South African National Defence Force
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SAASWIPP</b>	South African Association for Social Workers in Private Practice
<b>SAPS</b>	South African Police Services
<b>SASSA</b>	South African Security Agency
<b>STDs</b>	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
<b>TB</b>	Tuberculosis
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## **CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

This chapter presents the general overview of the study, as initially planned and adopted by the researcher. Although the chapter expounds on research methodology, amongst others, it is worth considering that a detailed application of the qualitative social work research employed for this study is presented in Chapter Three of this report.

In this section, a general introduction and problem formulation, as well as the rationale for the study, will be presented.

#### **1.1.1 General Introduction**

Research on divorce has demonstrated that dissolution of a marriage at any point in the life course of a person can have negative outcomes for divorced persons (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). Divorced persons are likely to experience grief similar to those who have lost a loved one through death (Frisby, Booth-Butterfield, Dillow, Martin & Weber 2012:718). Most studies reflect that divorced persons go through a grieving process similar to that of grieving the death of a loved one (Stoner 2009:15). Compared with their married counterparts, divorced persons experience increased levels of unhappiness, greater physical and psychological distress, more substance abuse problems, less dense and supportive social support systems, and lower levels of life satisfaction (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). Likewise, Gahler (2006:372) suggests that from a large number of potential life events, divorce has been rated as one of the most stressful, with a large, general impact on the life situation of divorced persons.

On the same note, Vera (1993:3) suggests that the drastic readjustments brought on by the ending of a love relationship make divorce one of the most stressful events that a person may face. Some of the negative impacts experienced by divorced persons

include increased social isolation, economic problems and the concomitant lower standard of living, difficulties in raising children, risk of health problems, and psychological distress (Yarnoz, Plazaola & Etxeberria 2008:291). Adding to that, divorced persons mostly display a higher risk of mortality, particularly behaviour related, such as motor vehicle accidents, suicide, and homicide, and they more often die from coronary disease and cirrhosis of the liver, a cause of death that is often a consequence of alcohol abuse. In some instances, divorced persons have been reported to exhibit substantially higher admission rates to psychiatric clinics and hospitals (Gahler 2006:372).

Many studies have reported higher mortality rates and higher rates of injuries, suicides, mental disorders, strokes, chronic diseases, and disabilities among divorced persons, as compared with married persons (Nielsen, Davidsen, Hviid & Wohlfahrt 2014:705). This signifies that divorce is one of life's roughest passages and it can cause a myriad of emotional responses that at times make a person feel overwhelmed and limits the person's ability to think clearly or make good choices (Tester & Thompson 2006:11). It is also worth noting that the divorce process continues beyond the separation itself, as different subjects in dispute, such as the custody rights and living arrangements of children, the role of the non-resident parent, economic issues, and so on, have to be determined (Hansson & Laidmae 2014:89). Consequently, divorce leads to detrimental long-term effects on the general health of divorced persons (Nielsen et al 2014:705). This notion reaffirms that the impact of divorce on divorced persons' lives are long-term and they can be experienced long after the divorce has been finalised.

Although divorce is not specified as one of the critical issues affecting families in the White Paper on Families (2013:22-30), it remains one of the major challenges faced by families and divorced persons. This resonates with Lawler and Salzman's (2017:338) assertion that divorce has serious effects on divorced persons and their families. On the same note, Jacobs and Sillars (2012:167) postulate that divorce is a time of great strain within family systems. Similarly, Ambrosino, Heffernan, Shuttlesworth and Ambrosino (2008:327) assert that families undergo changes in composition as a result of divorce and the transition is difficult for all family members. Hadad (2015:493) maintains that divorce is a fundamental factor in the disintegration

of the family unit. These sentiments attest to the fact that divorce affects divorced persons, as well as their families.

Regardless of the adverse consequences associated with divorce, divorce rates remain high across the globe. Roughly half of all first marriages end in divorce, elevating rates of economic, physical and psychological difficulties for divorced persons (Williamson, Nguyen, Bradbury & Karney 2016:1121). This means that a considerable proportion of all marriages worldwide ends in divorce (Nielsen et al 2014:705). Wolfinger (2005:9) states that the divorce rate remains high in most countries across the globe. During recent decades, divorce rates have risen in Europe, with crude divorce rates averaging 2.0 divorces per 1.000 inhabitants, or 40 to 50 divorces for every 100 marriages in the corresponding year (Symoens, Bastaits, Mortelmans & Bracke 2013:177). In South Africa, almost one third of all marriages end in divorce (Preller 2013:73). Moreover, it is estimated that about 23 885 divorce applications were received and processed by the end of December 2014 in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:7). Undoubtedly, this reaffirms that most marriages across the globe, including in South Africa, end in divorce. The statistics on marriages and divorces in South Africa, including the characteristics of the plaintiffs, number of times married, age at the time of divorce, duration of marriage of divorced persons, and divorced persons with minor children, are presented in Chapter Two, section 2.2.3.

There are various reasons for divorce and they differ from one individual/ couple to the other. Some of the factors that contribute to divorce include incompatibility in values and goals, poor communication, lack of conflict resolution skills, sexual incompatibility, extramarital relationships, substance abuse, emotional or physical abuse or neglect, boredom, jealousy, and difficulty coping with change or stress related to parenting, employment, finances, in-laws, and illness (Mooney, Knox & Schacht 2011:169). In some instances, divorce occurs due to the relationship problems faced by married couples related to communication difficulties, time spent together, sex, money, and household management (Williamson et al 2016:1121).

A study conducted by Ntimo-Makara (2009:49) in Lesotho reveals that people opted out of their marriages due to one or more of the following reasons: eagerness to protect the property against an extravagant spouse who had accumulated unnecessary debts,

adultery, domestic violence, abuse of marital power, desertion, irresponsibility and non-support of the family, disrespect, and physical and sexual abuse. Similarly, a study conducted in Lagos, Nigeria, revealed that childlessness, financial collapse, infidelity, and sexual incompatibility were identified by student counsellors as major causes of divorce among couples in the Lagos metropolis (Adetunji 2012:117). In addition, the study conducted in South Africa revealed the following as some of the most cited common causes of divorce by divorced persons: differences in priority; religious, cultural or ethical differences; parental responsibilities; finances; sexual incompatibility; addiction; social media; infidelity; abuse; and lack of communication (Preller 2013:2). Although the reasons for divorce differ from one individual/ couple to the other, most of these reasons are similar based on the aforementioned sentiments.

While a lot of research literature reports the negative effects of divorce on a person's well-being, the individual's psychological adaptation is still not well-understood (Perrig-Chiello, Hutchison & Morselli 2015:386). Even though there is a widespread understanding among family researchers that divorce may bring about a certain sense of relief for some, in most instances divorce and adjusting to being divorced are still difficult processes (Hansson & Laidmae 2014:89). Therefore, divorce involves a post-adjustment phase that includes a transition process of changing relationships, routines, assumptions and roles (Sakraida 2008:869). The post-divorce psychological adjustment includes managing the distress of re-establishing a lifestyle as an independent adult with a social support system (Sakraida 2008:869). This means that divorced persons who have more support find it easier to cope with divorce (Cullington 2008:21). On the same note, Faw (2016:3) reiterates that studies based on the stress-buffering hypothesis have shown that heightened levels of support result in many positive outcomes, including lower levels of psychological distress and fewer health complaints. Thus, support is crucial in enabling divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce.

The social work profession, through social work services, remains significant and relevant in providing support and addressing the needs of divorced persons, in order to enable them to cope with the aftermath of divorce. There are three primary methods of social work practice, namely casework, group work and community work, through which social work services are provided and these methods are aimed at promoting

the well-being of the people, including that of divorced persons (Segal, Gerdes & Steiner 2013:149). This relates to Rautenbach and Chiba's (2010:5) assertion that the overall mission encompassed in the profession of social work is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enhance their lives, and prevent dysfunction. This means that social work services are aimed at addressing the multiple complex transactions between people and their environments.

In order to address these multiple complex challenges, social work training is structured in such a way that it empowers social workers to become generalist practitioners who apply generalist social work practice. Generalist social work practitioners utilise a variety of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being (Segal et al 2013:149). There are different fields of social work practice, which include services to address the following: poverty; mental health issues; substance abuse; disabilities; health care; the needs of children, youth and families; older persons; youth and adults in conflict with the law or criminal justice system; social work in rural settings; and social work in the work place (Ambrosino, Heffernan, Shuttlesworth & Ambrosino 2012:139-140). In the same way, Schultz (2015b:168-183) states that social work services are better outlined in terms of the following fields of social work practice: health care (which includes HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections, mental health, and disabilities), child care (which includes child abuse, street children, child-headed households, foster care, and adoption), and family care (which includes domestic violence, marriage counselling, couples counselling, divorce, youth, and the elderly).

According to Miley, O'Meila and DuBois (2009:11-12), social work intervention focuses on systems at many levels, namely micro, meso, and macro.

- Micro-level intervention focuses on working with individuals, families, or small groups to foster changes within personal functioning, in social relationships, and in the ways people interact with social and institutional resources.
- Meso-level intervention creates changes in task groups, teams, organisations, and the network of service delivery.
- Macro-level intervention addresses social problems in community, institutional, and societal systems.

These levels of intervention relate to Bronfenbrenner's ecosystems theory, which emphasises the understanding of individuals, groups, families and communities in their context (Neal & Neal 2013:722). Moreover, these levels can also be viewed in terms of the three primary methods of social work practice, namely casework, group work and community work, which are central to social work services, including research and administration. The methods of social work practice are vital in providing services to divorced persons. In casework, social workers work with an individual on a one-on-one basis to resolve his/her personal and social problems and it also helps the person to adjust to his/her environment, or to changing social and economic pressures that adversely affect him/her as an individual (Zastrow 2015:55). Likewise, Sekudu (2015a:111) suggests that casework refers to social work intervention at the micro-level, where the social worker intervenes with a single client and his/her family, who is experiencing some challenges in his/her social functioning. Through the casework method, social work services to divorced persons involve providing individual counselling/ therapy to a divorced person in order to assist him/her to readjust or cope with the life challenges brought on by divorce.

On the other hand, group work as a method of social work practice is aimed at facilitating the social, behavioural, and emotional adjustment of individuals who are finding it difficult to cope with life changes, through the group process (Zastrow 2015:57). Additionally, group work can be understood as a series of activities carried out by the social worker during the life of a group (Toseland & Rivas 2009:3). As postulated by Ambrosino et al (2012:114), a group is a form of social organisation whose members identify and interact with one another on a personal basis and have a shared sense of the group as a social entity. Through the group work method, social workers can facilitate the process of adjustment with divorced persons in the form of a group in order to enable them to adjust to the negative aspects in their lives associated with divorce. Divorced persons are encouraged to share their collective experiences of divorce and develop some coping strategies.

Apart from the casework and group work methods, there is a community work method in social work practice. The community work method consists of various processes and helping acts by the social worker that are targeted at the community system, with the purpose of bringing about the required social change with the help of, especially,

community development, social planning, community education, social marketing and social action as practice models (Weyers 2011:28). This method can be used to help people deal with their social problems and to enhance their social well-being through planned collective action (Zastrow 2015:57). Through the community work method, divorced persons in a community can be assisted by social workers to eradicate social challenges and problems through planned collective action. For instance, social workers can run income-generating projects with divorced persons who are experiencing some financial difficulties due to divorce. In order to effectively handle the challenges faced by individuals, groups, families, organisations, and the larger community, social workers require training and expertise in a wide range of areas (Zastrow 2014:43).

In addition to social work services provided to divorced persons through the aforementioned social work methods of practice, social workers provide mediation and parenting plan services to divorced persons. Although social workers mostly provide mediation and parenting plan services prior to the completion of the divorce process, they also deal with post-divorce matters arising from the mediation and parenting plan. According to Douglas (2006:15), mediation is a conflict-resolution technique that is offered for and used by parents who are divorced and have continuing post-divorce conflict. The goals of mediation involve helping parents to negotiate more cooperatively, to make their own decisions about what is the best for their children, to contain conflicts, and to truly protect the children's best interests (Emery 2012:3). On the other hand, a parenting plan is a design for the way parents will raise their children after they are divorced (McWilliams 2011:3). A parenting plan is a carefully specified agreement about children's schedules and parents' decision-making (Emery 2012:103). It should be noted that social work services to divorced persons are expansively expounded in Chapter Two, section 2.8 of this report.

Besides the primary methods of social work practice, including social work services to divorced persons as stated above, clear policies and practice guidelines are vital in enabling social workers to proficiently address the challenges faced by divorced persons. Policies are considered as outcomes of disjointed incrementalism (Mishra 2010:245) and practice guidelines are guiding principles that make relevant recommendations to a larger population of practitioners, including social workers

(Jeniffer & Shin 2014:907). The policy implementation process includes three components, namely the policy formulation process that sets the goal and suggests the mode of operation, the implementation process that includes the actual delivery, and the outcomes (Mishra 2010:245). For that reason, clear policies and practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons set the standards of operation and without them it is almost impossible to establish whether the nature of social work services to divorced persons addresses their needs.

### **1.1.2 Problem Statement**

The impact of divorce can often be severe and can last for a significant period of time provided there are no solutions found to deal with the post-divorce challenges (Symoens et al 2013:178). In most instances, divorced persons experience depression, loneliness, anger, and other negative emotions that characterise the divorce transition, and they remain negatively affected for a long period of time (Perrig-Chiello et al 2015:387; Bogolub 1995:20;179). When divorced persons experience distress in one area of their lives, that distress may affect other areas of their lives and their overall wellness (Galvin 2006:420). Due to the negative experiences of divorce during the post-divorce phase, divorced persons mostly approach therapists or counsellors, including social workers, seeking services that would enable them to cope with the aftermath of divorce (Sommers-Flanagan & Barr 2005:482; Bogolub 1995:191).

Social workers turn out to be helpful in assisting divorced persons who present psychological concerns and, as a result, divorced persons are more likely to reach out to them for assistance (Jackson 2015:86). This means that social workers should be well equipped to work with divorced persons in order to bring about changes in their lives (Sommers-Flanagan & Barr 2005:482). Furthermore, they should be able to provide appropriate and needs-based social work services to divorced persons in order to promote positive changes in the lives of these divorced persons.

Despite the negative effects of divorce on the well-being of divorced persons, as documented in research literature, social work services to divorced persons remains a neglected research topic (Perrig-Chiello et al 2015:387; Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). Although there are several studies conducted on the topic of divorce, the

researcher could not locate research articles that directly discuss and explore social work services to divorced persons. Instead, the articles that were found during the process of literature research focus on other areas of divorce, including how divorce affects women and children.

Amongst others, some of these articles include: *The divorced woman: Institute of race relations* (Seabrook 2015); *The impact of divorce and mother's psychological well-being on children's emotional, behavioural and social competences* (Jurma 2015); *Challenges in criminal cases related to divorce in Women referred to Family Courts: A Emerged Cognitive Study* (Hadad 2015); *Effects of divorce and cohabitation dissolution on pre-schoolers' literacy* (Fagan 2012); *Sibling support during post-divorce adjustment: An Idiographic Analysis of support forms, functions and relationship types* (Jacobs & Sillars 2012); and *Parental divorce and children's adjustment* (Lansford 2009). It is worth noting that most of these articles were based on studies conducted outside the borders of South Africa and that there is no evidence found on studies conducted in South Africa focusing on social work services to divorced persons.

This signifies that little is known about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services. This resonates with Williams' (2015:75) assertion that a research problem is an unknown that invites a solution or resolution. Therefore, the research problem for this study can be delineated as follows: *although there are studies conducted on various aspects of divorce, there is still a knowledge gap in the existing literature about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services*. The implication therefore is that there is nothing documented in terms of social welfare policy and social work practice guidelines.

It is for this reason that the researcher embarked on this research project in order to explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services, with the aim of developing guidelines that would inform social welfare policies and social work practice.

### **1.1.3 Rationale for the Study**

The researcher worked as a generic social worker employed by the Department of Social Development (DSD) in the Limpopo Province of South Africa for seven years before he was employed as a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa (UNISA). At the time of his employment, there were a number of cases reported to him by divorced persons, alluding to the fact that they were unable to deal with the adverse consequences of divorce. The fact that there were no clear policy and practice guidelines related social work services to divorced persons and that divorced persons kept returning to social work offices citing similar challenges, motivated the researcher to explore the nature of social work services to divorced persons and if such services address the needs of divorced persons.

Another motivating factor for this research project was the gap in existing literature regarding the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons in South Africa. During the literature review, the researcher observed that previous studies conducted under the subject divorce gave much attention to how divorce affects women and children (Seabrook 2015; Fagan 2012; Boon 2005; Lansford 2009; Jurma 2015:69, 70; Hadad 2015:494; Jacobs & Sillars 2012) and did not focus on social work services to divorced persons.

The researcher was also motivated by the fact that divorce rates remain high in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:37) and across the globe (Wolfinger 2005:9), and that divorce brings adverse consequences to divorced persons and family members (Simonic 2014:205-207; Nielsen et al 2014:705; Gahler 2006:372). The researcher was of the view that appropriate social work services to divorced persons would be crucial in enabling divorced persons to adjust to the aftermath of divorce.

As the focal point of actions aimed at supporting family life and the strengthening of families in the country (South Africa), the DSD is responsible for the coordination of all the activities that would contribute to the successful implementation of social welfare policies, including the White Paper on Families (2013:46). The White Paper on Families (2013) is a policy document that guides the implementation of social work services to families. However, the researcher observed that it did not include divorce as one of the most crucial issues that affect families in South Africa (White Paper on

Families 2013:22-30), despite the negative impact divorce has on family relations and divorced persons (Abbassi & Nori 2015:22-30). This was another motivating factor for the researcher to undertake this study, given the fact that divorce brings pain to family members, as they must face the challenge of adjusting to new relationships and structures (Van Hook 2014:146-147). In agreement with this, Balswick and Balswick (2007:306) reiterate that family members experience many changes, challenges, and losses because of divorce, which makes divorce unbearable for them.

Apart from the aforementioned motivations, the researcher was of the opinion that this research project would benefit different role players and structures involved in the provision of services to divorced persons and that on its own served as a motivating factor. The role players who are anticipated to benefit from the study include social workers who provide services to divorced persons; divorced persons, since social work services will be aligned to their needs; and the DSD, since it is responsible for drafting social welfare policies. In this regard, the researcher believed that social workers employed at different welfare sectors and who provide social work services to divorced persons would benefit from this research project, as the study would identify gaps in the current form of social work services to divorced persons with the aim of developing practice guidelines. The researcher was of the view that divorced persons would also benefit from the study, because their needs regarding social work services would be explored and aligned to social work services. In other words, social work services and social welfare policies that are client-based would be established.

In the next section, the research questions, the research goal, and the objectives of the study will be explained.

## **1.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS, PRIMARY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In this section, the discussion focuses on research questions, goals and objectives of the study.

### 1.2.1 Research Questions

Research questions specify what the researcher wants to understand by doing the study and are mostly at the heart of the research design (Maxwell 2013:73). These questions relate directly to the statement of purpose and they are logically connected (Maree 2016:31). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016:82), research questions should be general enough to permit exploration, but focused enough to delimit the study. In qualitative research, the questions focus on the *what* and *how*, using participant voices and experiences to interpret and explain the phenomenon or what is happening in a certain context (Butler-Kisber 2010:26). Similarly, Creswell (2016:97) suggests that the research question should preferably begin with words such as *how* or *what*, but not *why*, which is relevant in a quantitative cause-and-effect discourse. To a certain extent, the research questions are broad questions that reflect the aim and the intention of the study. These questions need to be framed in relation to the data collection and analysis methods (Williams 2015:76). Without research questions, it would be difficult to pursue a research project.

The broad research questions for the intended study were initially posed as follows:

- What is the nature of social work services rendered by social workers to divorced persons?
- What are the needs expressed by divorced persons with regard to social work services?
- How do the experience-based perspectives of social workers and divorced persons regarding social work services to divorced persons inform the development of social work practice guidelines and social welfare policies?

### 1.2.2 Research Goals

Research goals serve two main functions for the research study. Firstly, they help guide the researcher's other design decisions to ensure that the study is worth doing and that the researcher, or the audience he or she writes for, gets something of value out of it. Secondly, they are essential to justifying the study; explaining why the researcher's conclusions matter (Maxwell 2013:23). The goals of the study are not simply a rephrasing of the questions in terms of answers, but look beyond the superficial to the significance of the study (Nieuwenhuis 2016:73). Therefore, research goals are the overall objective of the study and they convey the essence of the study

(Creswell 2016:94). They further shape the descriptions, interpretations, and theories the researcher creates in his/her study (Maxwell 2013:23). Without clear research goals, the essence of the study may not be established.

Thus, the main goals of this research study were formulated as follows:

- To develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons.
- To develop an in-depth understanding of needs expressed by divorced persons with regard to social work services.
- To develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

### **1.2.3 Research Objectives**

Objectives refer to clear, concise, declarative statements that are expressed to direct a study (Grove, Burns & Gray 2013:708). The research objectives specify how the aim of the study will be achieved (Moule & Goodman 2014:80). According to Dawson (2002:56), research objectives are means by which the researcher intends to achieve the aim. Through research objectives, researchers become aware of what they need to investigate in practical terms (Babbie 2007:114). Therefore, research objectives specify how the researcher intends to achieve the goal/ aim of the study.

In order to achieve the goals of this study, the following research objectives were proposed:

- To explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons.
- To explore and describe the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services.
- To explore and describe guidelines informing social work practice and social welfare policies.

Furthermore, the following task objectives (i.e. the steps to take to realise the goal) were formulated in order to realise the aforementioned goals and research objectives of the study:

- To obtain a sample of social workers who provide social work services to divorced persons and a sample of divorced persons seeking social work services through purposive sampling.
- To conduct semi-structured interviews in order to establish the nature of social work services provided by social workers to divorced persons, and to establish the needs of divorced persons regarding how they would like to be supported by social workers.
- To sift, sort, and analyse data according to the eight steps of qualitative data analysis as proposed by Tesch (in Creswell 2009:186).
- To explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to how they would like to be supported by social workers.
- To draw conclusions on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services, and make recommendations on practice and policy guidelines for social work services to divorced persons.

The next discussion focuses on research methodology.

### **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

It is crucial for any researcher to decide on the research method or methods in advance, rather than deciding on it during the research process (Maxwell 2013:88). Research methodology offers the researcher a theoretical and philosophical foundation and influences the method of data collection (Carey 2012:84). There are three kinds of research methods that can be used by the researcher, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed methods. These methodologies are explained in Chapter Three, section 3.4.2 of this report.

In this section, the research approach underpinning this study and the research design will be presented. It is worth noting that the application of the qualitative social work

research process according to Carey's (2012:17-28) framework is expounded in Chapter Three of this research report.

### **1.3.1 Research Approach**

The research approach relates to the choice of the research approach or approaches to be used (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:52). The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach for this study. A qualitative research approach is postulated by Grove et al (2013:705) as a systematic, interactive, subjective approach used to describe life experiences and to give them meaning. The authors further state that this approach is mostly associated with words, language and experiences, rather than measurement, statistics and numerical figures. In qualitative researching, the emphasis is placed on insights, meanings and interpretations (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:56). Equally, Green and Thorogood (2009:5) mention that the most basic way of characterising qualitative studies is to describe their aim as seeking answers to questions about the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of a phenomenon, rather than questions concerning 'how many' or 'how much'. In view of the fact that qualitative research involves doing one's utmost to map and explore the meaning of an area of human experience, it can result in unique learning for both the researcher and his/her audience, if carried out with integrity (McLeod 2011:11).

Researchers can use a qualitative research approach when the phenomenon is ill-defined/ not well understood; when the phenomenon being studied is deeply rooted within the participants' personal knowledge or understanding of themselves; when the phenomenon being investigated needs to be understood from the vantage point of an individual or group that occupies a singular or highly specialised role in society; when the phenomenon being investigated is of a delicate or sensitive nature; and when the target populations are vulnerable (Richie & Lewis 2005:32-33). Thus, qualitative research is used to describe or explore meanings in life experiences and through this interactive process, the researcher together with his/her participants jointly create a social reality.

The following are some of the characteristics of the qualitative research approach identified by Chambliss and Schutt (2013:179):

- Qualitative researchers typically begin with an exploratory research question about what people think and how they act, and why, in some social setting.
- The designs focus on previously unstudied processes and unanticipated phenomena, because previously unstudied attitudes and actions cannot adequately be understood with a structured set of questions or within a highly controlled experiment.
- The researchers have an orientation to social context and to the interconnections between social phenomena, rather than to their discrete features.
- The researchers focus on human subjectivity, as well as on the meaning that participants attach to events and the meaning people give to their lives.
- The researchers have sensitivity to the subjective role of the researcher. Qualitative researchers consider themselves a necessary part of the social process being studied and, therefore, keep track of their own actions in, and reactions to, that social process.

In view of the above-mentioned characteristics and the fact that the study was aimed at exploring and describing the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social welfare policies and social work practice, it is apparent that it was intended to adopt the qualitative research approach for the study. More precisely, it was planned to adopt the qualitative social work research approach proposed by Carey (2012:17-28) for the study, and the application of this approach or framework is expounded in detail in Chapter Three of this research report. Although qualitative social work research draws significantly from qualitative social science research, it specifically seeks to explore and address concerns or topics that bridge knowledge, meaning, tangible experience, emotions and reflexive understanding to the applied social work practice (Carey 2012:8). Moreover, qualitative social work research may also seek to comprehend or improve professional practice, evaluate services, or better explain social problems (Carey 2012:9).

In addition, Carey (2012:9) points out the benefits of doing qualitative social work research, namely that qualitative social work research:

- offers a more detailed understanding of social problems or issues, the person-centred needs of service users, or the impact(s) of social work interventions;
- increases our capacity to use our imagination by stimulating thought and new ideas;
- helps social workers to better understand the context and circumstances in which they practice;
- offers an opportunity to gain new insight into themes, such as those relating to policy, legislation, and political, economic or cultural dynamics, for example issues related to class, gender, power relations or educational needs of service users, which impinge upon aspects of practice;
- broadens social workers' understanding of the complexity of the service user, carer, or wider family's related needs; and
- helps social workers to provide better advice, guidance, and awareness of other forms of support to people in need following knowledge and skills gained by the social workers.

Therefore, the qualitative social work research method or approach used for this study was beneficial and useful in achieving the goals and the objectives outlined in section 1.2 of this Chapter.

### **1.3.2 Research Design**

A research design explains the 'how' of the research, based on decisions about the 'what', 'who', 'when' and 'where' (Williams 2015:70). A good research design is one in which the components work harmoniously together, promoting efficient and successful functioning (Maxwell 2013:2). On the contrary, a flawed design leads to poor operation or failure (Maxwell 2013:2). Moreover, a research design depicts the frameworks and data collection methods that are likely feasible, efficient and cost-effective (Williams 2015:70). According to Fawcett and Pocket (2015:51), the epistemological considerations, together with the orientation adopted, the refining of the overarching research question, the formulation of interlinked and specific research sub-questions, and the literature review form the backbone of the research design. Therefore, a research design involves a clear research plan that guides the researcher on how data

will be collected and analysed. In addition, Matthews and Ross (2010:110) suggest that designing research means going back to the research questions and thinking about what the researcher is hoping to do with the data collected in order to address those research questions. Without a research design, the research study does not exist.

In this study, the researcher proposed to employ explorative, descriptive and contextual research designs.

### **1.3.2.1 Explorative research design**

The purpose of exploratory research design is to investigate little-understood phenomena, discover important categories of meaning, and generate hypotheses for further research (Marshall & Rossman 2016:78). On the same note, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:41) reiterate that the purpose of an exploratory design is to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or persons. Exploratory studies are undertaken when a new area or topic is being investigated (Polit, Beck & Hungler 2001:19). In qualitative research, the researcher explores understandings and experiences, delves into the world of everyday as well as into that which is unusual or out of the ordinary, and places emphasis on insights, meanings and interpretations (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:53). Qualitative research is more concerned with the exploration of lived experiences and participant-defined meanings (Willig 2009:9). Therefore, an explorative design is often used when there is lack of basic information on the area or topic under study.

The exploratory design was preferred for this study, because little is known about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services. The exploratory design chosen helped the researcher in developing guidelines that would inform social welfare policies and social work practice.

### **1.3.2.2 Descriptive research design**

Descriptive research design is aimed at documenting and describing the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman 2016:78). In descriptive research, the researcher is provided with an accurate portrayal or account of the characteristics of a particular

individual, event, or a group in a real-life situation for the purpose of discovering new meaning (Grove et al 2013:632). In most instances, descriptive research starts with data and proceeds only to the stage of making empirical generalisations (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:24). This is done because qualitative research studies rely upon descriptive accounts of experiences, since it is impossible to directly access a person's lived experiences (Willig & Billin 2012:120). These are research studies that have as their main objective the accurate portrayal of the characteristics of persons, situations, or groups, and/or the frequency with which certain phenomena occur (Polit et al 2001:460). Therefore, descriptive research designs are most useful in describing phenomena of which little is known.

In this study, the researcher focussed on the "what" and "how" of the phenomenon in allowing participants to describe and share their views about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services. In so doing, it allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject studied, as detailed descriptions were provided.

### **1.3.2.3 Contextual research design**

In qualitative research, there is a focus on a particular context (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:55). Contextual conditions, such as the social, institutional and environmental conditions within people's lives, affect their behaviour (Yin 2011:8). Therefore, a contextual research design enables the researcher to focus on specific events in the naturalistic settings (Burns & Grove 2010:32). Through the contextual research design, participants describe their experiences and the researcher takes into consideration their individual backgrounds, environments, frames of reference, or the situation around them (Blackburn 2000:77). In other words, the contextual research design is based on the recognition that the research participants are part of the environment in which they are embedded (Babbie & Mouton 2001:282).

This research study intended to consider the contexts and/or settings in which social work services to divorced persons are provided, including private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private practice, and government departments. Furthermore, the socioeconomic factor, gender, ethnicity, and the uniqueness of the participants' experiences were also considered.

The population, sampling, and sampling methods will be discussed next.

## **1.4 POPULATION, SAMPLING AND SAMPLING METHODS**

In this section, the population, sampling, and sampling methods will be introduced.

### **1.4.1 Population**

The term “population” can be defined as the group or collection that a researcher is interested in generalising about (Rubin & Babbie 2013:372). According to Carey (2012:247), population is the total group or collection of people from which a sample is drawn. Likewise, Jupp (2006:265) refers to a population as a group of people or unit of analysis which is the focus of the study and which the researcher aims to understand or draw conclusions from. Additionally, Williams (2015:126) suggests that a population involves research with people who belong to a particular place, or data collection about large groups of people. Therefore, a population is a group of people which the researcher intends to understand, generalise about, and draw conclusions from.

The population for this study was defined as follows:

- All social workers in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, employed in the private sector, at NGOs, at government departments, and/or in private practice, who are registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions.
- All divorced persons (men and women) residing in the Gauteng Province of South Africa.

From this population the researcher intended to draw a sample, since the entire population could not be included in the study.

### **1.4.2 Sampling**

A sample is a smaller subgroup drawn from a larger population (Wilson & Maclean 2011:317). The sampling process begins when the researcher chooses the subset of the population that he or she intends to engage with and decides on how he or she will locate and involve them (Thorne 2016:96). In sampling, the researcher explicitly selects participants who are likely to generate appropriate and useful data (Green &

Thorogood 2009:118). The necessity of sampling is based on the fact that the nature of the research problem in which the researcher is interested does not always permit access to all entities that constitute the population (Strydom 2011:224). Without sampling, the qualitative research study would be flawed. In qualitative research, a sample must be drawn from the population in such a way that it would provide appropriate and adequate insight into people's experiences of the world (Nicholls 2009:639). Furthermore, sufficiency needs to be achieved in qualitative research sampling (Nicholls 2009:639). Sufficiency means that participants represent the range of population members in terms of whatever social categories are considered relevant, for example ethnicity, class, gender, or region (Waller, Farquharson & Dempsey 2016:70).

The sampling for this study initially proposed to focus on two groups of participants, namely social workers who provide social work services to divorced persons, and divorced persons who received or sought social work services. With the inclusion of social workers, the researcher was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of the social work services they provide to divorced persons, whereas the divorced persons were able to share their first-hand knowledge about their needs and experiences related to social work services to divorced persons. Eventually, the researcher developed guidelines that would inform social welfare policies and social work practice, and they are included in Chapter Six, section 6.4, of this research report.

### **1.4.3 Sampling Methods**

Sampling methods or plans refer to designs for how researchers specifically choose sources for their data (Tracy 2013:134). The most commonly used sampling method in qualitative research is non-probability sampling (Waller et al 2016:66; Chambliss & Schutt 2013:97). Non-probability sampling comprises the following sampling methods: convenience sampling, snowball sampling, purposive sampling, theoretical sampling, and quota sampling (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:97; Waller et al 2016:66). For this study, the researcher found the purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods to be more appropriate in adequately addressing the research goal and objectives. According to Tracy (2013:135), good qualitative researchers, at the very least, engage in purposeful sampling, which means that they purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals and purposes. These views

resonate with Hesse-Biber and Leavy's (2011:45) notion that qualitative researchers are often interested in selecting a purposive or judgement sample.

Purposive sampling is a somewhat more representative sampling technique in which the settings and specific individuals within them are recruited by virtue of some angle of the experience related to the topic under study that might help the researcher to understand the topic better (Thorne 2016:99). The aim of purposive sampling is to select interviewees who are likely to generate appropriate and useful data (Green & Thorogood 2009:118). It is worth noting that the type of purposive sample chosen in qualitative research is often based on the particular research question, as well as in consideration of the resources available to the researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:45). In other words, purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher aims to discover and gain understanding into a certain phenomenon and therefore he or she would select a sample from which the most can be learned.

Another method for reaching difficult-to-access or hidden populations is snowball sampling (Tracy 2013:136). Snowball sampling is a common sampling technique used in qualitative research, especially when the researcher does not have access to a population from which to draw a sample, or if the nature of the research population makes it impossible (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:47). This is a sampling method in which sample elements are selected as successive informants or interviewees identify them (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:97). Likewise, Waller et al (2016:66) state that with snowball sampling, participants are asked to suggest other participants. In this regard, snowball sampling is used to identify participants when appropriate candidates for a study are difficult to locate (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:47).

The researcher planned to use the following criteria for the inclusion of the first group of participants (**social workers**) into the sample:

- The participants must be working as social workers either in the private sector, at an NGO, at a government department, or in private practice.
- The participants must have at least two years' working experience as social workers.
- The participants must have provided social work services to divorced persons since they started working as social workers.

- The participants must have received intake cases of divorced persons seeking social work services.
- The participants must be based in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.
- The participants must be willing and available to participate in the study.

The following criteria were planned for the inclusion of the second group of participants (**divorced persons**) into the sample:

- The participants must have been legally divorced from their partners.
- The participants must have received or sought social work services from a social worker employed either in the private sector, at an NGO, at a government department, or in private practice.
- The participants must reside in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.
- The participants must be willing and available to participate in the study.

The researcher was cognisant of the fact that size is not the priority in most qualitative research projects, but rather the quality of data collected and analysed remain the core objective (Carey 2012:41). However, it should be noted that 10 social workers and 10 divorced persons were interviewed for this study and that data saturation was reached. Saturation or redundancy of data implies that the researcher will continue to compile data to a point where the data becomes recurring and a broad insight into the phenomena is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, in Merriam 2009:48). Therefore, data saturation can be reached when the researcher can no longer derive new information (Willig 2009:39). In other words, data saturation occurs when the participants no longer share new information. The determination of the sample size is further expounded in Chapter Three, sub-section 3.5.5.4.

The next section focuses on the method of data collection, data analysis, and data verification.

## **1.5 DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection can take many forms, and in fact, the possibilities are infinite for creative researchers (Thorne 2016:135). The process of data collection in qualitative research consists of more than simply collecting data; it involves several steps that

stretch from the selection of the site to designing forms for recording information (Creswell 2016:105). For that reason, the researcher needs to make a decision about how to collect the sort of data that can answer the research question (Willig 2009:2). This is based on the notion that all forms of qualitative data collection involve decisions regarding what data may be useful in answering the research question, and what data is irrelevant to the current study (Thorne 2016:135). Thus, data collection is crucial in qualitative research, as it paves the way for data analysis.

Prior to data collection, researchers first need to find people who are willing to talk to them (Tracy 2013:158). Therefore, the researcher must first seek permission from the gatekeepers or deciders, as they have more power to grant access. Determining the gatekeepers and negotiating entry is the most important step in gaining access to the participants (Tracy 2013:71). In agreement with this, Aurini, Health and Howells (2016:419) reaffirm that an important element of gaining access involves the identification and management of gatekeepers who guard the boundaries of public and private research sites (Aurini et al 2016:149). Researchers must take into consideration that negotiating access is a task that is never readily accomplished in fieldwork and it must be managed cooperatively and negotiated with intended participants (Aurini et al 2016:148). Prior to the process of negotiating and gaining access to participants, researchers must have knowledge of the individuals, community, and/or organisations under study, and an understanding of the proper procedures, rules and norms to follow.

Once researchers have been officially granted permission from gatekeepers, they must continually negotiate for informed consent from the participants (Tracy 2013:80). Informed consent is the principle that individuals should not be coerced, persuaded or induced into participating in the research study against their will, but that their participation should be based on voluntarism and on a full understanding of the implications of participation (Green & Thorogood 2014:70). On the similar note, Carey (2012:247) states that an informed consent is a verbal or written description which informs participants about the purpose of a research project and its potential benefits or risks. Therefore, researchers should thoroughly discuss the informed consent, including the interview guide, before participants can give their consent. An interview guide refers to less formal lists of questions, which are more flexibly drawn upon

depending on the situation and the participant (Tracy 2013:143). Moreover, the interview guide represents *what* questions will be asked, the interviewers' general *manner*, and the *order* in which to ask them (Tracy 2013:143). In qualitative research, an informed consent and interview guide form part of the preparation of participants for data collection. For this study, the researcher planned to discuss the informed consent and interview guide with participants prior the commencement of data collection process.

After the process of preparing participants for data collection, the researcher intended to continue with data collection using face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, with the aid of open-ended questions contained in an interview guide to collect data. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher sets the agenda in terms of the topics covered, but the participants' responses determine the kinds of information produced about those topics, and the relative importance of each of the topics (Green & Thorogood 2014:96). According to Tracy (2013:159), good interviewing is more than just asking good questions; rather it is about creating a logistically feasible and comfortable interaction that will encourage an engaging, honest and fun dialogue. For that reason, the researcher has to test the data collection instrument by conducting a pilot study.

For this study, the researcher planned to conduct the pilot study with two divorced persons and two social workers in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, where the actual study was to be conducted. The researcher can design pilot studies specifically to test his/her ideas or methods and explore their implications (Maxwell 2013:66). Similarly, Kim (2010:193) postulates that when conducting a qualitative inquiry, researchers can pilot a study to assess the acceptability of an interview or an observation protocol, or both. The pilot study may also be used to test the whole, or an aspect of, a research design before full-scale data collection (Williams 2015:73). Through the pilot study, the researcher wanted to determine if the research instrument and questions illicit or yield the sought data. The process used to gain access to participants and prepare them for data collection, methods used for data collection, and testing of the data collection instrument are extensively expounded in Chapter Three, section 3.5.6 of this study.

### 1.5.1 Methods of Data Analysis

Any qualitative study requires decisions about how the analysis will be done, and these decisions should inform, and be informed by, the rest of the design (Maxwell 2013:104). Data analysis refers to the interpretation of research findings which aims to achieve a better understanding of a problem, often with the use of theory and comparison (Carey 2012:245). It is suggested that the researcher should not wait for the data collection process to be finished before starting to analyse the data (Creswell 2009:184). Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as data are being collected, rather than after data collection has ceased (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:207). Therefore, the process of data analysis begins simultaneously with data collection. The majority of research projects arrive at a good conclusion through analysis processes rather than a grand moment of discovery (Aurini et al 2016:180). Good analysis draws widely on more general social science knowledge and locates the particular findings of one study within a broader context (Green & Thorogood 2014:204).

There are many different approaches to data analysis (Paulus, Lester & Dempster 2014:115). In the same way, Green and Thorogood (2014:205) mention that there is a broad range of approaches to analysis in qualitative research, with the task of the researcher defined rather differently across that range. For this study, the researcher followed the eight steps of Tesch's approach to data analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2009:186). The descriptive analysis technique of Tesch's eight steps, as cited in Creswell (2009:186), was applied as follows:

- The researcher intended to read all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole and jot down the themes as they emerge.
- The researcher further intended to pick one transcript and read it while writing down the meaning of what was being read in the margin. The researcher planned to read all the transcripts in the same manner.
- After all scripts had been read, the researcher planned to compile a list of all themes identified. The intention was to group the themes together according to their commonalities and to classify them into columns marked as major themes, unique themes, and leftover themes.
- The researcher planned to take the list of themes and revisit the data. The intention was to abbreviate themes as codes and to write the codes alongside the

appropriate portion of the text. The researcher further planned to review the coding scheme and observe if any new themes emerged.

- After that, the researcher intended to find the most descriptive wording for the themes and place them into categories. The researcher further planned to draw the linking lines between categories to show shared relationships.
- The researcher planned to make a final decision on the abbreviation for each of the categories and to write them in alphabetic order.
- Thereafter, the researcher planned to write down the data for each category and to do a preliminary analysis of the data.
- Lastly, the researcher planned to record the existing data, as it seemed necessary to do so. The researcher intended to analyse the two sets of data (divorced persons and social workers) in the same manner, but separately.

In addition, the researcher intended to provide the transcripts to an independent coder to conduct data analysis as a way of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. Thereafter, the researcher intended to compare his findings with the findings from the independent coder during the consensus discussion facilitated by the promoter.

The methods of data verification are discussed next.

### **1.5.2 Methods of Data Verification**

Data verification contributes to the credibility of research (Pool 2017:282). According to Williams (2015:119), data verification may happen as data is being collected, soon after, or during analysis. The process of data verification involves asking questions such as “who is speaking?”, “who are they speaking to?”, “for what purpose are they speaking?”, and “what are they talking about?” (Williams 2015:119). Through the data verification process, the researcher checks the different types of data collected to establish accuracy or identify inconsistencies. Therefore, data verification is aimed at establishing the trustworthiness of the data collected and the research findings.

The researcher planned to verify data and to establish the trustworthiness of the “research findings using Guba’s model. According to Guba’s model, there are four characteristics that ensure trustworthiness, namely truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (Krefting 1991:215-222).

### **1.5.2.1 Truth-value**

Truth-value seeks to check whether the findings of the study are a true reflection of the experiences of the research participants (Krefting 1991:215). This means that truth-value seeks to check the credibility of the findings. Credibility is the trustworthiness, plausibility, and good character of the researcher and his study, which impacts the believability of the research findings (Tracy 2013:248). Through credibility, the researcher becomes aware of a set of procedures to ensure that the standards of trustworthiness are met (Marshall & Rossman 2016:46). According to Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell and Walter (2016:1802), trustworthiness of results is the bedrock of good qualitative research. It is further suggested by Nieuwenhuis (2016:123) that credibility can be enhanced through the development of an early familiarity with the participants and participating organisations, but also through well-defined, purposive sampling, detailed data collection methods, and triangulation. In addition, Thorne (2016:234) postulates that qualitative studies ought to show representative credibility such that the theoretical claims they purport to make are consistent with the manner in which the phenomenon under study was sampled. Therefore, credibility reflects the sense of truth-value and that the findings are the true reflection of the participants' experiences.

In this study, the researcher planned to use the following credibility strategy in order to achieve the truth-value of the findings: interview technique, triangulation, peer examination, authority of the researcher, and member checking.

#### **- Interview technique**

The researcher intended to prepare the participants before the process of data collection, as it would create a conducive space for them to share their life experiences voluntarily and freely. Apart from the preparation of participants for data collection, the researcher planned to establish a rapport and trust during his initial visits to the participants. Furthermore, the researcher intended to discuss ethical considerations with the participants as part of the preparation for data collection, and later seek their informed consent. The researcher also intended to discuss the ethical considerations with participants during the process of preparation for data collection. The methods of data collection involved the use

of the following skills: listening, probing, questioning and empathy, as initially planned by the researcher. Using these skills, the researcher intended to enable participants to freely share their experiences during the interview, as well as enabling an in-depth exploration of the issues under discussion. The interview techniques/skills are expansively explained in Chapter Three, sub-section 3.5.6.2.

#### - **Triangulation**

Triangulation is a process of using multiple methods or data sets to increase the validity of findings, on the assumption that findings are more credible if they are consistent with other findings (Green & Thorogood 2014:324). Similarly, Nieuwenhuis (2016:122) suggests that triangulation is the use of multiple lines of sight and it constitutes an important strategy in the synthesis of research findings. With triangulation, the researcher is able to test a piece of data by comparing it with two or more other relevant pieces of data with the aim of validating a significant report, but it can also be used to analyse the reasons for differences (Williams 2015:119). Triangulation is considered one of the most important ways to enhance the trustworthiness of research findings (Nieuwenhuis 2016:375). Without triangulation, the credibility of the research findings is questionable.

In this study, the researcher intended to carry out triangulation in order to identify the common themes that would enhance the trustworthiness of the study. For instance, the researcher planned to collect data on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services from various sources, including from divorced persons and social workers. To ensure that triangulation was met, the researcher intended to collect data from social workers employed in different settings, including NGOs, government departments, the private sector, and in private practice. Moreover, the researcher planned to collect data from divorced men and women from different ethnic groups. The researcher also planned to use multiple methods of data collection, such as semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and the researcher's observations of the participants.

- **Peer examination**

Peer examination is the review of a project by someone who is familiar with the research being explored (Creswell 2016:194). It is intended to prevent bias and aid conceptual development of the study (Morse 2015:2015). It is recommended that the researcher must listen to alternative points of view, but take final responsibility for the results, its implications and applications (Morse 2015:2015). Likewise, Shenton (2004:67) suggests that opportunities for scrutiny of the project by colleagues, peers and academics should be welcomed. Therefore, peer examination assists the researcher with conceptualisation.

The researcher intended to use his promoter as a peer reviewer, since she is knowledgeable about the qualitative research method. The researcher also intended to give the transcripts to an independent coder in order for her to critique and assess the interpretation of the direct quotes and the research findings.

- **Authority of the researcher**

As a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at UNISA, one of the researcher's key performance areas involves supervising and providing support to students registered for their Master's degree in Social Work. The researcher also attended many workshops and training sessions on qualitative research. Additionally, the researcher was employed by the DSD in the Limpopo Province as a social worker for seven years and amongst his other duties, he dealt with clients experiencing difficulties with divorce. For that reason, the researcher is familiar with the topic related to divorce. This is also discussed in sub-section 3.8.2.1.

- **Member checking**

Member checking refers to giving the transcribed interview back to the participant to obtain additional information or to collect data (Morse 2015:2016). On the same note, Creswell (2016:192) postulates that member checking is when the researcher takes the participants' themes or entire stories back to them and asks the participants whether their themes or stories are an accurate representation of what they said. Member checking is used to validate, verify or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results (Birt et al 2016:1803). In addition, member checking is a means of enhancing rigor in qualitative research, proposing that

credibility is inherent in the accurate descriptions or interpretations of phenomena (Birt et al 2016:1803). With member checking, the researcher is afforded an opportunity to gather additional and often crucial information that was not shared by participants in the previous session for whatever reason. Participants are also afforded an opportunity to validate the previously supplied information.

For this study, the researcher planned to do member checking during the transcription and translation of data, as he may identify some gaps in the transcribed interviews.

### **1.5.2.2 *Applicability***

Applicability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings, or other groups (Krefting 1991:216). Therefore, applicability relates to transferability and generalisability. Transferability and generalisability in qualitative research refer to the extension of conceptual rather than empirical findings to other settings (Green & Thorogood 2014:324). More precisely, transferability is the ability of readers to assess what is likely to be relevant in other settings or contexts, and it relies on good descriptions of the particularities of the setting of the case and good theoretical analysis which allows credible inferences about what is general (Green & Thorogood 2014:252). On the other hand, generalisability is about extending the research results, conclusions, or other accounts that are based on the study of particular individuals, settings, times, or institutions (Morse 2015:2013). In the same way, Green and Thorogood (2014:323) assert that generalisability is the extent to which the findings of a study can be extended to other settings, populations or topics. With transferability and generalisability, the research findings can be applied to other contexts and settings, and in doing that, it relates to applicability.

The researcher planned to use purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure applicability and these methods clearly outline how to include participants. The researcher also intended to use exploratory, descriptive and contextual designs in order get an in-depth and an extensive description of the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of the divorced persons regarding social work services. In order to check the transferability and generalisability of the findings, the

researcher intended to provide a comprehensive description of the application of research methodology.

### **1.5.2.3 Consistency**

With consistency, researchers are concerned about the kind of data collection consistent with the research questions and research goal, and the kinds of analysis and presentation of results that fit with the approach (Holloway & Todres 2003:347). Thus, consistency means that similar findings are produced when replicated within the same contexts. In order to ensure the consistency of the research findings, the researcher intended to present the exact methodology which describes how the study was conducted. The researcher also planned to give data to an independent coder for analysis and interpretation. The researcher's findings and the findings from the independent coder were intended to be compared in order to check the consistency regarding the themes, sub-themes, and categories. In addition, the researcher anticipated using the code-recode procedure, as outlined by Krefting (1991:221), to check consistency.

### **1.5.2.4 Neutrality**

Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the participants and conditions of the research, and not of other biases, motivations, or perspectives (Krefting 1991:216). With neutrality, steps must be taken to help ensure that as far as possible, the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton 2004:72). In order to meet this criterion, the researcher planned to focus on the neutrality of data rather than the neutrality of the researcher. The researcher also intended to use literature control to compare and confirm data collected from the study. Furthermore, the researcher anticipated using credibility to establish the truth-value of the study through interview technique, triangulation, peer examination, and authority of the researcher, together with applicability of the study, in order to achieve neutrality of the study.

## **1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical codes are the codes of conduct set in place to protect the research participants and their setting, neither of which should be harmed by the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:85). Ethical discourses underpin the moral basis of decision-making for any research project (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:27). It is required that researchers think about their research projects from an ethical perspective (Williams 2015:80). In this regard, the overall integrity or moral soundness of a research project entails thinking about research ethics (rules of conduct), together with methodological aspects such as objectivity, impartiality, and bias (Williams 2015:80). This signifies the importance of ethics in research. Ethics within research seek to avoid deceit, exploitation, abuse, or other forms of malpractice (Carey 2012:97). Unethical research practice often leads to biased data collection and analysis (Williams 2015:80). The significance of researchers in adhering to the ethical principles of research is that their integrity or moral soundness during the research process and the findings become unquestionable.

For this study, the researcher planned to adhere to the following ethical considerations: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, data management, debriefing, and beneficence.

### **1.6.1 Informed Consent**

Informed consent is the process by which researchers inform potential participants about the risks, benefits, and anything else that may be involved when agreeing to participate in a study, before they decide to participate of their own free will (Tracy 2013:104). With this principle, the researcher informs the research participants about the research and its implications so that they can voluntarily agree to take part (Williams 2015:91). This principle further implies that participants should not be coerced, persuaded, or induced into research against their will, but that their participation should be based on voluntarism and on the full understanding of the implications of participation (Green & Thorogood 2014:70). Research participants should be acting freely and not pressured or coerced into taking part in a study (Williams 2015:91). Through the principle of informed consent, participants are able to

make informed decisions about whether or not they are interested in taking part after they have been provided with all the information pertaining to the research study.

The researcher intended to adhere to the principle of informed consent for the benefit of the study. In order to adhere to this ethical principle, the researcher planned to inform participants about the research process, goals and objectives, risks and benefits, expectations, and ethical considerations, and allow them to sign the informed consent form.

### **1.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality and anonymity is another way of protecting participants and that is the primary focus of research ethics (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:53). With the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher thinks about how the participants will be protected from any risks when their opinions, actions or attitudes become open to public scrutiny (Carey 2012:102). These principles also imply that researchers must take steps to ensure that research data and the sources of this data remain confidential, unless disclosure is deemed necessary and the participants have consented to it (Greener 2011:146). According to Green and Thorogood (2014:72), confidentiality means that the researcher should not disclose information gained from research in other settings, such as through informal conversation. The authors further state that confidentiality also relates to published accounts of the research, in which the identity of the sites and individuals should be protected where possible. Without the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, the participants would be exposed to more risks and harm, and it may affect the credibility of the study.

The researcher planned to maintain and adhere to the principles of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study and after the study has been completed, in order to protect the participants from any harm or risks. The researcher also intended to avoid using the real names and identifiable characteristics of the participants by making use of pseudonyms.

### **1.6.3 Data Management**

Ethical considerations often dictate that data must be kept safe and destroyed after the research has been completed (Williams 2015:114). Researchers should have a

good system in place to store and organise their interview data, otherwise it becomes difficult to manage information about people, places, events, locations and reflections (Aurini et al 2016:113). A simple data management system may just entail setting up files that reflect the stages of the project and headings of a final report (Williams 2015:114). This signifies the importance of developing a data management plan in order to manage data more efficiently. A data management plan is a document that describes how the researcher will treat his data during a project and what happens with the data after the project ends (Michener 2015:1). In other words, a data management plan should clearly stipulate how the researcher will treat data during and after the study.

For this study, the researcher planned to ask permission from the participants to make use of a voice recorder and notebook to capture data. The researcher further intended to explain to the participants that the audiotapes, notebooks and transcripts would be given codes to disguise their identity. In order to protect the participants' information, the researcher intended to keep all records, namely voice records, written notes and transcripts, locked away in a secure place. Furthermore, the researcher planned to inform the participants that the typed data would be protected by means of a password and saved on the researcher's laptop and on memory stick devices. In this regard, the plan was to limit access to information to the researcher, the promoter, and the independent coder, as was intended to be explained to participants. The researcher intended to erase all recordings on the voice recorder and to destroy all notes and transcripts once the research had been completed.

#### **1.6.4 Debriefing and Beneficence**

The principle of debriefing involves the researcher informing subjects about the study's purposes and methods after the study has been completed, and evaluating participants' personal reactions to the study (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:45). On the other hand, the principle of beneficence directs the researcher to strive to maximise the good outcomes of his study for science and humanity, and minimise the risk of harm to individuals in the research process (Mertens 2012:19). Likewise, Chambliss and Schutt (2013:43) suggest that beneficence means minimising possible harm and maximising benefits. Both debriefing and beneficence imply that the researcher take actions to benefit the participants and to facilitate their well-being. Therefore, the

principles of debriefing and beneficence are very important in protecting participants from further harm and risks emanating from taking part in the research project.

In order to minimise the emotional and psychological harm of the participants, the researcher planned to debrief participants immediately after each session to ensure that the emotions that surfaced during the interviews are dealt with. The researcher also received written consent from the relevant service providers who are willing to provide further counselling and interventions closer to where the participants live and therefore he intended to refer participants should the need arise.

The next section focuses on the clarification of concepts.

## **1.7 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

### **1.7.1 Divorce**

Divorce is the dissolution of a marriage in a court of law, which releases marriage partners from matrimonial obligations (Abbassi & Nori 2015:211). According to Knox and Schacht (2010:488), divorce is the legal ending of a valid marriage contract. Divorce can also be referred to a mode of dissolution of the marriage contract, a formal termination of the status derived from marriage, so that, following the grant of the decree, both spouses have neither the duties nor the rights of husband and wife (Sarkar 2015:92). For the purpose of this study, divorce refers to the legal termination of a marriage between married partners by a court of law.

### **1.7.2 Divorced Person**

Divorced person refers to the person who has terminated his/her marriage through a court of law (Preller 2013:74). Divorced persons can also be referred to as persons who dissolved their marriages and are equally affected by the cultural, societal, legal, historical, and material circumstances of divorce (Savaya & Cohen 2003:194). Similarly, Mooney et al (2011:169) state that the term 'divorced persons' refers to couples who dissolve their marriage/s when they feel that the marriage no longer meets their psychological needs, including emotional support, intimacy, affection, love, or personal growth. In the context of this study, a divorced person refers to an

individual who has terminated his/her marriage voluntarily or involuntarily through a court of law.

### **1.7.3 Policy Guidelines**

Understanding policy guidelines enables social workers to be more effective in practice and in influencing the policy-development process (Ambrosino et al 2012:128). Policy guidelines serve as a guide for sector-specific social welfare policies, capacity development, and greater emphasis on the implementation of welfare programmes by relevant partners (National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment 1997:1). According to Ambrosino et al (2012:127), policy guidelines are influenced by the prevailing social values. For this study, policy guidelines refer to social welfare policies that guide social work services to divorced persons.

### **1.7.4 Post-divorce Experiences**

Post-divorce experiences refer to the experiences of divorced persons after the completion of the divorce process and they are normally characterised by strong emotions, such as pain, stress, and depression (Preller 2013:73). Divorced persons experience the adversity of divorce in many aspects of their lives, resulting in increased social isolation, economic problems and a concomitant lower standard of living, difficulties in raising children, risk of health problems, and psychological distress (Yarnoz et al 2008:291). Post-divorce experiences involve a lower level of psychological well-being, such as depression, anxiety and a poorer self-concept (Mooney et al 2011:172). For the sake of this study, post-divorce experiences refer to the experiences of divorced persons after the termination of their marriages by a court of law.

### **1.7.5 Social Welfare Policy**

Social welfare policy refers to anything a government chooses to do, or not to do, that affects the quality of life of its people (Ambrosino et al 2012:127). According to Patel and Selipsky (2010:50), social welfare policies provide the overall framework or plan of action drawn up by governments to guide public officials on how to address specific social issues. Social welfare policies mostly include social security, unemployment, sickness, disability, health, and other policies explicitly furthering social rights

(Burgoon 2006:178). In relation to this study, social welfare policies refer to government policies aimed at addressing social issues, including divorce.

### **1.7.6 Social Work**

Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and create societal conditions favourable to their goals (Zastrow 2014:5). In the same way, Ambrosino et al (2012:23) suggest that social work is an activity that seeks to help individuals, families, organisations, groups, and communities make use of resources that will alleviate their problems. The profession of social work promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being (Arora 2013:1). For this study, social work refers to a profession that seeks to promote social change and the empowerment of the divorced persons in order to enhance their well-being through the utilisation of relevant theories.

### **1.7.7 Social Workers**

Social workers refer to graduates of the school of social work (with either Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degrees), who use their knowledge and skills to provide social services for clients, who may be individuals, families, groups, communities, organisations, or society in general (Zastrow 2014:5). Professional social workers assist clients with a wide variety of unmet needs (Ambrosino et al 2012:29). Social workers help people increase their capacities for problem solving and coping, help them to obtain needed resources, facilitate interactions between individuals and between people and their environments, enable organisations to become responsible for people, and influence social policies (Zastrow 2014:5). They are also identified as welfare workers who are engaged in public assistance programmes (Ambrosino et al 2012:22). For the purpose of this study, social workers refer to trained professionals who are registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions as social workers and utilise theories in providing social work services to divorced persons.

### **1.7.8 Social Work Practice Guidelines**

Social work practice guidelines provide a way to rethink and implement social work practice in order to achieve needed social change in ways that meet human needs

(Gutierrez & Parsons 1998:241). These are practice guidelines that provide strategies on how social workers should intervene at the micro- (with individuals), meso- (with families and small groups), and macro-levels (with organisations and communities) (Zastrow 2014:44). Moreover, social work practice guidelines involve a variety of skills, techniques, and activities consistent with a holistic social work focus on persons and their environments (Arora 2013:2). In this study, social work practice guidelines refer to a set of guiding principles for social workers in rendering social work services.

### **1.7.9 Social Work Services**

Social work services are services aimed at addressing the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments to enable people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction (Rautenbach & Chiba 2010:5). Social work services are provided by professional social workers in various forms and are intended to address the multiple complex transactions between people and their environments (Arora 2013:1). In the same way, Schultz (2015b:168-183) states that social work services are better outlined in terms of different fields of social work practice, including health care, child care, and family care. In the context of this study, social work services refer to the services provided by social workers to divorced persons.

The format of the research report is presented next.

## **1.8 FORMAT OF THE RESEARCH REPORT**

This research report was planned to consist of six chapters. In Chapter One, the researcher provides the general overview of the study, as initially planned. The chapter involves the presentation of the general introduction, problem statement, rationale for the study, research questions, research goals and objectives, research approach and design, population, sampling and sampling methods, data collection, methods of data analysis and data verification, ethical considerations, clarification of the key concepts, and the format of the research report.

In Chapter Two, the researcher provides a discussion on the literature review related to the study and the theoretical orientation adopted for the study. The chapter

comprises a discussion on an overview of divorce globally and in South Africa, reasons for divorce, consequences of divorce, post-divorce needs and challenges, post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction, social welfare policies, a general view of social work services, and social work services to divorced persons. The chapter further provides a discussion regarding the three theoretical approaches adopted for the study, namely the strengths perspective, person-centred perspective, and ecological systems perspective. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Chapter Three involves a discussion of the application of the qualitative research process followed by the researcher. The chapter begins with an introduction based on the qualitative research framework adopted by the researcher. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the seven stages involved in the framework adopted. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

In Chapter Four, the researcher introduces the reader to the research findings involving the first group of participants (divorced persons). The chapter begins with the presentation of the demographic particulars of the participants, followed by a detailed discussion of the themes, sub-themes and categories. A summary of the chapter concludes the discussion.

Chapter Five introduces the reader to the research findings involving the second group of participants (social workers). The chapter starts with the presentation of the demographic particulars of the participants, followed by a detailed discussion of the themes, sub-themes and categories. A summary of the chapter concludes the discussion.

Chapter Six of this research report is the last chapter and focuses on the presentation of the summary and conclusions of the research findings, as well as the recommendations. Recommendations made are based on social work practice, social work training and education, and further research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter presented the general overview of the study as initially proposed by the researcher. The chapter began with the general introduction regarding an overview of divorce, statistics of divorce, reasons for divorce, consequences of divorce, post-divorce needs and challenges, post-divorce adjustment, social work services, and social welfare policies. The chapter further unpacked the problem statement, which aimed to present the gaps identified in literature regarding the nature of social work services to divorced persons. The rationale for the study was also outlined, based on the experiences of the researcher in working with divorced persons and the need to develop guidelines that would inform social welfare policy and social work practice. The research questions, primary goals, and objectives of the study were also clearly stated, followed by the research methodology as initially planned. This was followed by a discussion of the intended population, sampling, sampling methods, data collection, methods of data analysis and data verification, and ethical considerations. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the key concepts, the format of the research report, and a summary of the chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Divorce is considered one of the most traumatic situations and it has the furthest reaching implications of all life events (Frisby et al 2012:716). Research on divorce revealed that divorce at any point in the life course of a person could have negative outcomes for both men and women (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). Many divorced persons face substantial emotional challenges including, among others, grieving the end of marriage, revising one's self identity, reforming social networks, managing feelings of loneliness, and making major changes in parenting practices (Sbarra, Law & Portley 2011:455). There are studies that have reported higher than average mortality rates and higher rates of injuries, suicides, mental disorders, strokes, chronic diseases, and disabilities among divorced persons (Nielsen et al 2014:705). These accounts point to the fact that divorce becomes unbearable for many divorced persons and that post-divorce adjustment is necessary for their well-being. This resonates with Sakraida's (2008:870) affirmation that the divorce experience is a major life event stressor or a state of emotional arousal that demands the capacity to adapt.

In this chapter, an overview of divorce, the reasons for divorce, the consequences of divorce, post-divorce needs and challenges, post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction, divorce and social welfare policies, social work services to divorced persons, and the theoretical framework underpinning the study will be presented. These will provide the reader with a holistic perspective about the topic under investigation emanating from the literature review.

### **2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF DIVORCE**

In general, divorce is a worldwide phenomenon and different countries across the globe have different laws that regulate the formalisation and dissolution of marriages (Vincent & Howell 2014:473). In 2014, almost every country in the world had laws regulating the dissolution of marriages (Gonzalez 2015:4). It is worth noting that the

laws that regulate divorce across the globe differ from one country to the other. Nonetheless, there is a general understanding globally that divorce is the termination of a marriage contract (Duzbakar 2016:118). In most instances, the divorce process starts long before the actual separation and ends with the legal termination of the marriage contract (Symoens et al 2013:179).

After the dissolution of their marriage contracts, divorced persons are more likely to rearrange many affairs in their lives and rebuild their identities, and this may affect them negatively, leading to post-divorce maladjustments. On the same note, Preller (2013:73) asserts that divorce is characterised by strong emotions of pain, shock, betrayal, hurt and panic, regardless of who initiated the divorce, whose actions led to the breakdown of marriage, who was at fault, or how long trouble had been brewing. These assertions point to the fact that divorce likely affects the well-being of divorced persons negatively and that divorced persons face challenges related to post-divorce adjustment.

The next discussion focuses on the global historical and current status of divorce, divorce within the context of South Africa, and divorce statistics.

### **2.2.1 The Global Historical and Current Status of Divorce**

The formalisation and termination of marriages have been in existence for many decades. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marriage was typically terminated only after the death of one of the spouses in western countries (Gonzalez 2015:2). Many countries started introducing legislation that allowed for the possibility of dissolving a marriage in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although initially divorce was only granted under very restrictive conditions, such as after adultery had been proved (Gonzalez 2015:2). These early divorce laws allowed divorce to be granted by a court of law only under “fault” grounds, which means that one partner had to prove in court that the other spouse had committed some form of marital misconduct. Similarly, Lopoo and Raissian (2014:216) postulate that historically divorce was only granted in exceptional situations, such as in the case of adultery, cruelty or desertion, since marriage was considered a lifelong commitment. The innocent party frequently received a considerable proportion of the marital assets, creating hostility and an incentive for spouses to fight vigorously in court (Lopoo & Raissian 2014:4). In most instances,

proof of inappropriate marital behaviour had to be provided before divorce could be granted. In other words, divorce could not be granted unless there was substantial evidence that the spouse initiating divorce had been wronged by the other spouse.

Generally, different countries practiced different procedures and required different reasons for divorce. For example, Coontz (2007:8-10) shares the following historical procedures and reasons for divorce in Japanese, Indian, Roman, Chinese and East African societies:

- In traditional Japanese society, a man had to write a letter to divorce his wife and a woman had to put in two years of service at a special temple before she could get divorced.
- In India, a wife who wanted to divorce would simply place her husband's possessions outside the dwelling, which belonged to her.
- In the ancient Roman Republic, a simple statement of intent to divorce was sufficient to effect the dissolution of a marriage.
- In China, a man's parents could force him to divorce his wife if he took her side against them.
- In Eastern Africa, the husband took his hoe, axe, and sleeping mat when he left his wife's village, and that symbolised the finalisation of the divorce.

Although divorce was mostly granted under "fault grounds" in different countries, each of the countries regulated divorce according to the respective laws of that country. For instance, Bouteillec, Bersbo and Festy (2011:194-204) share the following views, which represent the historical perspectives of divorce in the Scandinavian countries, such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark:

- In Sweden spouses agreeing to a divorce had to be separated for a year, whereas under the Norwegian Act on Access to Dissolution of Marriage of 1909, the period of separation was two years. According to Danish law, the couple had to be separated for two and half years before the final divorce decree could be granted.
- In Sweden, applications for divorce were handled by the church and through the procedure of warnings. Furthermore, disagreeing couples were punished economically and socially. The goal was to reunite the couples and keep the marriages intact.

- The Swedish Law Drafting Committee emphasised that the earlier administrative procedures of divorces managed by the church had to be abolished and that all divorces should be handled by the courts.
- Norway allowed divorces to be handled administratively and Danish law allowed both procedures.
- All Scandinavian countries adopted the principle that spouses had a duty of maintenance toward each other in marriage, during the separation period, and after the divorce had officially been recognised by the court. This implied that during marriage and after divorce, spouses should maintain the same standard of living.

In addition, Coontz (2007:7-15) shared the following historical perspective of divorce in the United States of America (USA):

- Less than half of the states accepted cruelty as a reason for divorce before 1840.
- By 1860, the majority of states allowed divorce in cases of habitual drunkenness.
- Between 1880 and 1890, there was a 70% increase in divorce.
- In 1900, there were just 0.7 divorces per 1000 people.
- In the 1910s and 1920s, many marriages became more satisfying, intimate and passionate than marriages of the past.
- Divorce receded in the 1930s, although desertion rates climbed.
- The outbreak of World War II led to a surge in marriage, followed immediately after the war by a new spike in divorce.
- In 1946, concerned experts estimated that almost one in three marriages was ending in divorce.
- In 1950, the divorce rate dropped swiftly from its post-war peak.
- In 1957 divorce started rising again, whereby one out of every three American couples who married in the 1950s eventually divorced.
- The acceleration of divorce rates began well before no-fault divorce was legalised in the 1970s.
- By the 1960s, divorce by mutual consent masquerading as fault divorce had already become routine in many countries, including America.
- Divorce rates peaked between 1971 and 1981.

The erosion of universal marriage accelerated all across North America during the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it sparked the origin of the modern divorce pattern (Coontz 2007:7). This modern divorce pattern also accelerated across other parts of the world and relied on the invention of the values that eventually elevated the marital relationship above all other personal and familial commitments. As a result, there was concentration of emotion, passion, personal identity, and self-validation in the couple's relationship, and the attenuation of emotional attachments and obligations beyond the conjugal unit.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, family law in different countries started introducing the possibility of "no-fault" divorce, which means that divorce did not require one spouse to accuse the other of any form of wrongdoing (Gonzalez 2015:2). For example, Scandinavian countries adopted a new divorce law in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, since the previous laws were seen by the intergovernmental committee as obsolete and in need of major reform (Bouteillec et al 2011:194). The new legislation permits divorce by mutual agreement, in line with several other European countries, and therefore being forced to remain married regardless of the spouses' wishes was now claimed to violate the right of self-determination.

Some countries required simply the stated declaration that the relationship had failed, but in recent years divorce laws have been liberated further, with many countries allowing for unilateral divorce where the consent of both spouses is no longer required. In the same way, the early Christian church in Europe allowed divorce for several reasons and some local church councils even had the equivalent of no-fault divorce, in which a couple was allowed to part after swearing that their marriage life had become impossible or that there was no charity in the marriage according to God (Coontz 2007:14). This means that in "no-fault" divorce, wrongdoing did not have to be proven in order for the divorce to occur, as it was the case with "fault" divorce. Although many countries developed laws that regulate divorce a long time ago, it should be noted that some countries have only recently legalised divorce. For example, divorce was legalised in Malta in 2011, Chile in 2004, Ireland in 1996, and Spain in 1981 (Gonzalez 2015:4). On the contrary, there are countries that have made changes in their divorce legislation during the past few decades.

In modern society, divorce is granted in accordance with the law of each country. In most instances, the type of marriage contract which was entered into by a married couple determined the type of divorce. For example, Duzbakar (2016:118) suggests that there are three types of divorce in Islamic law, namely:

- divorce that is realised through the intention of one party;
- divorce that is realised through both parties' will; and
- divorce by the decision of the court.

Although the right to end the marriage in Islamic law was given to the man, if the woman so desired she could also request that the marriage contract be terminated (Duzbakar 2016:118). It means that women who were sure that they would not be able to continue the marriage could ask for a divorce in return for a certain price. The Islamic law made it possible for a woman to request a divorce or cancel the marriage contract in certain situations and these situations involved conditions concerning the husband, such as his illness or impotence, or him being lost or abusing his wife.

Furthermore, in India the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (India 1955: section 13) regulates that any marriage solemnised, whether before or after the commencement of the Act, on petition presented by either the husband or the wife, be dissolved by a decree of divorce on the ground that the other party:

- has after the solemnisation of the marriage had voluntary sexual intercourse with any person other than his or her spouse or has after the solemnisation of the marriage treated the petitioner with cruelty or has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of not less than two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition;
- has ceased to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion; or
- has been incurably of unsound mind, or has been suffering continuously or intermittently from a mental disorder of such a kind and to such an extent that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent.

There is no vast difference between the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and the United Kingdom Law Reform Commission, as it is stipulated in the Matrimonial Causal Law (Law Reform Commission 2011: section 10) that a decree of dissolution of marriage may be pronounced by the court based on the following grounds:

- the respondent has committed adultery and the petitioner finds it intolerable to live with the respondent;

- the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent;
- the petitioner has deserted the respondent for a continuous period of at least two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition;
- the parties to the marriage have lived apart for a continuous period of at least two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition and the respondent consents to the decree being pronounced; or
- the parties in marriage have lived apart for a continuous period of at least five years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition.

The above-mentioned pieces of legislation affirm that divorce is regulated differently across the globe, and South Africa is no exception. In this section, the focus was on the historical and current status of divorce across the globe, therefore the next section presents the perception of divorce within the South African context with the aim of providing the reader with an overview of divorce in South Africa.

### **2.2.2 Divorce within the Context of South Africa**

There is a high rate of divorce in South Africa, as in most countries across the globe. It is estimated that approximately one third of all marriages in South Africa end in divorce (Preller 2013:73). This implies that there is a large number of people who are faced with the challenges related to divorce in the country. Just like in many countries, divorce in South Africa is regulated by law. As indicated by Preller (2013:11), there are three different laws under which a marriage may be formed and only marriages that have been entered into in accordance with these laws can be legally dissolved by a court of law in South Africa, namely:

- The Marriage Act 25 of 1961 (South Africa 1961), which allows for the solemnisation of civil or religious marriages between a man and a woman.
- The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 (South Africa 1998), which allows for the registration of marriages under African customary law.
- The Civil Union Act 17 of 2006 (South Africa 2006b), which allows for the solemnisation of a civil or religious marriage, or a civil partnership between two people regardless of gender.

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned laws regulate the following relationships, namely:

- Same or opposite sex engagements.
- Same or opposite sex marriages.
- Same or opposite sex civil unions.
- Opposite sex domestic partnership.
- Same sex life partnerships.
- Religious marriages, even those not recognised by law.
- Marriages in terms of customary law.

The divorce courts in South Africa are found within the setup of the High Court and the regional divisions of the Magistrate's Court (Preller 2013:74). It should further be noted that divorce in South Africa is mainly regulated in terms of the Divorce Act 70 of 1979 (South Africa 1979) and that there are two parties involved, namely the plaintiff (usually referred to as the person who initiates divorce) and the defendant (usually referred to as the person who is contesting the divorce in a court of law). According to this Act, a court may grant a decree of divorce based on the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, or the mental illness or continuous unconsciousness of a party to the marriage. This relates to Preller's (2013:110) suggestion that a marriage may be dissolved by a court on the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage or the mental illness or continuous unconsciousness of a party to the marriage.

In other words, the court may grant a decree of divorce on the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage if it is satisfied that the marriage relationship between the parties to the marriage has reached such a state of disintegration that there is no reasonable prospect of the restoration of a normal marriage relationship between them. This may include the following circumstances:

- The parties have not lived together as husband and wife for a continuous period of at least one year immediately prior to the date of the institution of the divorce action.
- The defendant has committed adultery and the plaintiff finds it irreconcilable with a continued marriage relationship.
- The defendant has, in terms of a sentence by a court, been declared a habitual criminal and is undergoing imprisonment as a result of such a sentence.

A court may further grant a decree of divorce on the grounds of mental illness if it is satisfied that the defendant in terms of the Mental Health Act 18 of 1973 (South Africa 1973):

- has been admitted as a patient to an institution in terms of a reception order;
- is being detained as a President's patient at an institution or other place specified by the Minister of Prisons (currently known as the Department of Correctional Services);
- is being detained as a mentally ill convicted prisoner at an institution or hospital prison for psychopaths and that he/she has for a continuous period of at least two years immediately prior to the institution of the divorce action not been discharged unconditionally as such a patient, President's patient or mentally ill prisoner; or
- is mentally ill and that there is no reasonable prospect that he/she will be cured of his/her mental illness, after having heard the evidence of at least two psychiatrists, one of which shall have been appointed by the court.

In addition, the Divorce Act 70 of 1979 (South Africa 1979) state that the court may grant a decree of divorce on the grounds that the defendant is by reason of a physical disorder in a state of unconsciousness, if it is satisfied that:

- the defendant's unconsciousness has lasted for a continuous period of at least six months immediately prior to the institution of the divorce action; or
- after having heard the testimony of at least two medical practitioners, one of which shall be a neurologist or a neurosurgeon appointed by the court, that there is no reasonable prospect that the defendant will regain consciousness.

In view of the above, divorcing spouses also have several options when it comes to choosing how they want to get divorced. According to Preller (2013:112), divorces are categorised in terms of uncontested/unopposed or contested/opposed, which are briefly explained next.

#### **2.2.2.1 Uncontested/Unopposed divorce**

Uncontested/unopposed divorce is when spouses work together to agree on the terms of the divorce and they consult with one attorney who is impartial/unbiased. An uncontested/unopposed divorce is granted as per the summons or the subsequent agreement between the divorcing spouses (Engelbrecht, Recken-Wentzel & Venter

1999:26). This type of divorce comprises default divorces, do-it-yourself divorces, mediation, collaborative divorces, and round-table meetings, and Preller (2013:112-117) explains them as follows:

- Default divorce is a form of uncontested divorce where the court grants a divorce by default if a divorce summons is served to the other spouse and he/she does not respond.
- Do-it-yourself divorce is a form of divorce where a divorce is concluded without the help of an attorney and it can be achieved in one of two ways. The local Magistrate's Court can provide the divorcing spouses with the necessary forms and further provide guidance on how to conclude the divorce without legal representation, or they can use the online divorce service to draft divorce papers and conclude the divorce.
- In mediation, an independent third party works with both sides to try to reach a settlement agreement and advises the parties on the various scenarios they could face if the matter goes to court. In this case, the mediator acts as a neutral third party and usually has a background in law and/or psychology.
- In collaborative divorces, each client's legal representative is present during negotiations to provide support and legal advice, and to manage the process. Although collaborative law is not yet practiced in South Africa, Preller (2013:116) believes that it will play a huge part in family law in the foreseeable future.

#### **2.2.2.2 Contested/Opposed divorce**

A contested divorce is when the parties are not able to agree on the division of their assets or the custody of the minor children. Furthermore, a contested divorce may include the maintenance amount to be paid to the spouse and/or children. According to Engelbrecht et al (1999:28-29), contested/opposed divorces involve preparing the summons, delivering the summons, filing a notice to defend, preparing for trial, the trial and court appearance itself and, lastly, granting of the divorce. In most instances, attorneys are involved in contested divorces to represent and guide the plaintiff and the defendant respectively with legal advice during the process. Divorce may be opposed to allow for negotiations until a settlement acceptable to both parties has been reached (Engelbrecht et al 1999:26). It is often left up to the court to decide on

the disputed matters. This kind of divorce may take anywhere from three months to three years or more to conclude (Preller 2013:117).

### **2.2.3 Divorce Statistics**

It is estimated that a considerable proportion of all marriages across the globe ends in divorce, particularly in the western world (Nielsen et al 2014:705). More precisely, divorce rates have increased extensively worldwide, particularly in the European countries, between 1960 and 2004 (Toth & Kemmelmeier 2009:208). Similarly, Symoens et al (2013:177) state that during recent decades divorce rates have risen in Europe, with crude divorce rates averaging 2.0 divorces per 1.000 inhabitants, or 40 to 50 divorces for every 100 marriages in the corresponding year.

The Office for National Statistics (2015:2) reflects that there were 114 720 divorces in England and Wales in 2013 and the highest number was among men and women aged 40 to 44. The statistical bulletin further reveals that for those married in 1968, 20% of marriages had ended in divorce by their 15<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, whereas for those married in 1998, almost a third of marriages (32%) had ended by the same time.

In the USA, divorce rates began to rise shortly after the American Civil War and continued on a steady upward course for more than a century (Coontz 2007:11). It is further estimated that about 5% of marriages ended in divorce just after the American Civil War, compared to an estimated 36% in 1964. The sharp increase in the incidence of divorce in the USA happened between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s. The divorce rate suggests that there is a high number of divorced persons who suffered the consequences of divorce in the USA. This statement relates to the assertion by Williamson et al (2016:1121) that divorce contributes towards the economic, physical, and psychological difficulties of divorced persons. Furthermore, divorce rates in the USA showed a two-fold increase between 1990 and 2010, with approximately 25% of all divorces in 2010 involving at least one spouse who was 50 years or older (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). Similarly, Perrig-Chiello et al (2015:387) suggest that divorce rates in the age group of 50 years and older have doubled in the last 20 years in the USA, just like in most European countries. These sentiments reaffirm that

divorce does not only affect a particular age group, but instead it happens in all the age groups.

In addition, Zastrow (2014:187) highlights the following statistical realities about divorce based on studies conducted in the USA:

- Divorce is most likely to occur when the partners are in their 20s.
- Divorce rates are higher for those who had a brief engagement.
- People who marry at a very young age (particularly teenagers) are more likely to divorce.
- Most divorces occur within 3 years after marriage.
- Divorce occurs more frequently at the lower socioeconomic levels.
- Divorce rates are higher for those with fewer years of schooling.
- Divorce rates are higher in urban areas than in rural areas.
- The more often individuals remarry, the more likely they are to get divorced again.

These realities suggest the complexity of divorce and that divorce rates remain high.

In Switzerland, the divorce rate for couples that have been married for more than 20 years has risen from 15% in 1970 to 28% in 2010 (Perrig-Chiello et al 2015:387). Equally, the divorce rates in China have increased dramatically since the 1970s (Wang & Zhou 2010:2). For example, China's crude rate (number of divorces per 1000 population) increased from 0.33 in 1979 to 1.59 in 2007 and its refined divorce rate (number of divorces per 1000 married population) increased from 0.85 to 2.62 over the same years (1979 to 2007).

In South Africa, it is estimated that about 23 885 divorce applications were received and processed by the end of December 2014 (StatsSA 2015a:7). The statistics on marriages and divorces in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:6-7) reflect divorce in terms of the following: the characteristics of the plaintiffs, number of times married, age at the time of divorce, duration of marriage of divorced persons, and divorced persons with minor children.

- **Characteristics of the plaintiffs:** The statistics on marriages and divorces in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:6) reflect occupation and gender as the

characteristics of the plaintiffs during divorce. However, it should be taken into consideration that these characteristics are based on the latest statistical release of 2013 on marriages and divorces. Based on these statistics, it is revealed that 12.7% of the plaintiffs were reported to be in clerical and sales occupations, 8.9% were managers and administrators; and 7.5% were professionals, semi-professionals and administrators. Moreover, about 14.9% of the plaintiffs who initiated divorce were reported to be men and were largely employed as managers or administrators, whereas 20.0% were reported to be women and were mainly in clerical or sales occupations.

- **Number of times married:** About 80.0% of divorce cases in 2013 for both men and women were mainly from first-time marriages, as compared to 10.0% of divorces reported from second-time marriages. Approximately 2.0% of men and women were getting divorced for at least the third time.
- **Age at the time of divorce:** The statistics (StatsSA 2015a:6) on marriages and divorces reflect that the median ages at divorce in 2013 were 43 years for men and 39 years for women. In this case, Black African men had the highest median age of 44 years, while the Indian/Asian and mixed population groups had the lowest median age, which is 37 years. There were fewer divorces revealed among the younger generation (less than 25 years old) and the older generation (65 years and older).
- **Duration of marriage of divorced persons:** According to StatsSA (2015a:7), almost 6 729 (28.2%) of the divorces in 2013 were from marriages that lasted between five and nine years, followed by 4 639 (19.4%) divorces from marriages that lasted less than five years. In terms of the population groups, about 33.5% of divorces are from the Black African population, 28.0% from the Coloured population, 25.1% from the Indian/Asian population, and 26.4% from the White population, and all were marriages that lasted for less than 10 years. Furthermore, the statistics reflect that for the white population an equally high proportion (24.5%) of divorces occurred in the first five years of the marriage.
- **Divorced persons with minor children:** In 2013, 12 999 (54.4%) of the 23 885 divorces involved couples with children younger than 18 years. The coloured population had the highest (64.0%) percentage and the white population had the lowest (46.6%) percentage (StatsSA 2015a:7).

The following table illustrates the number of published divorces in South Africa by population, for the period of 2003 – 2013 (StatsSA 2015a:35).

**Table 2.1: The number of published divorces in South Africa**

Year	Total	Numbers					
		Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Mixed	Unspecified
2003	31 566	7 657	3 911	1 508	12 639	532	5 319
2004	31 768	8 965	3 300	1 648	12 437	594	4 824
2005	32 484	8 672	3 568	1 635	11 582	538	6 489
2006	31 270	9 113	3 451	1 676	11 079	613	5 338
2007	29 639	9 055	3 558	1 715	9 935	865	4 511
2008	28 924	10 110	3 057	1 802	9 481	902	3 572
2009	30 763	10 528	4 016	1 610	9 981	2 912	1 716
2010	22 936	8 169	3 189	1 294	6 995	31	3 258
2011	20 980	7 517	3 473	1 359	6 730	-	1 901
2012	21 998	7 311	3 967	1 036	7 238	22	2 424
2013	23 885	8 656	3 888	1 425	7 561	24	2 331

The above table reaffirms that divorce rates remain high in South Africa. It further reflects an increase in divorce rates between 2002 and 2005, and the fluctuation in statistics is reflected between 2007 and 2013. The researcher is of the view that the variation in divorce statistics is based on the unstable number of marriages registered per year.

### 2.3 REASONS FOR DIVORCE

It is a well-known fact that there are reasons for each divorce and these reasons differ from one marriage to another. In most instances, divorce is triggered by problems that could be apparent from the beginning of the relationship or that could arise and then worsen over the course of the relationship (Williamson et al 2016:1121). Some of the problems that lead to divorce include, amongst others, infidelity, incompatibility, drinking or drug use, lack of commitment, conflict/arguing, and growing apart

(Williamson et al 2016:1121). On the same note, a study conducted by Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen and Markham (2013:133) revealed lack of commitment, infidelity/extramarital affairs, too much arguing or conflict, economic hardship, lack of support from a spouse, financial problems, substance abuse, domestic violence, marrying too young, little or no premarital education, and religious differences as the reasons for divorce. Adding to the above, Tumin and Qian (2017:2) state that unemployment exacerbates the marital strain that follows from financial difficulties and often ends in the breakdown of the marriage. The aforementioned reasons confirm the notion that there are reasons for divorce and that these reasons are based on the individual experiences of divorced persons during their marriages, including the relationship problems they were confronted with during their marriages. Some of the relationship problems that may lead to divorce relate to communication difficulties, time spent together, sex, money, and household management (Williamson et al 2016:1121).

It is worth taking into consideration that divorce mainly occurs based on the decision taken by one or both of the spouses to terminate their marriage contract. In other words, divorce may be favoured or rejected, for instance, depending on the presence of dependent children in the marriage, since children are typically viewed as a reason for a couple to stay together as it is often considered beneficial for children to grow up in a household with both parents present (Toth & Kemmelmeier 2009:283). This implies that there could possibly be married couples who decide not to proceed with the divorce because there are children involved, despite the relationship problems they are faced with.

In most studies, infidelity and extramarital sex have been identified as common causes of divorce. Extramarital sex and divorce are associated because a number of studies found that divorced persons would often cite infidelity as a reason for divorce (Allen & Atkins 2012:1478). This suggests that divorce is more likely when one of the spouses is involved in an extramarital affair. Although infidelity may happen in the absence of marital distress, marital problems clearly increase the risk of infidelity (Allen & Atkins 2012:1488). From this statement, it can be alluded that marital problems are more likely to cause infidelity and eventually lead to divorce.

Apart from infidelity, abuse during marriage is reported to be one of the reasons for divorce. A study conducted by Watson and Ancis (2013:171-174) suggests that physical, emotional, economic, or sexual abuse during marriage is a cause of divorce:

- **Physical abuse during marriage.** A number of divorced persons described instances of physical abuse during their marriages, which included punching, slapping, choking and pushing, as the cause of their divorce.
- **Emotional and verbal abuse during the marriage.** Divorced persons noted many instances of emotional and verbal abuse during their marriages, for example:
  - being isolated from family, friends, and loved ones by their partners;
  - being prevented from pursuing their own goals and initiatives;
  - not being allowed to have their own viewpoints or opinions without incurring emotional abuse;
  - receiving verbally derisive comments based on their appearance; and
  - being brainwashed into believing that they were somehow inferior or that they needed guidance to function.
- **Economic abuse during the marriage.** Divorced persons reported that their abusers were economically abusing them in the following ways:
  - giving them meagre allowances;
  - restricting access to funds;
  - sabotaging their financial livelihood;
  - incurring and leaving large amounts of debt behind for them to pay; and
  - attempting to make them feel guilty for not being able to contribute as much financially.
- **Sexual abuse during marriage.** Most of the divorced persons noted that they experienced various forms of sexual abuse during their marriage, namely:
  - sexual coercion;
  - threats;
  - sexual assault;
  - partners withdrawing sex from them and engaged in affairs with other men/women;
  - being accused of being unfaithful, particularly if they did not want to have sex with their partners;
  - partners pressuring them for sex until they give in;

- partners being physically aroused and forcing them to have sex.

In addition, some studies refer to domestic violence and substance abuse as reasons for divorce. Although domestic violence may include physical, emotional, economic, and sexual abuse, the researcher is of the view that substance abuse in some instances may lead to domestic violence and consequently divorce. For example, in a study conducted by Scott et al (2013:137), it was revealed that domestic violence and substance abuse were the most endorsed reasons for divorce by divorced persons. Likewise, Kalmijn, Vanassche and Matthijs (2011:160) suggest that partner violence/ domestic violence, the use of drugs and alcohol, and depression increase the risk of divorce. On the same note, Killewald (2016:697) asserts that substance abuse may also lead to financial constraints among married couples and ultimately divorce. This means that limited financial resources stress marriages and increase the risk of divorce. These views relate to the sentiments of Kalmijn et al (2011:159) that financial problems can lead to tensions in a marriage, which in turn increase the risk of divorce.

There are also studies that reported the reasons for divorce as cited by divorced wives and divorced husbands. For example, a study conducted by Williamson et al (2016:1127) reported that wives often cited lack of communication, unwillingness to work on the relationship, lack of trust, jealousy, infidelity, moods, and tempers as reasons for divorce, whereas husbands cited moods and tempers, lack of communication, lack of trust, lack of quality of time spent together, poor decision making/ problem solving skills, and mismanagement of money, as reasons for divorce. Based on the above-stated reasons for divorce cited by divorced men and women, it is apparent that the reasons given are somehow similar. However, it is worth noting that the reasons stated above are based on studies conducted outside the borders of the African continent.

On the African content, a study conducted by Ntimo-Makara (2009:49) in Lesotho reveals the following as reasons for divorce: eagerness to protect the property against an extravagant spouse who had accumulated unnecessary debts, adultery, domestic violence, abuse of marital power, desertion, irresponsibility and non-support of the family, disrespect, and physical and sexual abuse. Another study conducted by Adetunji (2012:117) in Lagos, Nigeria, found that childlessness, financial collapse,

infidelity, and sexual incompatibility were identified by student counsellors as major causes of divorce among couples in the Lagos metropolis. Adding to that, Preller (2013:2-4) reveals the following as some of the common reasons for divorce, based on a study conducted in South Africa:

- **Differences in priorities.** This happens when couples no longer prioritise or view issues in the same way.
- **Religious, cultural, or ethical differences.** Couples of different religions or cultures, or with ethical differences, may sometimes disregard the expectations of each other's religion, culture, or ethnicity, causing resentment.
- **Parental responsibilities.** It often happens when parents no longer co-parent their children.
- **Finances.** Disagreement on certain financial issues may result in undue stress on their relationship if not resolved.
- **Sexual incompatibility.** This happens when married men and women differ emotionally, mentally, and sexually.
- **Addiction.** Addiction of any kind may cause the separation of the married couple, as it throws family life off balance. The stronger the addiction, the more it puts undue strain on relationships.
- **Social media.** Social media affects privacy and family interaction more and more, as it blurs the lines between the public and private domain.
- **Infidelity.** Having an extramarital affair interferes with marriage relations, leading to the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage relationship.
- **Abuse.** Any form of abuse, be it physical, verbal, emotional, psychological or financial, leads to divorce.
- **Lack of communication.** Lack of communication is the single biggest cause of divorce.

Although the above-mentioned reasons differ from one divorced person to another, there seems to be great similarities in the reasons, as cited by different studies. It is clear that divorce has some dire consequences for divorced persons, regardless of the reasons that led to it.

The next discussion focuses on the consequences of divorce.

## 2.4 CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE

Divorce has both immediate and long-term consequences for divorced persons. Although divorce comes as a relief for some, more recent reviews of literature continue to reveal negative outcomes for divorced persons (Frisby et al 2012:716). In other words, there are divorced persons who manage the transition of divorce well, conversely divorce is an acute stressor that becomes chronic for many (Sbarra et al 2011:455). Many divorced persons experience an increased level of unhappiness, greater physical and psychological distress, more substance abuse problems, less dense and supportive social support systems, and lower levels of life satisfaction (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). These sentiments suggest that divorced persons are more likely to experience the negative consequences of divorce long after the finalisation of the divorce. In this regard, divorced persons often experience deteriorated physical and psychological conditions, including guilt, depression, distress and intimacy issues, for years following marital termination (Frisby et al 2012:716). Although the initiators of divorce are more likely to experience distress prior to divorce, the consequences of divorce may be suffered by all divorced persons regardless of who initiated the divorce. To support these views, Sakraida (2008:871) states that initiators of divorce normally experience distress prior to divorce and non-initiators of the divorce express greater distress after the divorce. This relates to an assertion by Mooney et al (2011:172) that leaving a bad marriage does not always result in increased well-being, because divorce is a trigger for even more problems after divorce. Based on this notion, it can be said that the initiators and the non-initiators of divorce are equally affected by divorce.

There are also studies that demonstrate that divorced persons have an elevated risk of suicide (Stack & Scourfield 2015:697). In other words, divorced persons are more likely to take their lives if they fail to adjust to the repercussions of divorce. Similarly, Sbarra et al (2011:454) suggest that divorce is a relatively common stressful life event that is purported to increase the risk for all-cause mortality. Based on the review of studies conducted in North America, and European and Eastern countries, Sbarra et al (2011:454) found that divorced persons had a higher suicide risk than their married counterparts.

Apart from the higher risk of suicide, divorce may lead to behavioural and health problems due to the inability of the divorced persons to cope with its stressful nature. The stressful nature of divorce and its association with behavioural problems makes it a major health concern (Bouchard & Saint-Aubin 2014:481). As a psychological and interpersonal stressor, divorce has the potential to disrupt biological processes that are important to health and well-being and in doing so can increase the risk for health problems (Sbarra et al 2011:455). Likewise, Nielsen et al (2014:705) suggest that divorce is known to be a profoundly stressful life event, which not only leads to high levels of anger and despair, but also seems to have detrimental long-term effects on general health.

It is further postulated by Bouchard and Saint-Aubin (2014:481) that lower marital satisfaction and more maladaptive personality characteristics are amongst the many risk factors associated with divorce, especially for remarried couples. These views reaffirm the long-term consequences of divorce, which are more likely to follow the divorced persons into their next marriage. This is founded on the notion that divorced persons may suffer from a loss of trust, a lowered self-esteem, increased anxiety, increased worry about being hurt in future relationships, lowered confidence, preoccupation with what others think, negative emotions, anger, and depression (Frisby et al 2012:719).

In addition, Simonic (2014:205-207) highlights the following consequences of divorce, observable when working with divorced persons:

- **Emotional consequences.** A wide range of emotions that can sometimes be positive, but are mostly negative, accompany divorce. These emotions include anger, guilt, fear, sadness, depression (sometimes accompanied by suicidal thoughts), bitterness, and feelings of frustration. When divorced persons fail to deal with the emotional consequences of divorce, they are likely to commit suicide. Another stressor that may lead to suicidal thoughts include a decline in the standard of living, which generally results from splitting one household into two and losing economies of scale (Amato 2014:10).
- **Behavioural and financial consequences.** Divorce impacts the emotions and actions of the individual. Routine activities of everyday life have to continue after divorce, but now everything has to be done without the assistance of a partner.

Change in a person's current financial status can reflect in other forms of material loss, such as moving into less expensive housing, the sale of property, leaving a community that afforded the person a network of friends and social support, etc. All of this often leads to a change in the behavioural patterns and activities of everyday life.

- **Social consequences.** When the relationship between partners dissolves, the ramifications spread out to relationships with others, for instance, children, parents and other relatives, whose reactions can vary from shock and rejection, to rage and fear. Criticism often emerges from those who reject, condemn, blame, and even occasionally mistreat the divorced person, and can even come from married friends who may feel threatened.
- **Physical and health consequences.** Divorce can be detrimental to the health of individuals. Stress affects the immune system and lowers the body's capacity to defend itself from infections and diseases. According to Sbarra, Hasselmo and Bourassa (2015:110), divorced persons suffer health wise after divorce because they suffer distress for a prolonged period of time and remain vulnerable as a consequence of the divorce experience. Thus, their physical health and well-being remain negatively affected until such time that they discover new meaning in their lives.
- **Spiritual consequences.** Divorce can lead some into pursuing a deeper relationship with a spiritual being, often because the divorced person seeks support in spirituality. Conversely, others might project their anger towards spirituality. The community might condemn and blame the divorced person. Many also abandon their spiritual life and activities.

Although there is reaffirmation from studies conducted across the globe that divorce negatively affects the well-being of divorced persons, Amato (2014:9) proposes a straightforward model to understand why divorce affects people negatively. In terms of this model, divorce should be viewed as a process that unfolds over months and even years, during which time a variety of stressful life events occur, namely:

- A decline in the standard of living, which generally results from splitting one household into two and losing economies of scale. This is simply because divorced persons often move after divorce, and it is a time-consuming and stressful experience for many people.

- Parents who retain custody of children (usually mothers) often experience the strain of solo parenting, given that a second parent is no longer present in the household to share daily childrearing tasks. Correspondingly, non-resident parents (usually fathers) often experience the loss of daily interaction with their children.
- Because married couples tend to socialise with other married couples, newly divorced adults often find that they drift apart from former spouses over issues of child residence and access.
- Divorce also means the loss of the benefits associated with marriage. For many people marriage provides emotional support, companionship, a regular sexual partner, and economic security.

All of these stressful features of divorce can take a cumulative toll on divorced persons' physical and mental health. Moreover, the severity of the consequences of divorce becomes unbearable to divorced persons and leads to more post-divorce challenges, which are discussed next.

## **2.5 POST-DIVORCE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES**

The end of marriage is an upheaval that often entails a wide variety of challenges. Some of these challenges emanate from the substantial financial changes and legal involvement, the renegotiation of parenting relationships and the management of co-parenting conflicts, changes in friendships and social networks, and moving, as well as a host of psychological challenges (Sbarra et al 2015:109). In other words, the post-divorce challenges and needs experienced by divorced persons relate to life readjustment. Life readjustment after divorce is necessary for divorced persons, as they begin to face life on their own without the other partner.

One of the challenges faced by divorced persons after the dissolution of their marriage relates to the upbringing of children, if there are children involved. Following divorce, the majority of parents share legal custody, and it is becoming increasingly common for them to share physical custody of their child, meaning that both parents have the right to make decisions for the child and the child resides with each parent for a certain period of time each year (Markham, Hartenstein, Mitchell & Aljayyousi-Khalil 2015:2).

However, divorced persons may be confronted with a long-term co-parenting conflict (Sbarra et al 2011:455). On the same note, Frisby et al (2012:720) postulate that divorce is not an end state to a relationship; instead, divorced persons enter into a dynamic post-marital relationship and state of being. This means that communication between divorced persons who share children is deemed to continue after divorce, and for that reason they may be required to develop new disclosure and privacy rules to maintain a harmonious relationship and negotiate co-parenting responsibilities. Similar sentiments are shared by Hansson and Laidmae (2014:89), namely that the divorce process continues beyond divorce itself, as different subjects in dispute such as the custody rights and living arrangements of children, the role of the non-resident parent, economic issues and many others, have to be determined.

In many instances divorce involves custody disputes, which are more likely to manifest beyond the finalisation of divorce by a court of law, especially if there is high tension between the divorced persons. In this regard, divorce matters involving violence are more likely to involve adversarial custody disputes (Watson & Ancis 2013:167). Although there is a common perception that a judicial bias exists in favour of women gaining custody of children, research has suggested that fathers obtain primary or joint physical custody a majority of the time when they actively seek it (Watson & Ancis 2013:167). This suggests that both men and women are eligible to gain custody of their children regardless of gender. In many countries joint physical custody, which refers to arrangements in which children are in the equal care of each parent each year, is applied (Lavadera, Caravelli & Togliatti 2012:1537). With joint custody, divorced parents are involved in co-parenting, although it may be challenging, especially if there is constant dispute amongst them or if they do not agree on the method of co-parenting.

Co-parenting requires joint efforts from both divorced parents and therefore continuous disputes may pose a huge challenge. Adding to that, Markham et al (2015:2) suggest that co-parenting consists of more than just the duties associated with caring for a child, as it includes attitudes as well as behaviours. The study conducted by Markham et al (2015:14) reports that divorced persons with formal custody arrangements were more likely to establish rigid boundaries relating to the methods they used to communicate with their former partners, namely:

- **Avoiding talking to their ex.** Most divorced persons reported using text or email to communicate with their former partners in order to limit direct communication with them.
- **Getting it in writing.** The majority of divorced persons described preferring to email and text, because it provided a written record of what was said.

These kinds of arrangements were different from divorced persons with informal arrangements, as they expressed the importance of setting aside their interpersonal relationship issues to focus on the children. This points to the importance of divorced persons redefining their parental roles and sticking to them, in order to effectively co-parent. Most research regarding co-parenting has categorised co-parenting relationships in terms of cooperative parents and conflicted parents (Markham et al 2015:2-3). Cooperative parents are parents who are able to interact with one another to share child-rearing responsibilities. Cooperative parents avoid arguments and do not undermine each other's parenting efforts. On the other hand, conflicted parents have a relationship that is riddled with conflict and they may try to undermine each other's parenting. Moreover, conflicted parents hardly ever agree and it poses a challenge as one or both parties may want to dent the other party's parenting ability.

Post-divorce relationships may also be dynamic and/or challenging as divorced persons develop new types of relationships, namely perfect pals, cooperative colleagues, angry associates, fiery foes, and dissolved duos (Frisby et al 2012:720-721).

- **Perfect pals** are described as friends who are amicable in all aspects of their lives. With this type of relationship, divorced parents are able to reach an amicable agreement without disputes.
- **Cooperative colleagues** are successful as co-parents, but do not deal with one another in other interpersonal aspects of their lives. In other words, the focus is on co-parenting, rather than on matters outside the scope of parenting.
- **Angry associates** are characterised as hostile and limit their interactions with one another to avoid conflict. Co-parenting is not effective in this type of relationship, as the divorced parents hardly interact.

- **Fiery foes** are extremely hostile and experience great conflict in both the parental and personal realm. Just like with angry associates, co-parenting in this type of relationship is not effective, as there is high tension between the divorced parents.
- **Dissolved duos** are divorced persons who have ceased all contact with one another. The divorced parents do not communicate at all and this is one type of relationship which negatively affects co-parenting.

Although there may be challenges with the first two post-divorce relationships (namely perfect pals and cooperative colleagues), challenges are more likely to happen with the last three types, namely angry associates, fiery foes, and dissolved duos. The constant conflicted and hostile relationship amongst the divorced parents in the angry associates and fiery foes types is a challenge, as the good co-parenting relationship may be tarnished. Even though the divorced persons in the dissolved duos type of relationship may have ceased all contact with one another, there may be challenges in co-parenting, especially if the line of communication is not clearly defined.

Co-parents who have amicable relationships are more likely to communicate with former partners through a variety of methods about a number of topics, and are able to use technology to aid them in communicating with their former partners about parenting (Markham et al 2015:3). On the contrary, co-parents with contentious relationships avoid communicating with former partners directly in person or on the phone, and communicate with them through indirect means and use communication technology to keep records of conversations with their former partners, limit the co-parent's ability to have an input in making decisions about the children, and influence the behaviour of the former partner.

Divorced persons are also likely to spend less time with their children, because there is only one person to fulfil the breadwinner and caregiver roles (Fagan 2012:464). Although there may be a need for divorced persons to spend quality time with their children, it may not necessarily be possible because they would be compelled to work harder to provide for their children. Therefore, spending less time with children is a challenge on its own for divorced persons. In fact, it becomes a huge challenge for them because they want to ensure that they provide for their children, and at the same time they want to spend quality time with them.

Apart from spending quality time with their children, divorced persons may develop a need to love or to be loved and this may result in them establishing a new relationship. In most instances, the introduction of a new partner reduces communication between former partners (Markham et al 2015:21). There may be different reasons for this, for instance a divorced person may want to invest more time in and focus on the new relationship by cutting ties with the former spouse. Sometimes the new partner may instruct them to cut ties with the former partner, as he/she may not be comfortable with them maintaining contact. Whatever the reason may be, reducing communication with the former partner may present some challenges and may affect co-parenting, as it would mean that they no longer communicate about the upbringing of their children. The situation could be worse if children do not approve of the new relationship.

The next discussion focuses on post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction. The significance of expounding on post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction is that the reader will be introduced to some of the factors that contribute towards post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction arising from the literature review.

## **2.6 POST-DIVORCE ADJUSTMENT AND LIFE SATISFACTION**

Although divorce may bring some sense of relief to divorced persons, in most cases adjusting to being divorced is a difficult process (Hansson & Laidmae 2014:89). A post-adjustment phase includes a transition process of changing relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Sakraida 2008:869). The post-divorce psychological adjustment may also include managing divorce-related distress to re-establish a lifestyle as an independent adult with social support systems (Sakraida 2008:871). This signifies the importance of post-divorce adjustment for the well-being of divorced persons. Research shows that divorced persons are far less likely to experience well-being after divorce (Fagan 2012:464). According to Frisby et al (2012:716), the negative impact of divorce signifies the importance of understanding ways to alleviate the detrimental psychological, emotional, and physiological consequences that divorced persons experience. The inability of divorced persons to adjust to the aftermath of divorce may be detrimental to them.

Even though divorce has negative effects on the well-being of divorced persons, some divorced persons experience positive outcomes, as they seem to be resilient to this adverse event (Frisby et al 2012:716). Therefore, resiliency and adjustment to divorce more likely lead to life satisfaction. Several authors have pointed to the factors that influence adjusting to divorce, such as gender, education, employment, initiator or non-initiator role, and changes in life conditions (Hansson & Laidmae 2014:89). Though the above-mentioned factors may be useful to divorced persons, it should be noted that adjustment to divorce is not easily generalised, as it depends on the coping ability of each individual.

In addition, Perrig-Chiello et al (2015:388-389) suggest the following factors regarding post-divorce adjustment:

- Individuals with high scores in openness and extraversion seem to be better able to adapt to the new situation.
- The ability to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical function in the face of disruptive events (trait resilience) can have a beneficial impact on adaptation.
- Having children can present an important resource for adaptation.
- Whether men and women differ with regard to adaptation is rather controversial, because some studies found men to adapt better and more quickly to the new situation, and others found just the opposite, whereas others did not find any gender differences at all.

From the above-mentioned factors, it is clear that post-divorce adjustment cannot be attributed to a single factor, as it is a transition process which requires transformation in a number of aspects. Furthermore, post-divorce adjustment has nothing to do with gender, as both men and women are equally affected by divorce. Given the adverse consequences and effects of divorce on divorced persons, it becomes imperative for divorced persons to adjust. Failure to do so may result in dissatisfaction with life in general. The ultimate goal of adjustment as envisaged by divorced persons is life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is defined by Prasoan and Chaturvedi (2016:26) as a degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole and it includes

the desire to change one's life, satisfaction with the past, satisfaction with the future, and significant other's views of one's life. It is about living a satisfactory and quality life, with excellent physical, social, financial, mental, and psychological stability. Life satisfaction can also be understood as the subjective assessment of the overall quality of life (Comert, Ozyesil & Ozguluk 2016:237). In other words, divorced persons who suffer from psychological tension, such as depression and anxiety, are more likely to experience lower life satisfaction.

A study conducted by Bowen and Jensen (2017:1369-1373) reveals the following regarding post-divorce life satisfaction:

- **Divorced more than once.** Divorced persons who had experienced more than one divorce were more likely to report lower life satisfaction, as compared to divorced persons who had experienced only one divorce.
- **Who asked for the divorce?** Divorced persons who reported that they either initiated the divorce or shared in the initiation of the divorce have higher life satisfaction than their counterparts.
- **Age of children when divorced.** Divorced persons who divorced after the age of 50 years relied on their children for emotional support.
- **Experience with other personal life events.** Negative experiences with other life events have a negative influence on life satisfaction.
- **Current stress, strain or pressure.** Divorced persons who reported high levels of ongoing stress, strain or pressure in their lives also reported low levels of life satisfaction.
- **Gender.** Limited empirical evidence exists regarding gender differences in post-divorce life satisfaction amongst divorced persons and therefore no specific hypothesis was offered about the influence of gender on life satisfaction.
- **Education.** High levels of post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction have been found among divorced persons who had attained high levels of education.
- **Household income.** Divorced persons in high-income brackets reported being happier and less depressed than divorced persons in lower income brackets, who likely faced more economic challenges.
- **Future relationship fears.** Divorced persons who reported high levels of fear regarding future relationships, such as concerns about being alone after the

divorce, never finding another intimate partner, or failing at a subsequent marriage, also reported low ratings of life satisfaction.

- **Health.** Divorced persons who reported excellent health also reported higher ratings of life satisfaction than those who reported poor or fair health.
- **Religious and family support.** Divorced persons who received religious or family support to cope with the divorce reported higher levels of life satisfaction.
- **Marital status or living with a partner.** Divorced persons who reported remarrying or living with a partner also reported higher levels of life satisfaction than their counterparts who were not currently involved in such a committed relationship.
- **Right decision to divorce.** Divorced persons who ascribed a positive interpretation to their divorce also reported high ratings of life satisfaction.
- **Coping strategies.** Divorced persons who used one or more active coping strategy reported higher life satisfaction than those who merely “toughed it out”.

Based on the above-mentioned, it is apparent that divorced persons who are financially independent, in good health, satisfied with the decision to divorce, have attained a high level of education, have religious and family support, and are more certain about their future, are more likely to experience higher life satisfaction. It means that the contrary may lead to post-divorce maladjustment and consequently lower satisfaction with life. It is therefore evident that post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction are crucial in the well-being of divorced persons. In order to assist divorced persons with post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction, the government should develop clear social welfare policies that specify what needs to be done and what kind of services should be provided to divorced persons. Social welfare policies are necessary, as they provide guidelines on any matters that affect the quality of life of the people, including divorced persons. As such, the next discussion focuses on social welfare policies.

## **2.7 SOCIAL WELFARE POLICIES**

This section comprises two categories, namely understanding social welfare policies and the development of social welfare policies.

### **2.7.1 Understanding Social Welfare Policies**

Understanding social welfare policies and the framework from which they are developed enables social workers to be more effective in influencing the policy development process (Ambrosino et al 2012:128). Social welfare policies are regarded as the collective strategies that aim to address social problems and they are implemented through social welfare programmes and carried out by social service professionals such as social workers (Mbedzi 2015:44). Through social welfare policies social workers are able to determine who is eligible for services and to what extent such services should be provided. It is suggested by Patel and Selipsky (2010:50) that social welfare policies provide the overall framework or plan of action drawn up by government to guide public officials on how to address specific social issues. In order to meet human needs and promote the social well-being of the population as a whole, social welfare policies should reflect on the historical perspective of social welfare in a country. It is for such reasons that different countries have developed their own social welfare policies designed to address the needs and promote the social well-being of its citizens. This corresponds with the views of Ambrosino et al (2008:149) that social welfare policies refer to anything a government chooses to do or not do that affects the quality of life of its people, and these policies are influenced by the prevailing values. In other words, social welfare policies are based on the equitable sharing of the resources through government systems.

Social welfare policies are often conceived as the public management of social risks (Koch, Gullberg, Schoyen & Hvinden 2016:706). These could be risks relating to social security, health, unemployment, and any other issues that affect the quality of the people's lives, divorce included. In the same way, Burgoon (2006:178) postulates that social welfare policies mostly include social security, unemployment, sickness, disability, health, and other policies explicitly furthering social rights. There are three main approaches to social welfare policy, as encapsulated by Mbedzi (2015:44-45), namely the residual approach, institutional approach, and social development approach. Additionally, Patel and Selipsky (2010:50-52) suggest that the residual, institutional, and social development approaches are the three ways of thinking about social welfare policy.

- **Residual approach** – this approach takes into account the two natural systems (individuals and families) through which people meet their needs. When these two systems fail to meet people’s needs, state welfare is introduced, only for a short period, as an emergency aid to assist people experiencing crises. The family and individuals take over the responsibility as soon as the crises are eradicated.
- **Institutional approach** – this approach argues that it is the state’s responsibility to support its members who are unable to provide for themselves due to circumstances beyond their control. Furthermore, it makes social welfare available to every citizen of the country, regardless of his/her financial situation.
- **Social development approach** – this approach emphasises the social and economic development of individuals, families and communities, and it includes raising awareness of social concerns, while at the same time developing methods to combat social challenges. In addition, the social development approach seeks to encourage people to participate and collaborate in their own development.

A historical perspective reflects that organised social welfare in Colonial America was essentially non-existent (Ambrosino et al 2012:129). In that era, families were accountable for taking care of their own and adults who could not support themselves through no fault of their own were cared for in the homes of others. However, most European states developed social policies to ensure a more just system of wealth distribution, after the Second World War (Lin & Chan 2015:831). Three social welfare policy models were identified after a review of social policy development worldwide, namely redistributive, developmental, and productivist models (Lin & Chan 2015:832).

- **The redistributive model** is based on ideologies of social justice and social citizenship, and it takes equality as its core value.
- **The developmental model** emerged as an alternative to the redistributive model, especially in third world countries, and it encourages the empowerment of civil society. Its roots are found in the community-based programmes initiated in former British colonies. It further stresses the need to mobilise families, neighbourhoods, and non-governmental agencies to encourage the self-reliance of individuals and families.

- **The productivist model** is another alternative to the redistributive model and it clearly has a pro-market orientation. The following characteristics are linked to the productivist model:
  - Social welfare policy is subordinated to economic policy and productive activities.
  - The state takes a dominant role in the relationships between the state, the market, and the citizenry.
  - The state considers economic growth its top priority.
  - Welfare is not a universal right for all citizens, but connected to their employment status in the labour market.

Although, different countries have adopted and/or developed different social welfare policies aimed at meeting the needs of the population, these policies have been informed by the historic and current state of each country's social problems. On the contrary, it should be noted that little or no attention has been given to develop social welfare policies that address the needs of divorced persons. Despite the reports from the previous studies which suggest that divorce rates have escalated across the globe and that many of the divorced persons are adversely affected by divorce, no policies could be found which directly focus on the needs of and services to divorced persons. In most countries the social welfare policies developed are aimed at addressing the challenges faced by families. This is reaffirmed by Matzke and Ostner (2010:387), who state that most of the welfare policies are designed to aid families and they vary across countries.

In South Africa, the responsibility of meeting social needs was largely taken on by families and society during the pre-colonial and pre-apartheid eras (Mbedzi 2015:51). In other words, people's survival and social needs were taken care of by family members who did not expect anything in return. This was mostly done in the spirit of humanity, also known as *Ubuntu*. Both colonialisation and apartheid shaped the evolution of the nature, form, and content of social welfare policy in South Africa (Mbedzi 2015:51). Under the apartheid government, the state maintained and protected certain vulnerable groups of people, particularly those who were considered as 'poor Whites', at the expense of all others (Sevenhuisen, Bozalek, Gouws & Minnar-Mcdonald 2003:301). Therefore, welfare was seen as a form of remediation for White

citizens. New social welfare policies have been developed since the demise of apartheid (Sevenhuisen et al 2003:299). In order to address the injustices of the past, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) was developed and it was aimed at addressing problems of poverty, housing, health, violence, and welfare in a coordinated and inclusive manner. The White Paper for Social Welfare was published in 1997 by the Ministry of Social Development and it formed the basis for several discussions on social welfare policy making.

In addition, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which was published in 1994 had an impact on the writing of the White Paper for Social Welfare (Sevenhuisen et al 2003:302). The RDP proposed the following ways to combine growth with development:

- meeting basic needs;
- upgrading human resources;
- strengthening the economy;
- democratising state and society; and
- recognising the state and public sector.

The basic needs strategy as proposed in the RDP was based on the following:

- Creating opportunities for all to develop their full potential.
- Boosting production and income through job creation, production and efficiency, improving conditions of employment and opportunities for all to sustain themselves through productive activity.
- Improving living conditions through access to better social services.
- Establishing a social security system and other safety nets to protect the poor, disabled, elderly, and other vulnerable groups.

The responsibility for the implementation of the social welfare policies to address the injustices of the past is assigned to the DSD, and the focal point of its actions is supporting family life and the strengthening of families in South Africa. As a result, the DSD released a draft of the White Paper on Families in South Africa in 2012, which was approved by parliament in 2013 and officially launched in October 2014 (Rabe 2016:1). The White Paper on Families (2013) is a policy document that guides the implementation of social work services to families. It is worth taking into consideration

that a white paper is usually preceded by a green paper, which is a draft policy document prepared by government for public consultation with interested parties and civil society organisations. It means that the green paper on families was seen as a vehicle for helping to prevent the family from further disintegration and vulnerability.

In the case of the White Paper on Families (2013), the process was somewhat different in that it was released more than a decade after the draft National Policy Framework for Families, but hot on the heels of the “Green Paper on Families”, which is about promoting family life and strengthening families in South Africa, released in 2011 by the DSD (Rabe 2016:2). The White Paper on Families (2013) is guided by different Acts (for example, the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, Divorce Act 70 of 1979, Marriage Act 25 of 1961, Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998, and many others) and various national policies (such as the draft National Policy Framework for Families, the Policy on Gender Equality, the Integrated Youth Development Strategy, and many more), as they were seen as relevant to the family in general and to specific family members and the issues affecting them. It should be taken into consideration that the White Paper on Families (2013) did not include divorce as one of the most crucial issues that affects families in South Africa, despite the impact it has on family relations (Abbassi & Nori 2015:21). Instead, it included poverty and inequality, unemployment, housing, HIV and AIDS, absentee fathers, crime, substance abuse, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and moral degeneration as some of the most important issues that affect families. Therefore, the researcher could not find any social welfare policy in South Africa with specific reference to divorce or issues relating to divorce and services to divorced persons. In order to effectively influence the development of social welfare policies, including policies to divorced persons, it is crucial to have an overview of the development of social welfare policies and this is the point of discussion in the next section.

### **2.7.2 Development of Social Welfare Policies**

The value of understanding the context in which social welfare policies are developed is that professionals, including social workers, are able to influence the process of developing such policies. Social welfare practitioners such as social workers are affected by and have the potential to affect social welfare policies (Ambrosino et al 2012:128). It is therefore imperative for social welfare practitioners to develop social

welfare policies that could be translated into subsequent action. The following policy models were suggested by Ambrosino et al (2012:128) and they serve as a framework for determining how social welfare policy is developed and implemented, namely the institutional model, process model, group theory model, elite theory model, rational model, and incremental model.

- **Institutional model.** In this model, the focus is on social welfare policy as the output of governmental institutions, such as congress, state legislatures, and the courts.
- **Process model.** The focus here is on gaining an appreciation for and an understanding of how social welfare policy decisions are made.
- **Group theory model.** The focus is on the interaction between political interest groups, such as advocacy groups, policy institutes, political action committees, or lobbying organisations.
- **Elite theory model.** The focus is on the preferences, values, and behaviours of the government elite, usually at the expense of other members of society.
- **Rational model.** The focus is on costs-benefits, long-term results, and the common good (rational policymaking is comprehensive, objective, and free from the influence of special-interest groups).
- **Incremental model.** The focus is on using existing policies as a baseline for change, and attention is concentrated on how new or proposed policies affect that base.

Taken alone or in combination, these models have an influence on guiding the development of social welfare policies. Furthermore, the models suggest that policy development should be done in such a manner that it should clearly state some rules and guidelines on how social welfare practitioners should execute their duties. These views resonate with Budzak's (2015:234) statement that policy development is important, as it sets out rules and guidelines on how people should take action. However, the development of social welfare policies is influenced by social values (Ambrosino et al 2012:127). For example, one of the social values as affirmed in the White Paper on Families (2013) is that families should promote, preserve, and strengthen the life of their members. On the other hand, there is an acknowledgement that families are strained by various social, cultural, and economic challenges, as well

as the impact of past policies that disrupted family life and that compromised the well-being of family members (Patel 2015:200).

Although it is not stated in the White Paper on Families (2013:22-30) as one of the issues that affects families, divorce results in adverse consequences for divorced persons and affects families, and divorce rates remain high in South Africa. These views resonate with Abbassi and Nori's (2015:211) assertion that divorce affects family relations in such a way that it becomes unbearable to divorced persons and family members. Families undergo changes in composition as a result of divorce and those transitions are difficult for all family members (Ambrosino et al 2008:327). Therefore, in developing social welfare policies, the changing nature of families due to divorce and their capacity to take care of their members must be taken into consideration. Similarly, Patel (2015:201) suggests that social welfare policies must take into account the changing nature of families.

Good social welfare policy simply cannot be developed without the input and involvement of the social work profession (Ambrosino et al 2012:128). However, it should be noted that developing social welfare policy is not a one-way undertaking, as there may be other professionals involved. On the same note, Patel and Selipsky (2010:55) state that social workers along with other professionals, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector are often involved in policymaking processes. The following suggestions were made by Ambrosino et al (2008:151) regarding the involvement of other disciplines in the development of social welfare policies:

- Social work professionals play a significant role in defining and shaping social welfare policy.
- Direct service workers have first-hand knowledge of the impact of social welfare policies on their clients in terms of what works, what does not work, and what has to be changed.
- Programme planners know which policies lead to trouble-free, straightforward implementation and which do not.
- Social welfare advocates provide important information to policymakers about the needs and concerns of the client groups they represent and monitor policy development to ensure that those needs and concerns are not neglected.

- Social welfare researchers develop the evidence base for deciding which policies are best suited to which client and under what conditions.

In addition, Patel and Selipsky (2010:55) postulate that the social service professions and researchers may bring their knowledge and experience from practice to bear on social issues or problems. Through the involvement of other professionals in the development of social welfare policies, evidence-based, straightforward social welfare policies that are best suited to clients (in this case, for divorced persons) may be developed. The involvement of the state in the development of social policy is also crucial, because the state becomes more directly involved if the family fails to take responsibility for its members (Rabe 2016:3).

Social welfare policies are sometimes also referred to as standard-setting documents, as they define how societies should address particular needs or promote social harmony (Patel & Selipsky 2010:58). Sometimes they may target specific groups and define what benefits such groups may receive. As a result, it is necessary to develop social welfare policies that would respond to the challenges faced by people, in particular a group of people affected by a specific social issue such as divorce. It is also crucial to develop social welfare policies that are aligned to the needs of divorced persons, given the adverse consequences of divorce and the post-divorce challenges. It should be noted that guidelines informing social welfare policy are presented in Chapter Six of this report.

The next section presents the generalist view of social work services, as well as social work services to divorced persons. In so doing, the reader will be introduced to and informed about the kind of services rendered by social workers to their client system, including social work services to divorced persons.

## **2.8 SOCIAL WORK SERVICES**

In this section, the generalist view of social work services and social work services relating to divorce will be discussed.

### **2.8.1 Generalist View of Social Work Services**

The significance of gaining a broad view of the social work services provided to the client system is that one becomes aware of the nature of such services and the methods used by social workers in service delivery. It may also help in identifying possible gaps in service delivery and improving such services. In general, social work services are aimed at addressing the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. The overall mission encompassed in the profession of social work is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enhance their lives, and prevent dysfunction (Rautenbach & Chiba 2010:5). Therefore, social work training is structured in such a way that it should empower social workers to become generalist practitioners who apply generalist social work practice in order to address multiple and complex challenges. Generalist social work practitioners utilise a variety of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being (Segal et al 2013:149). In other words, generalist social work practitioners provide a variety of services to individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, and these services are aimed at promoting the well-being of the client.

There are different fields of social work practice and these include services to address poverty; mental health issues; substance abuse; disabilities; health care; the needs of children, youth and families; older persons, youth and adults in conflict with the law or criminal justice system; social work in rural settings; and social work in the work place (Ambrosino et al 2012:139-140). The aforementioned relates to Schultz (2015b:168-183), in that social work services are better outlined in terms of the following fields of social work practice: health care (which includes HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections, mental health, and disabilities), child care (which includes child abuse, street children, child-headed households, foster care, and adoption), and family care (which includes domestic violence, marriage counselling, couple's counselling, divorce, youth, and the elderly). In view of the above, social workers are required to utilise certain skills and competencies in order to provide effective services. Apart from skills and competencies, social workers should understand the multiple sources of knowledge about different social issues generated by diverse groups as well as their contexts, and should also be able to integrate those skills and knowledge into practice.

According to Anastas (2014:571), social work has three dimensions, aims or functions, namely the therapeutic, which may promote change and/or provide support; problem solving in human relationships, which promotes interpersonal and social harmony and/or serves social control functions; and promoting social development and/or social change. These three dimensions of the professional activities are key in rendering social work services.

In agreement with this, Miley et al (2009:11-12) state that social work intervention focuses on systems at many levels, namely micro-, meso-, and macrosystems.

- Micro-level intervention focuses on working with individuals, families, or small groups to foster changes within personal functioning, in social relationships, and in the ways people interact with social and institutional resources.
- Meso-level intervention creates changes in task groups, teams, organisations, and the network of service delivery.
- Macro-level intervention addresses social problems in community, institutional, and societal systems.

These levels of social work intervention can also be viewed in relation to the primary methods of social work intervention, namely casework, group work and community work, but also in relation to the secondary methods, namely research and administration, as they are central to social work services. In casework, social workers work with the individual on a one-on-one basis to solve his/her personal and social problems and it also helps the person to adjust to his/her environment, or to changing social and economic pressures that adversely affect him/her as an individual (Zastrow 2015:55). Group work is another method of social work intervention and it is aimed at facilitating the social, behavioural, and emotional adjustment of individuals who are finding it difficult to cope with life changes through the group process. Lastly, the community work method can be used to help people to deal with their social problems and to enhance their social well-being through planned collective action. In order to effectively handle the challenges faced by individuals, groups, families, organisations, and the larger community, social workers require knowledge and expertise in a wide range of areas (Zastrow 2014:43). After providing a holistic view of social work services and the methods of social work intervention, it is necessary to elaborate on social work services to divorced persons. In so doing, the reader shall develop an

overview of the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the intervention methods followed by social workers in providing such services. Therefore, the next discussion focuses on social work services to divorced persons.

## **2.8.2 Social Work Services to Divorced Persons**

Social work services to divorced persons are necessary for the well-being of divorced persons. In providing social work services to divorced persons, a social worker is required to use a range of theories and techniques or skills to promote the physical, emotional, and social well-being of divorced persons (Segal et al 2013:149). In general, social work practice has been enriched with the emerging knowledge of human development, ecology, economics, organisational behaviour, stress management, social change, and more effective intervention (Ambrosino et al 2012:105). It is for the same reason that social work practice entails the creative use of techniques and knowledge that guide intervention activities designed by the social worker/ social work practitioner. The effective use of techniques and knowledge by the social worker contributes towards the improvement and enhancement of divorced persons' social functioning and may lead to the provision of effective social work services to divorced persons. There are three major social work services to divorced persons, namely therapeutic services, as well as mediation and parenting plan services (Schultz 2015b:178-179). These services are now expansively explained below in order to get a broader perspective.

### **2.8.2.1 Therapeutic services**

The role of a social worker in divorce matters is always therapeutic (Schultz 2015b:180). Therapeutic intervention means that a social worker is able to intervene on a one-on-one basis with divorced persons, or with affected family member/s (through the casework method), or as a group (through the group work method) and provide therapy or counselling. Therapeutic intervention is significant in social work, given the adverse consequences associated with divorce. The study conducted by Mnyango in South Africa (Mnyango & Alpaslan 2018:86) maintains that when social workers provide therapeutic services to divorced persons, those therapeutic services should focus on:

- managing the stress caused by the divorce;

- dealing with the losses brought about as a result of the divorce to the point of accepting them;
- restoring the self-image and self-esteem tarnished by the divorce;
- healing emotionally before venturing into a new relationship;
- equipping divorced persons with –
  - relationship skills, in order to prepare them for new relationships;
  - parenting skills and skills on how to manage post-divorce parenting relationships;
  - dispute and conflict management skills involving children following the divorce;and
- informing and counselling children affected by divorce.

Although, social work services to divorced persons is currently not a specialised field in South Africa, social workers are required to apply professional knowledge and techniques during therapeutic intervention with divorced persons.

The goal of therapeutic interventions in working with divorced persons is to assist divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce and to bring change in their lives. For that reason, social workers are expected to follow certain procedures and steps embedded within a particular theoretical framework learned during their professional training at an institution of higher learning. This means that as trained generalist practitioners, social workers are required to use techniques, skills and theories during therapeutic intervention with divorced persons. Over the years, social workers have adopted a number of theoretical approaches in their work with individuals, families, and groups (Ambrosino et al 2012:109). Some of these theories are used to understand human behaviour and some are used for intervention. According to Sekudu (2015b:92), models, theories, approaches and perspectives are used in social work practice to assist the social worker in understanding the client systems better, so as to pave the way for appropriate intervention. In other words, social workers use different theoretical approaches to understand the experiences of divorced persons in order to determine an appropriate intervention.

Many social workers use an eclectic approach, whereby they integrate elements of different theories as a framework for understanding human behaviour and for practice

(Ambrosino et al 2012:109). An eclectic approach means that social workers utilise different theories, approaches, and models to understand their clients and for intervention. As suggested by Ambrosino et al (2012:109-113), some of the social work theories used during therapeutic intervention include the ecological systems approach, ego psychology, the problem-solving approach, behaviour modification, reality therapy, the task-centred approach, the client-centred/ person-centred approach, the feminist approach, and the solution-focused approach. The authors explain these theories as follows:

- **Ecological systems approach.** This approach is based on the perspective that individuals and their environment are continually interacting and that problematic behaviour is the result of disequilibrium between the individual and the environment. This means that an imbalance between divorced persons and their surroundings or significant others is more likely to cause psychological tension. For example, psychological tension is more likely to occur if the divorced person is unable to adjust to societal demands, which it turn could create tension between him/her and the society.
- **Ego psychology.** It stresses the interplay between the individual's internal state and the external environment. In other words, ego psychology emphasises a balance between the personality or character of a divorced person and the environment he/she finds himself/herself in, and failure to create such a balance may result in a stressful situation.
- **Problem-solving approach.** It is based on the motivation, capacity, and opportunity of the client systems for change. It requires divorced persons to do more than just identify and talk about their problems; it requires them to also move towards taking action about their situation in order to heal.
- **Behaviour modification.** This is based on the premise that behaviour is learned, and thus the client can be assisted to discard faulty behaviours and acquire new and appropriate response patterns. Through behaviour modification, divorced persons can be assisted to change their unacceptable behaviours by means of acquiring appropriate methods of dealing with the situation.
- **Reality therapy.** It is based on the assumption that individuals are responsible for their behaviour. In reality therapy, change is effected by confronting divorced

persons with their irresponsible behaviours and encouraging them to accept responsibility for their behaviour.

- **Task-centred approach.** This approach stresses the selection and establishment of specific tasks to be worked on within a limited time. By compacting the agreed-upon time limits to work on problems, divorced persons must concentrate their attention and energy on the problem and quickly adopt tasks to achieve a resolution.
- **Client-centred/ person-centred approach.** This approach is based on the perspective that clients know most about their problems and needs. Therefore, it seeks to provide an accepting emotional climate in which divorced persons can work out their own solutions with the support of a therapist.
- **Feminist approach.** This approach seeks to empower individuals who have been members of an oppressed group to find their own voices and view themselves as equals with other groups as they make decisions about their lives. Therefore, divorced persons who have been oppressed and marginalised may be assisted to find their voices and make decisions about their lives.
- **Solution-focused approach.** This approach often consists of a few sessions, during which the therapist guides the client through a series of questions. Such as: “when does this problem you are talking about not occur?”; “if you could wave a magic wand and make this problem go away during the night, when you wake in the morning, how will things be different?”; etc. In this case, divorced persons are assisted through a series of structured questions to seek solutions to their problems.

Apart from the above-mentioned theoretical approaches used in social work practice, Sekudu (2015b:93-106) highlights the following theories: the developmental approach, strengths perspective, empowerment approach, psychosocial theory, and crisis-intervention approach.

- **Developmental approach.** This is a planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development. This implies that divorced persons have to develop some skills that will assist them to face future problematic situations without seeking the assistance of a social worker.

- **Strengths-based perspective.** This perspective is based on the assumption that every person has some inherent strengths, regardless of the nature of the problem he/she might be experiencing. Through the strengths-based perspective, divorced persons are encouraged to utilise and focus on their strengths, instead of focusing on their weaknesses. In so doing, they will be able to overcome the challenges they are faced with.
- **Empowerment approach.** This is the process of helping individuals, families, groups, or communities to increase their interpersonal, personal, political, and socioeconomic power. Personally, divorced persons are helped to take control of their lives through changing their personal thinking patterns, feelings, and behaviour; interpersonally, divorced persons are assisted to manage their relationships more effectively; and politically, divorced persons are helped to change their manner of interacting with larger systems.
- **Psychosocial theory.** This theory is based on systemic thinking and affords the social worker the opportunity to adopt a comprehensive way of addressing the clients' problematic situations, utilising a variety of techniques. Through psychosocial theory, social workers adopt an eclectic approach and use different techniques in addressing the challenges faced by divorced persons.
- **Crisis-intervention approach.** This is based on the crisis theory, which states that individuals have the capacity to cope with their stressful situations. Through crisis intervention, divorced persons are assisted to develop new coping skills, as the current ones are not always able to assist.

These theoretical approaches are significant and play an important role during therapeutic intervention. It should further be noted that these theoretical approaches are applicable at different levels of intervention, for example at the individual, family and group levels, and that not all social work theories were mentioned due to the limited scope of this text. More precisely, social workers may use different theoretical approaches when providing therapeutic services to divorced persons individually, to family members affected by the divorce, and to divorced persons in the form of a group.

**a) Therapeutic services to divorced persons through the casework method of social work practice**

Casework refers to social work intervention at the micro-level, where the social worker intervenes with a single client and his/her family, who is experiencing some challenges in his/her social functioning (Sekudu 2015a:111). The aim is to help the individual resolve his/her personal challenges in his/her social functioning. Therefore, casework intervention includes providing therapy or counselling to a divorced person in order to assist him/her to readjust or cope with the life challenges brought on by divorce. However, it should be noted that social workers may also provide counselling or therapy to individuals during the process of divorce and not only after divorce. In other words, besides the post-divorce counselling, social workers may also provide counselling during the process of divorce, in order to enable the divorcing persons to adjust to the changes and the emotional aspects of divorce. The process of casework begins with the intake of the individual/family coming to the organisation for assistance and ends when their needs have been addressed and no further assistance from the social worker is required.

In casework, the working relationship between the social worker and client is very important and the social worker should be able to build such a relationship throughout the process. The therapeutic intervention process in casework is not a linear process and it should be noted that different authors have suggested that different processes be followed. It is a process that involves the development and implementation of a strategy for improving or altering some specified condition, pattern of behaviour, or set of circumstances in an effort to improve a client's social functioning or well-being (Sekudu 2015b:83). As an example, Black-Hughes and Strunk (2010:105-114) suggest the following process, which begins by building a client-social worker relationship, and moves on to assessment, collaborative case plan development, collaborative case plan implementation, and collaborative evaluation, and finally concludes with the discontinuation of services/ termination.

- **Client-social worker relationship.** This involves a social worker building a rapport with the client, allowing client self-determination, assuring confidentiality, and respecting and accepting the client. It means that the social workers providing services to divorced persons must be able to build

a good working relationship with their clients, give them an opportunity to make their own choices and decisions, and assure confidentiality, while being respectful and not judgemental, and accepting each client as a unique individual. In so doing, it enhances the working relationship between the social worker and the divorced person.

- **Assessment.** This involves the assessment of the client and it comprises identification of the client, the nature of the client's concerns, resources, the client's environment, and the client's strengths. In this stage, the social worker begins with the identification of the primary, secondary, and tertiary clients (in this case, divorced persons). Thereafter, he/she continues with the assessment of the nature of the problems and the available resources. The social worker also assesses the environment and the strengths of the divorced person.
- **Collaborative case plan development.** This is about the social worker developing a case plan, goals, and objectives with the client. The social worker involves the divorced person in this process as a way of empowering him/her and encourages him/her to develop objectives that are specific and measurable.
- **Collaborative implementation.** This includes making appropriate referrals for the services that the client needs, ensuring that the proper paperwork is completed in a timely fashion, and making arrangements for services to be funded, as previously discussed between the client and social worker. As with collaborative planning, the social worker is required to involve the divorced person in the process of implementation.
- **Collaborative evaluation.** In this stage, the social worker focuses continuously on whether the case plan intervention or action plan goals and objectives are being accomplished, and whether the divorced person views the accomplishments as having a positive or negative outcome.
- **Discontinuation of services.** This stage refers to the termination of services and the necessary support to the client is required from the social worker. After the termination of the services, the divorced persons should be able to function independently within their environment.

Similar steps were outlined by Sekudu (2015b:83-92) for the helping process in rendering casework therapeutic services, namely engagement/exploration, assessment, planning, implementation/intervention, evaluation and disengagement. These steps of the helping process flow from engagement/exploration to disengagement in order to form the process.

- **Engagement/exploration.** During this step, the social worker establishes a helping relationship with the divorced person, and helps him/her to relax and share his/her problem.
- **Assessment.** In this step, the information gathered during the exploration phase is analysed and synthesised to provide a concise picture of the divorced person and his/her needs and strengths.
- **Planning.** During the planning step, the social worker plans the actual intervention with the divorced person to ensure that the intervention options have the potential to address the identified needs.
- **Implementation/intervention.** During implementation the social worker and the divorced person implement the actual intervention together, based on the contract between them.
- **Evaluation.** This is an ongoing process whereby the social worker and the divorced person review the intervention activities and assess their impact on the divorced person's situation after the intervention phase has been introduced.
- **Disengagement.** This is the phase where the social worker and the divorced person agree to end the helping relationship that was established at the beginning of the helping process.

In addition, Cournoyer (2008:155-400) suggests the following stages for the social work helping process: preparing, beginning, exploring, assessing, contracting, working and evaluation, and ending.

- **Preparing.** In this stage, the social worker prepares himself/herself personally or professionally to ensure that he/she is ready to perform competently from the first moment of contact with the divorced persons.

- **Beginning.** The beginning of the process starts when the social worker and the divorced person meet each other for the first time and it includes the social worker introducing himself/herself and seeking an introduction from the divorced person, describing the initial purpose, the orientation, discussing policy and ethics, and seeking feedback.
- **Exploring.** The process of exploring allows the social worker and the divorced person to explore the person/ issue/ situation. It further affords divorced persons the opportunity to share information, thoughts, and feelings about themselves, the problems or concerns that led to the contact, and the social context and environment in which they function.
- **Assessing.** During the assessment phase the social worker, in collaboration with the divorced person, tries to make sense of the person/ issue/ situation in the present, past and future, and identifies the risk factors, strengths, and resources.
- **Contracting.** This stage follows integrally from the exploring and assessment processes and leads to the development of a service agreement or service contract between the social worker and the divorced person. Aspects of the contracting process typically begin during the exploring phase and continue throughout the assessment process.
- **Working and evaluation.** The working and evaluation phase is a transition phase whereby a social worker and the divorced person jointly agree to pursue goals. During this phase, the social worker and the divorced person evaluate and rehearse the action plan and review the action steps.
- **Ending.** This is where the social worker concludes the working relationship with the divorced persons. The four most common forms of concluding a relationship with divorced persons include transferral, referral, termination, and discontinuation.

The above-mentioned phases are some of the phases/steps which may be followed by the social worker in the casework therapeutic intervention process with divorced persons. Each of these phases/steps is aimed at facilitating change in divorced persons' lives. It should further be noted that there are professional values and communication skills used by the social worker in providing therapeutic services to divorced persons. Respect, individualisation, self-

determination, and confidentiality are some of the professional values suggested by Grobler, Schenck and Mbedzi (2013:39-45), and they may be helpful during therapeutic process.

With the value of respect, the social worker is able to accept divorced persons and not impose judgement on them. The value of self-determination enables the social worker to involve divorced persons in decision-making, and through individualisation the social worker treats divorced persons as unique individuals and refrains from generalising. The value of confidentiality is used by the social worker to assure divorced persons that what is being discussed between them and the social worker shall remain confidential. The value of confidentiality also involves the social worker informing divorced persons of his/her professional obligations when it comes to the value of life. This is an ethical dilemma, as it signifies that confidentiality may be breached under certain circumstances, especially if the life of the divorced person or any other person is threatened. Nonetheless, the social worker does not abandon the client, but continues to work with him/her. These professional values play a vital role during therapeutic intervention and guide the social worker's attitude throughout the process.

Communication skills form the basis for social work intervention at all levels, including micro-level (casework) and they include, amongst others, culturally competent communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, listening and active listening, warmth, empathy, and genuineness (Sekudu 2015a:112). There are two sets of communication skills that may be used during therapeutic intervention with divorced persons, namely basic communication skills and advanced communication skills (Grobler et al 2013:47-72, 82-102). Basic communication skills include, amongst others, basic empathy, listening, and attentiveness, and they may be used by social workers during therapeutic intervention with divorced persons in order to deal with the conscious experiences. On the other hand, the advanced skills include advanced empathy (which includes identifying the implied messages, connecting islands, and identifying themes), exploring discrepancies, and immediacy. Basic and advanced communication skills are mainly used to facilitate the change process

in the lives of divorced persons. Communication skills are useful during the therapeutic intervention process in casework with divorced persons.

**b) Therapeutic services through group work**

Apart from casework, therapeutic services to divorced persons may be provided in the form of a group. Group work is regarded as one of the methods of social work in which groups consisting of individuals are treated via the scientific manipulation of the group experience and group process, in order for individual members to grow, change, and develop according to their own abilities (Strydom & Strydom 2010:122). Therefore, therapeutic services through group work happen when two or more people are brought together by a social worker to satisfy a particular need. Usually, these are people who have common interests or needs that may be satisfied through group intervention. On the same note, Qalinge (2015a:131) asserts that group work is a method of working with people in groups for: the development of skills; personal growth and development through self-reflection; the enhancement of social functioning; achievement of socially desirable goals; and the accomplishment of tasks. The six primary purposes for treatment groups suggested by Toseland and Rivas (2009:20-21) that are applicable in working with a group of divorced persons are support, education, growth, therapy, socialisation, and self-help.

- Support group. The purpose is to help divorced persons cope with divorce and revitalise existing coping abilities.
- Education group. The aim is to educate divorced persons on a number of areas related to divorce through presentations, discussions, and experience.
- Growth group. This type of a group is aimed at developing the divorced persons' potential, awareness, and insight in a group context on divorce-related matters.
- Therapy group. The purpose of a therapy group is to change behaviour, and to facilitate correction, rehabilitation, coping, and problem solving through behaviour change interventions.
- Socialisation group. The aim is to increase communication and social skills and improve the interpersonal relationships of divorced persons through programme activities, structured exercises, and role-playing.

- Self-help. The goal is to help divorced persons solve their own problems.

These types of groups may be applicable in working with divorced persons, but the researcher is of the view that a support group is more appropriate, as it is aimed at assisting members to cope with stressful life events and enhance their coping abilities. Through the support group, divorced persons are encouraged to share their collective experiences in coping with the consequences of divorce. Although there are similarities between the support and therapy groups purely based on the fact that support is emphasised in both groups, the distinction is that a therapy group focuses on remediation and rehabilitation which may include a group for people addicted to drugs, a first-offenders group, and a group of mentally ill patients (Strydom & Strydom 2010:125). This implies that in therapy groups the social worker is often viewed as an expert or authority who assesses the problems and develops treatment goals, whereas in support groups the social worker encourages group members (divorced persons) to share their experiences and helps them to deal with a particular stressful event, namely divorce.

In addition to the above-mentioned types of groups, Corey (2016:5-10) identifies the following types of groups: group counselling, group psychotherapy, psychoeducational groups, and task facilitation groups. They are explained as follows:

- Group counselling has preventative, as well as remedial aims. For example, in group counselling divorced persons may be facing a situational crisis and temporary conflicts, struggling with personal or interpersonal problems of living due to divorce, having trouble with life transitions, or trying to change self-defeating behaviours.
- Group psychotherapy is a process of re-education that includes both a conscious and unconscious awareness, and both the past and present. Divorced persons are mostly people who are in need of remedial treatment, rather than developmental or preventative work. Therefore, the social worker assists them in developing better strategies to deal with their problems and make new decisions.

- Psychoeducational groups serve a number of purposes, such as imparting information, sharing common experiences, teaching divorced persons how to solve problems, teaching social skills, offering support, and helping divorced persons learn how to create their own support systems outside of the group setting.
- Task facilitation groups are designed to assist task forces, committees, planning groups, community organisations, discussion groups, study circles, learning groups, team building, programme development consultation, and other similar groups to correct or develop their functioning. These groups address the application of principles and processes of group dynamics that can foster the accomplishment of identified work goals.

Although the aforementioned types of groups may be applicable in dealing with a diverse number of social ills faced by people, it is apparent that group counselling is the most appropriate form of a group in dealing with divorced persons. Group counselling is similar to a support group in that it focuses on people facing a stressful situation or experiencing difficulties with life transitions, such as in the case of divorce. It should be noted that group work is a process and therefore there are stages to be followed by the group worker (social worker) in any of the above-mentioned types of groups. For example, Corey (2016:70-112) suggests the following stages in the development of a group: pre-group stage, initial stage, transition stage, working stage, final stage, and post-group stage.

- The pre-group stage involves the formation of the group and planning. The planning of the group begins with drafting a written proposal containing the basic purposes of the group; the population to be served; a clear rationale for the group, which elaborates on the need for and justification of that particular group; ways to announce the group and recruit members; the screening and selection process for members; the size and duration of the group; the frequency and time of meetings; the group structure and format; the methods of preparing members; whether the group will be open or closed; whether membership will be voluntary or involuntary; and follow-up and evaluation procedures.

- The initial stage is a time for orientation and exploration, determining the structure of the group, getting acquainted, and exploring members and expectations. During this phase, divorced persons learn how the group functions, define their own goals, clarify their expectations, and look for their place in the group.
- In the transition stage, members deal with their anxiety, defensiveness, conflict, and ambivalence about participating in the group. Here, divorced persons are usually willing to express certain feelings, thoughts and reactions that they may not have been willing to verbalise during earlier sessions.
- In the working phase, divorced persons have truly become a group and have developed relationship skills that allow them a greater degree of autonomy, and they are less dependent on the leader.
- The final stage is the consolidation and termination stage. In this stage, divorced persons consolidate the learning that took place in each of the sessions, they summarise and pull together loose ends, and integrate and interpret the group experience. It also involves dealing with feelings, each person examining the effects of the group on themselves, giving and receiving feedback, and completing unfinished business.
- The post-group stage involves evaluating the process and outcomes of a group and deciding on a time for a follow-up session to discuss the group experience and put it in perspective.

Toseland and Rivas (2009:151-396) suggest and discuss the following stages of group development: planning stage, beginning stage, middle stage, and ending stage.

- The planning stage involves establishing the group purpose, assessing potential sponsorship and mentorship, recruiting members, composing the group, orientating members, contracting, preparing the environment, preparing for virtual groups, and preparing a written group proposal.
- The beginning stage is about introducing new members, defining the purpose of the group, assuring confidentiality, helping divorced persons to feel part of the group, guiding the development of the group, goal setting,

contracting, addressing ambivalence and resistance, working with involuntary clients, and anticipating obstacles.

- The middle stage is characterised by an initial period of testing, conflict, and adjustment as divorced persons work out their relationships with one another and the larger group. Contracts are also negotiated and renegotiated, divorced persons establish their positions in relation to one another, and the group develops a niche within a sponsoring organisation.
- During the ending stage, the group's work is consolidated. The changes made by divorced persons individually are stabilised, and plans are made for maintaining these gains after the group ends. It is also a time when social workers confront their feelings regarding ending their work with a particular group.

These stages of the development of a group are, amongst others, some of the stages that a social worker can follow during the group work intervention process with divorced persons. The social worker's role is to help divorced persons share their experiences with the use of group work skills. Toseland and Rivas (2009:4) reaffirms the view that social workers use group work skills during group counselling to help meet the needs of individual group members and the group as a whole. By using group work skills, the social worker helps divorced persons to cope effectively with the negative consequences of divorce and prevent further emotional instability.

Below is an overview and the desired outcomes of the group leadership skills suggested by Corey (2016:29-30). It should be noted that not all group work skills have been included in the table below.

**Table 2.2: Group leadership skills**

<b>SKILL</b>	<b>DESIRED OUTCOMES</b>
Active listening	To encourage trust and client self-disclosure and exploration.
Restating	To determine if the leader has understood correctly the client's statement, and to provide support and clarification.
Clarifying	To help clients sort out conflicting and confusing feelings and thoughts, to arrive at a meaningful understanding of what is being communicated.
Summarising	To avoid fragmentation and give direction to a session, to provide for continuity and meaning.
Questioning	To elicit further discussion, to get information, to stimulate thinking, to increase clarity and focus, and to provide for further self-exploration.
Interpreting	To encourage deeper self-exploration, to promote full use of potentials, and to bring about awareness of self-contradictions.
Confronting	To encourage honest self-investigation, to promote full use of potentials, and to bring about awareness of self-contradictions.
Reflecting feelings	To let members know that they are being heard and understood beyond the level of words.
Supporting	To create an atmosphere that encourages members to continue desired behaviour, to provide help when clients are facing difficult struggles, and to create trust.
Empathising	To foster trust in the therapeutic relationship, to communicate understanding, and to encourage deeper levels of self-exploration.
Facilitating	To promote effective communication among members, and to help members reach their own goals in the group.
Initiating	To help members work more effectively, and to increase the pace of the group process.

Setting goals	To give directions to the group's activities, and to help members select and clarify their goals.
Evaluating	To promote better self-awareness and understanding of group movement and direction.
Giving feedback	To offer an external view of how the person appears to others, and to increase the client's self-awareness.
Suggesting	To help members develop alternative courses of thinking and acting.
Protecting	To warn members of possible risks in group participation, and to reduce these risks.
Disclosing oneself	To facilitate deeper levels of group interaction, to create trust, and to model ways of revealing oneself to others.
Modelling	To provide examples of desirable behaviour, and to inspire members to fully develop their potential.
Linking	To promote member-to-member interactions, and to encourage the development of cohesion.
Blocking	To protect members, and to enhance the flow of group process.
Termination	To help members assimilate, integrate, and apply in-group learning to everyday life.

The social worker can use the aforementioned group leadership skills during the facilitation of the group work process with divorced persons. In so doing, a conducive environment will be created whereby divorced persons will be able to support one another within a group setting and ultimately enhance their ability to deal with the aftermath of divorce.

### **2.8.2.2 Mediation and parenting plan services**

Although social workers mostly provide mediation and parenting plan services to divorced persons prior the finalisation of the divorce process, they also deal with post-divorce matters emanating from the mediation and parenting plan. Mediation gives an opportunity for individuals involved in disputes to resolve their disputes amicably, while at the same time reducing litigation and avoiding further harm to their relationships

(Palihapitiya & Eisenkraft 2014:1). Conflict between divorced persons and couples who are divorcing can thwart efforts to arrive at the decisions and agreements needed, and this can adversely affect children. The disputes related to the rights and responsibilities of divorced parents over their children are inevitable and therefore social work mediation services may be vital in this regard. In mediation services, social workers become impartial and provide divorced persons with a voluntary conflict resolution process in which they discuss their issues and explore options for a mutually acceptable agreement, especially on issues relating to shared parenting. Shared parenting is the extent to which mothers and fathers agree to, support, and coordinate childrearing tasks with each other (Sotomayor-Peterson, De Baca, Figueredo & Smith-Castro 2012:622).

On the other hand, Pickar and Kahn (2011:59) state that parenting plan evaluative mediation may be necessary in order to provide intermittent, out-of-court assistance to divorced parents needing expert help with parenting plan re-examinations or with resolving new child custody evaluation disputes. This signifies that there may be disputes emanating from the previously developed parenting plan and mediation services that may require social work intervention during the post-divorce phase. In this regard, parenting plan and post-divorce mediation services are necessary to address new matters or disputes related to shared parenting. Mediation provides a non-confrontational alternative to litigation and the neutral mediator (in this case the social worker) acts as facilitator, while disputants (in this case divorced persons) strive to arrive at agreements of their own making by analysing their issues, communicating needs and interests, and examining various solutions (Palihapitiya & Eisenkraft 2014:1).

The South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006a: section 33) suggests the following regarding a parenting plan:

- The co-holders of the parental responsibilities and the rights in respect of the child may agree on a parenting plan determining the exercise of their respective responsibilities and rights in respect of the child.
- If the co-holders of the parental responsibilities and rights in respect of a child are experiencing difficulties in exercising their responsibilities and rights, those persons, before seeking the intervention of a court, must seek to agree on a

parenting plan determining the exercise of their respective responsibilities and rights in respect of the child.

- A parenting plan may determine any matter in connection with parental responsibilities and rights, including:
  - where and with whom the child is to leave;
  - the maintenance of the child;
  - contact between the child and any of the other parties, and any other person; and
  - the schooling and religious upbringing of the child.
- A parenting plan must comply with the best interests of the child.
- In preparing a parenting plan, the parties must seek the assistance of a family advocate, social worker, or psychologist, or mediation through a social worker or another suitably qualified person.

In view of the aforementioned core issues relating to parenting plans, it is clear that the content of the parenting plan is more likely to change long after the divorce has been finalised and therefore social work intervention through mediation services is crucial in preparation for a new parenting plan. The changes relating to a parenting plan long after the finalisation of divorce may be due to changes in the circumstances of one or both of the divorced parents. As a result, social work services may be required to re-examine the entire parenting plan to the satisfaction of the divorced parents and children. However, Robinson, Stewart, Ryke and Wessels (2011:223) state that social workers are often not well-grounded in the legal requirements of facilitating, formulating, and implementing a parenting plan and this can have devastating effects if the proposed parenting plan is not workable, or if it is unrealistic or inadequate. The authors further suggest that substantive guidelines that are comprehensive and clear on the structure and general content of a parenting plan are needed for social workers in order to prevent dysfunctional situations, which might cause additional stress for the child. It is worth noting that mediation and parenting plan services are not sufficient in dealing with the aftermath of divorce, though they are mainly required during the process of divorce.

From the above discussion, it is clear that therapeutic services (through casework and group work intervention), mediation, and parenting plan services are central services provided by social workers to divorced persons.

After expounding the nature of social work services to divorced persons based on the literature review, including an overview of divorce, divorce statistics, reasons for divorce, consequences of divorce, post-divorce challenges and needs, post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction, social welfare policies and social work services, it is important to deliberate on the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The theoretical framework of the study plays a significant role in providing guidance throughout the entire research process. The researcher found these theories to be well-suited to explain and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services to divorced persons. Therefore, the next discussion is about the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

## **2.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section, the underlying theories and approaches that attempt to describe and explain the various dimensions relating to divorce, particularly divorced persons, will be presented. Several theories and approaches appeared to be relevant, but the researcher has opted to focus on three specific theoretical perspectives, namely the strengths perspective, person-centred perspective, and ecological systems perspective, as they offer frameworks for understanding and analysing the interrelationship between individual and social problems (Gray 2010:86). These theoretical perspectives further provide frameworks in relation to social work services to divorced persons.

### **2.9.1 Strengths Perspective**

The purpose of the strengths perspective is to help individuals in the context of an enriching collaborative partnership to identify, secure, and sustain the range of internal and external resources that are required to live in the community normally and independently (Salleebey 2009:48). The strengths perspective also emphasises the understanding of clients' needs, interests and strengths, rather than diagnosing and

labelling (Yip 2005:446). Likewise, Gray (2010:91) asserts that the strengths perspective positions the clients as the experts, rather than the social workers. In other words, the strengths perspective holds the view that people have the strength to overcome adverse situations they may encounter in their lives. Although the strengths perspective focuses on identifying the strengths of the client system, weaknesses may also be identified. However, the social worker has to assist the client to maximise their strengths and minimise their weaknesses. With the strengths perspective, social workers are challenged to see every person as having some inherent strengths, regardless of the nature of the problem he/she might be experiencing at the time when contact is made with the social worker (Sekudu 2015b:93). It means that in the strengths perspective, the focus is on possibilities, strengths, and resources, and not solely on problems. Therefore, in order to apply a strengths perspective, social workers need a clear understanding of how to focus on the present and incorporate a vision of the future.

Based on the adverse consequences divorced persons are confronted with, the strengths perspective provides an opportunity for social workers to assist divorced persons to draw on their inner strengths and utilise them to enhance their capacity to re-adjust and deal with the challenges they are facing. The social worker's role is to assist divorced persons in discovering, exploring, and utilising their strengths and resources in order to help them achieve their goals and realise their dreams.

The strengths perspective can best be understood in terms of the principles that guide it and the stages of strengths-based counselling.

### **2.9.1.1 *Principles inherent in the strengths perspective***

According to Salleebeey (2009:15), there are five principles that guide the strengths perspective and they are as follows:

#### **a) Every individual has strengths**

This principle postulates the view that every person is born with strengths, which may be suppressed by the unfavourable circumstances that they are exposed to in life. In order to discover clients' strengths, social workers must genuinely be interested in and respectful of the stories, narratives, and accounts of clients.

The unearthing of clients' identities and realities does not come only from a ritual litany of troubles, embarrassments, snares, foibles, and barriers. Rather, clients come into view when you assume that they know something, have learned lessons from experience, have hopes, have interests, and can do something masterly. These assumptions may be obscured by the stresses of the moment, submerged under the weight of a crisis, oppression, or illness, but nonetheless, they abide.

Divorced persons need assistance to discover their strengths in order to improve their life situation. Apart from that, they want to know that the social worker cares about them, that the social worker listens to them, that they will be respected regardless of their situation, and that the social worker believes that they can build something of value with the resources within and around them. Most of all, divorced persons want to know that the social worker believes they can surmount adversity and begin the climb towards transformation and growth. In so doing, they are more likely to draw from their strength and develop strategies to deal with the aftermath of divorce.

**b) Trauma, abuse, illness and struggle may be injuries, but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity**

People who experience a variety of traumatic incidents are often thought of as victims damaged by those incidents in ways that obscure any strengths or possibilities for rebounding. The reality is that there is pride/dignity in having survived life's obstacles. Often this pride is hidden behind embarrassment, confusion, distraction, or self-doubt. It means that social workers must support divorced persons in discovering their strengths, irrespective of their situation. Divorced persons become motivated to change when their strengths are supported. Instead of focusing on the challenges experienced by divorced persons, social workers should rather focus on the strengths they can utilise to bring about change in their current situation.

**c) Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the client's capacity to grow and change and take individual aspirations seriously**

With this principle, social workers must have high expectations of their clients' ability to change their lives and grow. There are no limitations on the clients' ability to grow and take their individual aspirations seriously. It is possible for social workers to assume that the situations, challenges, problems, and demographic characteristics of their clients might prevent them from growing and becoming the person they want to become. Change in people emanates from within and it cannot be imposed from without.

It is therefore vital for social workers to believe in divorced persons' potential to recover and have prospects that their dreams and hopes could be achieved without limits.

**d) We best serve clients by collaborating with them**

This principle urges social workers to collaborate with clients, because social workers who take on the expert position during a counselling session might never come to appreciate their client's strengths and resources. It is therefore imperative that social workers and divorced persons work together and that social workers connect to the stories, hopes, and fears of divorced persons instead of putting them in the narrow confines of a diagnostic category or treatment protocol. It would therefore be a serious mistake for social workers to undermine the wisdom, knowledge, and strengths of divorced persons, hence collaborative partnership is so crucial.

**e) Every environment is full of resources**

This principle suggests that no matter how harsh an environment, or how it may test the mettle of its inhabitants, it can also be understood as a structure full of resources and possibilities. In every environment, there are individuals, associations, groups, and institutions that have something to give, something that others may desperately need. This calls for social workers to explore and identify the resources and ultimately link divorced persons with such resources. These are resources aimed at enhancing the psychosocial well-being of divorced persons.

**f) Caring, caretaking and context**

Care is essential to a person's well-being and therefore caregivers should be able to render appropriate, quality support without sacrificing their well-being. Caring for one another is the most basic form of community participation. Social work is therefore about care and caretaking, and the strengths perspective is about the revolutionary possibility of hope realised through the strengthened power of social relationships in family, neighbourhood, community, culture, and country. As a caring profession, social work should provide the possibility of hope to divorced persons, realised through the strengths of social relationships in their families, neighbourhood, community, culture, and country.

The above-mentioned principles highlight the significance of recognising divorced persons as partners who need to be assisted in discovering their strengths and potential in order to improve their life situations, while keeping in mind the social contexts which may have an impact on their lives.

**2.9.1.2 Stages of strengths-based counselling**

There are 10 stages of strengths-based counselling suggested by Smith (2006:38-48) and they are as follows:

- (i) Creating the therapeutic alliance.** During this stage, the social worker builds a relationship with divorced persons by helping them to identify and marshal strengths and competencies to confront their difficulties and adversities.
- (ii) Identifying strengths.** The social worker allows divorced persons to narrate their life stories from a strengths-based perspective, letting them tell their life stories, make sense of their lives, and view themselves as survivors.
- (iii) Assessing presenting problems.** The social worker assesses the problems as presented by the divorced persons. Through assessment the emotional and behavioural skills, competencies, and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment are measured and contribute to a satisfying relationship between the divorced persons and the family members. The assessment also enhances divorced persons' ability to deal with adversity and stress, and promotes their personal, social, and academic development.

- (iv) Encouraging and instilling hope.** A social worker's counselling may be conceptualised as encouragement counselling that is based on the behavioural principle of positive reinforcement. The social worker positively reinforces divorced persons for coming to therapy, whether voluntary or involuntary, by emphasising their strength.
- (v) Framing solutions.** The social worker understands that divorced persons have to find solutions to their troubling situations. In so doing, the social worker engages divorced persons in solution building conversations.
- (vi) Building strength and competence.** The social worker bears in mind that divorced persons require competence and strength building across the developmental life span. These strengths include courage, insight, optimism, perseverance, putting troubles in perspective, and finding purpose.
- (vii) Empowerment.** During empowerment, the social worker works to develop a critical consciousness about the interconnections in the realities of divorced persons' socio-political life.
- (viii) Changing.** Social workers understand that change is a process, not an isolated event. A divorced person's strength is viewed as the foundation for making the desired changes.
- (ix) Building resilience.** The social worker actively seeks to help divorced persons build resiliency that will fortify them against a recurrence of the same problem or to insulate them from similar problems.
- (x) Evaluating and terminating.** During this phase, social workers and divorced persons honour the progress that has been made. They determine whether the divorced persons have accomplished goals, whether changes can be attributed to the intervention, and what strengths and environmental resources were most significant in helping them achieve their goals.

The afore-mentioned stages of strengths-based counselling point to the fact that social workers use their professional skills and knowledge to assist divorced persons to explore their strengths and resources in the social environment, and also use them to address their challenges. The strengths perspective helps divorced persons discover their inner strengths that will enable them to cope with aftermath of divorce.

### **2.9.2 Person-centred Perspective**

The person-centred approach (hereafter referred to as PCA), previously known as the client-centred approach, was developed by Carl Rogers in the 1940s and its focus is not to change people, but to create an environment in which people can feel safe to explore themselves and then decide if and how they want to change (Sekudu 2015b:101). The PCA rests on the assumption that people have the capacity to understand their problems and have the resources within themselves to resolve these problems (Corey, Corey & Corey 2014:116). The aim of the PCA is to enable people to discover for themselves what they are struggling with and then find their own unique way forward (Grobler et al 2013:3). In other words, in the PCA people are considered capable of solving their own problems if they feel accepted by the therapist. The fundamental goal in the PCA is to provide a climate of safety and trust in the therapeutic setting so that the client can become aware of the obstacles to their growth (Corey et al 2014:116). The emphasis is based on the attitude and personal characteristics of the therapist and the quality of the relationship between the client and the therapist as the prime determinates of the outcome of the therapeutic process (Corey 2017:165). These sentiments attest to the fact that in the PCA it is imperative for social workers to create an enabling environment for divorced persons to grow and develop a changed attitude/perspective with regard to the situations they are faced with.

The journey of self-discovery between the divorced persons and the social workers can be divided into the following four broad phases identified by Grobler et al (2013:1-2):

- The beginning phase, whereby the social worker in his/her capacity as a facilitator tries to make sure that everything is in place for the journey, including a relationship that is conducive to mutual trust.
- During the second phase, the social worker and the divorced person explore what hampers his/her self-discovery.
- In the third phase, the social worker and the divorced person work together to sort through the issues that were uncovered in the second phase.
- During the fourth and final phase, the social worker and the divorced person come to the end of their journey together and are ready to go their separate ways.

It should be noted that each of the above-mentioned phases are founded on the following: three main core conditions, Rogers' 19 propositions, professional values, and basic and advanced communication skills, as they are central to the PCA facilitation process.

### **2.9.2.1 Core conditions**

There are three main conditions in the PCA, namely congruence or genuineness, unconditional positive regards, and accurate empathetic understanding (Corey 2017:174-175). Social workers are required to embrace these conditions in working with divorced persons, as they are deemed necessary and significant during the facilitation process.

#### **a) Congruence**

Congruence implies that social workers are real, that is, they are genuine, integrated, and authentic during the therapy session. It further implies that social workers can openly express feelings, thoughts, reactions, and attitudes that are present in the relationship with the client. Therefore, in working with divorced persons, it is necessary for social workers to be genuine in their conduct, rather than pretending to be somebody they are not.

#### **b) Unconditional positive regard**

Unconditional positive regard and acceptance implies that social workers value and warmly accept clients without placing stipulations on their acceptance. Through this condition, social workers refrain from imposing judgment on divorced persons and accept them without putting blame on them for their actions, feelings, and thoughts.

#### **c) Accurate empathic understanding**

Accurate empathic understanding implies that the social workers will sense clients' feelings as if they were their own, without becoming lost in those feelings. In other words, it is a deep and subjective understanding of divorced persons by social workers. The aim is to encourage divorced persons to get closer to themselves, to feel more deeply and intensely, and recognise and resolve the incongruity that exists within them.

The afore-mentioned core conditions are deemed necessary and sufficient for the process of change to occur. On the same note, Corey (2017:173) suggests that the process of change in the client depends to a large degree on the quality of the mutual relationship they have with the social worker, and this kind of relationship can be made possible through the application of the core conditions. It means that in the PCA, divorced persons are actively involved throughout the entire process and they are equally considered experts who know what they want, as well as how and when they want it. The role of the social worker is to ensure that they remain congruent/genuine, accept divorced persons unconditionally without imposing any form of judgment, and understand them from their own frame of reference. In so doing divorced persons will be able to find themselves and move towards their intended direction on their journey of self-discovery.

### **2.9.2.2 Rogers' 19 propositions**

There are 19 propositions developed by Rogers and these propositions provide a holistic theoretical understanding of the person, his/her interaction environment, and his/her experiences. In the PCA the social worker tries to understand how the client sees himself/herself and it further looks at the experiences that a client can allow in his/her conscious mind and those that cannot be allowed because they threaten who he/she is (client's self) (Grobler et al 2013:4). Therefore, the propositions enable the therapist to perceive the client and his/her experiences (conscious and unconscious) more clearly.

In addition, Grobler et al (2013:12-112) describe how the propositions relate to working with individuals. Therefore, in this case, the propositions will be described in relation to working with divorced persons.

#### ***Proposition 1: "Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which she/he is the centre."***

There are three principal elements to this proposition, namely:

- The experiential world of every person is central, unique, and personal. This element enlightens social workers working with divorced persons that the experiences of divorced persons are unique and only known to divorced persons.

This means that an outsider will never get to know what is happening in the lives of divorced persons unless they decide to share with him/her.

- This personal world is continually changing. This implies that the experiences of divorced persons are not static, but continually changing. Therefore, a social worker may not assume that the experiences of the divorced person are still the same, as they are living in a continually changing world of experiences.
- The experiences that constitute this world can be conscious and/or unconscious. This is the last element inherent in this proposition and it implies that social workers working with divorced persons should be cognisant that they are dealing with both conscious and/or unconscious experiences. Conscious experiences refer to experiences known to divorced persons and these experiences do not threaten their self-structure. On the other hand, the unconscious experiences are those experiences that are hidden or not entirely known and threaten the self-structure of divorced persons.

***Proposition 2: “The organism reacts to the field as it is experiences. This perceptual field is for the individual reality.”***

This proposition postulates that peoples’ reaction to a situation is based on how they experience and/or perceive that particular situation. In other words, divorced persons’ reaction to the experience of divorce is based on how they experience it and the meaning they attach to it. It is for this reason that divorced persons are less likely to all respond to the aftermath of divorce in a similar way.

***Proposition 3: “The organism reacts as an organized whole to this phenomenal field.”***

This proposition informs the therapist that human beings have different types of experiences and none of them can be ignored when trying to understand the self of a person. Therefore, when working with divorced persons, social workers should consider all the experiences of divorced persons and not become selective. This will enable them to understand the self-structure of divorced persons in totality.

***Proposition 4: “The organism has one basic tendency and striving to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism.”***

This proposition suggests that all human beings have one basic aim, namely to actualise, maintain and develop themselves. It means that social workers must keep in mind that regardless of the adverse experiences divorced persons face, they are optimistic about the future and determined to become the person they want become.

***Proposition 5: “Behavior is basically the goal directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced in the field as perceived.”***

This proposition gives an understanding that behaviour is made up of deliberate efforts by human beings to satisfy the needs that they personally experience. In other words, behaviour is linked to the needs of the person. Therefore, social workers should become aware of the fact that any form of behaviour displayed by divorced persons is associated with their needs. Meaning that such behaviour seeks to satisfy the needs of divorced persons.

***Proposition 6: “Emotions accompanies and in general facilitates such goal-directed behavior, the kind of emotions being related to the seeking versus the consummatory aspects of the behavior, and the intensity of the emotion being related to the perceived significance of the behavior for the maintenance and enhancement of the organism.”***

This proposition links with the previous proposition (proposition 5) in the sense that the purposeful behaviour mentioned is being accompanied by an emotion or emotions, but the intensity of such emotions differs from one person to another. Moreover, the intensity of the emotions signifies the significance of the need. It means that social workers working with divorced persons should consider the intensity of emotions accompanying behaviour, as it signifies the importance of their needs.

***Proposition 7: “The best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself.”***

This proposition suggests that the best way to understand somebody’s behaviour is to get it from the person himself/herself, otherwise it may result in speculation. The importance of doing so is that the clear purpose of such behaviour can best be obtained from the person himself/herself. In order to understand the reasons behind

divorced persons' behaviour, social workers should get it from the internal frame of reference of the divorced persons themselves. This helps to avoid speculation, as the true reasons behind such behaviour will be obtained from the person himself/herself.

***Proposition 8: “A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self.”***

With this proposition, we learn that the perception we have of ourselves links to all our experiences, for instance our thinking, behaviour, needs, emotions, and values. This is built on the principle that if human beings know who they are, they will know how to behave, what to believe in, and ultimately find their way forward. It implies that the self emerges from all the experiences of the people. It is crucial for social workers working with divorced persons to consider all the experiences of divorced persons and consider how they perceive themselves. It should be noted that their perception of themselves is not static, as their experiences are always changing (as we have learned in proposition 1).

***Proposition 9: “As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of the self is formed together with values attached to the concepts.”***

This proposition tells us that the structure of the self is formed as a result of the interaction with the environment and significant others. Through these interactions, human beings get a clear understanding and perception of who they are. With this proposition, social workers become aware of divorced persons' understanding of themselves based on their interaction with the environment and their significant others.

***Proposition 10: “The values attached to experiences and the values that are a part of the self-structure in some instances are values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in a distorted fashion as if they had been experienced directly.”***

This proposition states that values attached to the experiences of human beings and those that form part of the self-structure may be shaped by a person's own experiences, but they may also be taken over from others and assimilated into the person's self as if they had been experienced personally. It means that the values owned by divorced persons and those attached to their experiences may have been

adopted from their significant others. However, the divorced persons may perceive them as if they have experienced them directly.

***Proposition 11 (a & b): “As experiences occur in the life of the individual, they are either (a) symbolized, perceived and organized into some relationship to the self, (b) ignored, because there is no perceived relationship to the self-structure.”***

With this proposition, we learn that experiences that are perceived to be relevant or significant to the person can be symbolised. On the other hand, experiences that are perceived to be irrelevant or insignificant to the person can be ignored. This means that divorced persons may decide to share with the social worker specific experiences relating to divorce if these experiences affect them the most, and be reluctant to talk about experiences that are of less concern to them.

***Proposition 11 (c & d): “As experiences occur in the life of the individual, they are either (c) denied symbolization (d) given a distorted symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the structure of the self.”***

This proposition is a continuation of the previous proposition (proposition 11 a & b), and it states that experiences that threaten the person may be denied or distorted in order to protect him/her. Moreover, this proposition links with proposition 16, which is about the defence of self. Therefore, social workers working with divorced persons would know that divorced persons may deny or distort some experiences, especially those that are perceived to be a threat to them. This signifies that they do not want to be associated with such experiences, as such experiences are inconsistent with the structure of the self.

***Proposition 12: “Most of the ways of behaving that are adopted by the organism are those that are consistent with the concept of self.”***

This proposition states that people choose to behave in a manner that fits with who they are. In other words, they would not want to behave in a manner which does not speak to who they are. With this proposition, social workers are informed that, regardless of the adverse consequences of divorce, divorced persons do not all necessarily behave in the same manner, but they opt to behave in a way that is consistent with themselves.

***Proposition 13: “Behavior may, in some instances, be brought about by organic experiences and needs that have not been symbolized. Such behavior may be inconsistent with the structure of the self, but in such instances, the behavior is not ‘owned’ by the individual.”***

This proposition suggests that unsymbolised experiences and needs may influence a person to behave in a manner that does not fit with his/her self-concept and, as a result, he/she may not want to be associated with such behaviour. Therefore, the inability of divorced persons to comprehend divorce and adequately meet their needs may lead them to behave in a manner that does not fit in with who they are. Moreover, unlike with proposition 5 and 12 that refer to behaviour at a conscious level, this kind of behaviour falls under the unconscious level, and hence they may not want to be associated with it.

***Proposition 14: “Psychological maladjustment exists when the organism denies to awareness significant sensory and visceral experiences, which consequently are not symbolized and organized into the gestalt of the self-structure. When this situation exists, there is a basic or potential psychological tension.”***

With this proposition, we learn that when there are many experiences that cannot be allowed into conscious awareness, it creates psychological stress for the individual. This happens when people do not want to be associated with life experiences that do not correlate with their self-concept, and this in turn creates psychological tension. It therefore means that divorced persons’ denial or failure to acknowledge divorce and/or the challenges they are faced with because of divorce may result in psychological tension.

***Proposition 15: “Psychological adjustment exists when the concept of the self is such that all the sensory and visceral experiences of the organism are, or may be, assimilated on a symbolic level into a consistent relationship with the concept of self.”***

The process of reconstruction begins with this proposition. In contrast to the previous proposition where psychological tension would exist due to denial or failure to acknowledge their experiences, in this proposition experiences that are inconsistent with the self-structure are acknowledged and accepted into the concept of self. In so

doing, the reconstruction process can begin. In other words, divorced persons would no longer deny in their conscious mind that they are divorced. Instead, they would acknowledge that the divorce happened, and seek alternative ways of dealing with it through the assistance of the social worker.

***Proposition 16: “Any experience that is inconsistent with the organization or structure of self will be perceived as a threat, the more of these perceptions there are, the more rigidly that self-structure is organized to maintain itself.”***

This proposition tells us that experiences that are in conflict with an individual’s self-perception are considered threatening to the self, and the greater the number of such experiences, the more intent the self-structure becomes on self-preservation. It should be noted that the defence of self may happen in the form of denial and distortion (proposition 11 c & d). Therefore, defence of self may happen to divorced persons when they are largely criticised for having been divorced. As a result, they are likely to perceive such criticism by their significant others as a threat and ultimately, they will defend themselves.

***Proposition 17: “Under certain conditions, involving primarily complete absence of any threat to the self-structure, experiences that are inconsistent with it may be perceived, examined and the structure of self-revised to assimilate and include such experiences”***

This proposition is crucial at the beginning phase, as it requires therapists to create a non-threatening or a conducive environment for their clients to feel free as they share their experiences. This implies total understanding and acceptance of people together with their experiences, and it is built on the precept that the creation of an enabling environment paves the way for their enhancement and reconstruction. This signifies that divorced persons are more likely to reconstruct and effectively deal with the aftermath of divorce if they feel understood and accepted by social workers.

***Proposition 18: “When the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his sensory and visceral experiences, then he is necessarily more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals.”***

With this proposition we learn that when people are able to symbolise most of their experiences and integrate them into a total self-concept, they will display a greater understanding of others and be able to accept them as separate, unique individuals. At this stage, people have already accepted themselves together with their experiences (as in proposition 15), therefore they are more likely to accept other people with differing opinions or who might be going through similar experiences. It means that divorced persons are more likely to accept other people with their differing opinions or experiences if they have accepted their situation.

***Proposition 19: “As the individual perceives and accepts into his self-structure more of his organic experiences, he finds that he is replacing his present value system – based so largely upon introjections that have been distortedly symbolized – with a continuing organismic valuing process.”***

This proposition relates to the development of the way forward regarding the experiences or challenges faced by people. It happens when people replace their present value system with a sustainable value system or a solution to their situation. This is the final stage of the facilitation process between the therapist and the clients, and it mostly happens when divorced persons find new or alternative ways and values to deal with divorce through the assistance of the social worker.

### **2.9.2.3 Professional values**

Professional values form part of the social worker’s attitude and it is an integral part of the facilitation process in the PCA. It means that the social worker has to internalise the professional values and make them part of himself/herself. There are four main professional values suggested by Grobler et al (2013:197-203), namely respect, individualisation, self-determination, and confidentiality.

- **Respect**

Respect is crucial during the facilitation process and it involves total acceptance of divorced persons as unique entities. The value of respect links with the core

condition of unconditional positive regard discussed earlier, and the role of the social worker working with divorced persons is to facilitate the process of change without imposing judgment.

- **Individualisation**

Individualisation simply means that the social worker cannot generalise when working with divorced persons and he/she should treat them as unique individuals. This value further helps the social worker to refrain from approaching divorced persons in a manner that is based on assumptions he/she has made when interacting with other divorced persons.

- **Self-determination**

Through the value of self-determination, the social worker holds the belief that divorced persons know who they are and what they want, as well as how and when they want it. In other words, social workers involve divorced persons in decision-making and avoid making decisions for them.

- **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is the key to building a trusting relationship with divorced persons. Therefore, the social worker should assure divorced persons that the information shared during the session will not be shared with other people or institutions without their consent, regardless of how significant the information may be. However, sometimes social workers find themselves in a dilemma when they are caught between maintaining confidentiality and a life-threatening situation. Therefore he/she further explains to divorced persons that in a situation such as this, priority is given to life, meaning that information may be divulged to save a life, regardless of their consent.

#### **2.9.2.4 Basic and advanced communication skills**

Communication skills are so important in working with divorced persons. There are two categories of communication skills used in the PCA, and they are basic communication skills and advanced communication skills (Grobler et al 2013:204-226). Basic communication skills are used to deal with conscious experiences and advanced communication skills are used to deal with unconscious experiences. The

following are the three main basic communication skills used in the PCA: attending, listening, and basic empathy. In addition, the following advanced communication skills are mainly used in the PCA: immediacy, exploring distortions or discrepancies, and advanced empathy.

An overview and the desired outcomes of these communication skills is presented in the table below.

**Table 2.3: An overview of the communication skills and the desired outcomes**

<b>SKILLS</b>		<b>DESIRED OUTCOMES</b>
<b>BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS</b>		
Attending		To enter the client's total life world through physical and psychological orientation, so that he/she may feel at ease to share all his/her experiences.
Listening		To understand the client's experiential world, perceptions and realities.
Basic empathy		To communicate understanding and to encourage deeper levels of self-exploration.
<b>ADVANCED COMMUNICATION SKILLS</b>		
Immediacy		To explore the stumbling blocks in the professional relationship, and it deals with the here and now.
Exploring distortions	Verbal versus non-verbal distortions	To explore messages conveyed verbally by the client which are contrary to his/her actions.
	Verbal versus verbal distortions	To explore contradictory verbal messages conveyed by the client.
	Self versus self	To explore different selves or identities of the client as presented by him/her.
Advanced empathy	Implied messages	To listen for the hidden meaning of the client's self and how it is being threatened, and to communicate such meaning to the client.

	Connecting islands	To put together different pieces of the client's experiences and give feedback to the client.
	Identifying themes	To put together experiences that share similar meanings and explore how they relate to the self.

With these basic skills, social workers demonstrate an understanding of the divorced person's symbolised experiences and self. On the other hand, social workers can use advanced skills to share their understanding of the experiences that threaten the self of divorced persons or to deal with unsymbolised experiences. The basic skills are always used initially and throughout the session, especially when creating a safe environment for the client or when dealing with the symbolised experiences.

It is evident that the core conditions, propositions, professional values, and communication skills are crucial in the PCA facilitation process. For that reason, social workers using this perspective should be conversant with these key components inherent in this perspective, in order to effectively deal with divorced persons' experiences.

### **2.9.3 Ecological systems Perspective**

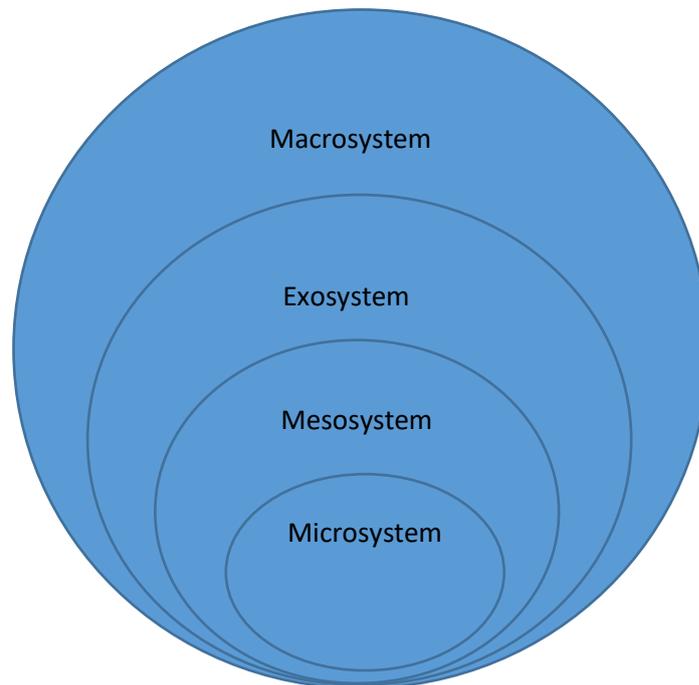
The ecological systems perspective, hereafter referred to as the eco-systems perspective, was originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner and its interest is in understanding individuals in context (Neal & Neal 2013:722). It is a perspective concerned with understanding the contexts in which an individual exists, and incorporates the interactions between the individual, other individuals, and the social structures of society to explain human development (Woodside, Caldwell & Spurr 2006:260). As suggested by Maistry (2010:170), the eco-systems perspective is a combination of ecology and general systems theory, and was developed to arrange, integrate, and systematise knowledge about the interrelationships of people with one another and with their environments.

With the eco-systems perspective a human being is viewed as a subsystem within a hierarchy of larger systems, such as the family and the community, even though the individual occupies the central position within the system. A fundamental principle of

the eco-systems perspective states that a change in one part of the system creates a change in other parts of the system, which in turn changes the functioning of the entire system (Miley et al 2009:38). This implies that the eco-systems oriented social work practice centres on changing and maintaining both the client and his/her environment. Social workers have to make every effort to understand every system that the client system interacts with and the impact of the interactions on the client system (Sekudu 2015b:96).

With the eco-systems perspective, an individual's thoughts and actions can be explained and described accurately only by understanding the microsystem and macrosystem of the person's environment (Woodside et al 2006:256). This points to the fact that the eco-systems perspective views human beings as a subsystem within a hierarchy of larger systems, such as the family and community, even though the individual occupies the central position within the system. It means that human beings and their environments are inseparable, as they exist in ongoing transactions with one another. On the same note, Zastrow (2015:51) postulates that the eco-systems perspective views individuals, families, and environments as having transactional problems and needs caused by some changes that might have occurred. This is based on the principle that a change in one part of the system creates a change in another part of the system. And so, the eco-systems perspective describes the ways in which the environment affects people and the ways in which people affect their environment.

In his original articulations of the eco-systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified four levels that are nested around a focal individual like a set of concentric circles, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. These levels are illustrated in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: The levels of the ecological systems theory originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979)**

Neal and Neal (2013:725) expound the aforementioned levels as follows:

- The microsystem is the lowest level of Bronfenbrenner's hierarchy and it is the setting where the focal individual plays a direct role and has direct experiences and social interactions with others. For example, a family could be regarded as a microsystem where divorced persons interact directly with their children, siblings, and immediate family members.
- The mesosystem, within which microsystems are nested, includes social interactions between two or more of the focal individual's settings. In other words, the mesosystem could include a meeting between the divorced person's family and his/her employer regarding his/her conduct at work. In this regard, the divorced person's family and his/her employer are the two microsystems that are nested and that he/she has direct contact/interaction with.
- On the other hand, the exosystem, within which mesosystems are nested, includes settings that influence the focal individual, but the focal individual does not directly participate. This could refer to social welfare policies or legislation that regulate services to divorced persons. In this instance, divorced persons are the

recipients of social services, but they are not involved in the decision-making process regarding the 'what' and/or 'how' of these services.

- Finally, the macrosystem, within which exosystems are nested, includes broad cultural influences or ideologies that have long-ranging consequences for individuals. For instance, the societal view about divorced persons or the society that holds the view that married partners should not divorce regardless of the marital instabilities/conflicts they encounter.

In addition, the eco-systems perspective emphasises whole entities or systems (Maistry 2010:170). Instead of looking for linear causality, it highlights the interactional patterns that are formed through the relationships among parts and it is viewed in terms of the person-environment fit in which a human being is viewed within his/her context. Similarly, Miley et al (2009:35) postulate that human beings are neither completely powerful nor powerless, but they play an active role in creating events that shape their lives, a role tempered by environmental forces and conditions. It means that human beings and environments evolve in continuously accommodating responses to one another and this symbolises that there is an interrelatedness and connection between humans and their environments. This reciprocal connection between humans and the environment is the process by which people continually shape their environments and are shaped by the environments at the same time.

The eco-systems perspective was adopted as a theoretical framework for this study, because it provides a holistic understanding of the interrelationships between the divorced persons and their environments, together with the impact of this relationship on them. By using the eco-systems perspective, social workers get to understand the conflicts, influence, and interconnectedness between divorced persons and the environment they live in. For instance, divorced persons who relocated back to their family of origin may find it hard to acclimatise to the new environment (in this case, referring to the family and the society/community at large) and on the other hand, the environment may find it hard to receive them back to the community. Therefore, the reciprocal relationship between the divorced persons and the environment would have been impaired and ultimately exacerbate the tension between them and the environment. The social worker's role in this instance would be to understand the interrelationship and the interactions between the divorced persons and the

environment. This is aimed at improving the relationship and the interactions between the person and the environment, and assisting divorced persons to adjust with the aftermath of divorce. These sentiments resonate with Zastrow's (2015:51) views that the eco-systems perspective focuses on the maladaptive interpersonal problems between individuals, families and the environment. Similarly, Neal and Neal (2013:722) assert that the eco-systems perspective emphasises the understanding of individuals, groups, families, and communities in their context. It is for this reason that eco-system oriented social workers consider the maladaptive interpersonal challenges of divorced persons in relation to different systems.

In addition, Miley et al (2009:32) emphasise the following principles underlying the eco-systems approach. The eco-systems perspective:

- presents a dynamic view of human beings as systems interacting in context;
- emphasises the significance of human system transactions;
- traces how human behaviour and interaction develops over time in response to internal and external forces;
- describes current behaviour as an adaptive fit of persons in environment;
- conceptualises all interaction as adaptive or logical in context; and
- reveals multiple options for change within persons and their social and physical environments.

Based on the above-mentioned principles, it is clear that the eco-systems perspective emphasises the understanding of the connectedness or interactions between human beings and their environment. It further describes how individuals and other human systems change and stabilise in response to internal and external forces. In other words, with the eco-systems perspective divorced persons' behaviour or challenges can be explained in terms of adapting to a situation. Social workers may also get an understanding that divorced persons' behaviour does not occur in isolation; instead, they respond to multiple internal and environmental events simultaneously.

Therefore, the strengths perspective, the PCA, and the eco-systems perspective in social work offer frameworks for understanding and analysing the interrelationship between divorced persons and their social problems. These perspectives further emphasise the complex transactions between individuals and their environments, and

encourage social workers to tailor their work to achieve the best 'adaptive fit' in the client-environment interface (Gray 2010:86). With the strengths perspective, divorced persons identify and utilise their strength in order to cope with post-divorce challenges. The PCA enables them to understand themselves and their experiences, and further empowers them to lead their lives towards the intended direction. With the eco-systems perspective, divorced persons understand the ways in which the environment affects them and the ways in which they affect their environment. Therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that the strengths perspective, the PCA, and the eco-systems perspective are appropriate in understanding the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social welfare policy and social work practice.

## **2.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter presented the literature review and theoretical orientation of the study. An overview of divorce with specific focus on the global historical and current status of divorce, and divorce within the South African context were presented. The presentation of divorce within the South African context was based on the following types of divorce: uncontested/unopposed divorces, where spouses work together to agree on the terms of divorce; and contested/opposed divorces, where parties do not agree on the division of assets and/or custody of children. The chapter also presented the global statistics of divorce and divorce statistics within the South African context. This was followed by the presentation of reasons for divorce, which includes, amongst others, physical abuse, emotional and verbal abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse, infidelity, addiction, religious and cultural differences, social media, and lack of communication.

The consequences of divorce were also presented and they are composed of the emotional consequences, behavioural consequences, financial consequences, social consequences, physical consequences, and spiritual consequences. Apart from the consequences of divorce, the post-divorce needs and challenges were presented. These challenges involve co-parenting/ upbringing of children, changes in friendships, changes in social networks, and financial changes. Furthermore, there was a

presentation on the needs of divorced persons, which include, amongst others, the need to spend quality time with their children, and the need to love and to be loved.

Moreover, the chapter presented post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction. The post-divorce adjustment phases involve a transition process of changing relationships, routes, assumptions, and roles. A successful post-divorce adjustment mostly leads to life satisfaction. There is also a presentation on the nature and development of social welfare policies, which was followed by the presentation of social work services to divorced persons. Prior to the presentation of social work services to divorced persons, a generalist view of social work services was presented. In addition, a theoretical framework underlying the study was presented. These are theories and approaches that seek to describe and explain various dimensions relating to divorce, particularly divorced persons, namely the strengths perspective, the person-centred perspective, and the ecological systems perspective. The presentation of these perspectives was aligned to working with divorced persons.

A discussion of the application of the qualitative research process for investigating the research topic under discussion will be presented in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter One the research plan outlining the research methodology as proposed by the researcher was discussed. In general, a research is expressed through applied methodology, as it is a scientific investigation of phenomena (De Vos & Strydom 2011:42). Research methodology refers to different methods applied by researchers to collect information or data as part of research and it offers a theoretical and philosophical foundation, which in turn will then influence the methods employed to collect information and data (Carey 2012:83). This suggests that the research methodology is an essential component of research, as it provides guidelines and the structure of the research plan, and through the research plan a framework for the direction of the study is provided.

There are three genres of research that can be followed in the process of research, namely quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed methods (Creswell 2016:3). Therefore, when planning the research project, the researcher is often faced with the question of whether he/she intends to utilise the qualitative or quantitative research approach, or mixed methods (Du Toit, Boshoff & Mariette 2016:1). Moreover, the researcher may also be faced with the question of what needs to be understood and by which methods to obtain such knowledge. Qualitative research involves investigating the quality or nature of something through addressing the question of 'what is going on?', while quantitative research aims to quantify it through addressing the question of 'how widespread is this?'. On the other hand, a mixed method is the combination of both (Waller et al 2016:5). In other words, qualitative research focuses on the description of the context and often emerges from problems situated in the field, whereas the quantitative methodologies employ measurement and statistics to develop predictions.

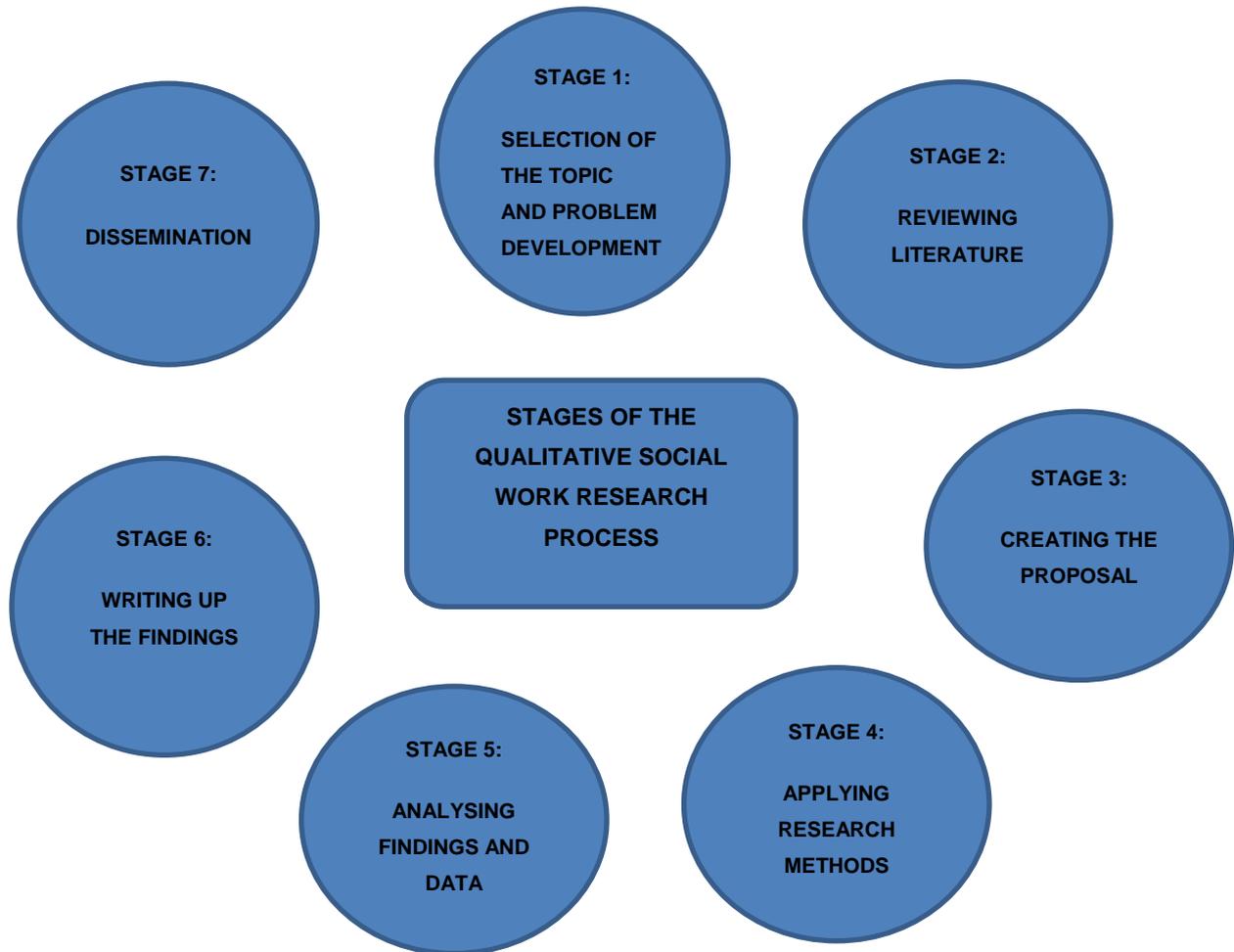
For this research study, a qualitative research approach was followed to realise the goals of the study as set out in Chapter One, section 1.2.2 of this report. In this

chapter, a description of how the qualitative research method was applied in the study will be provided. Qualitative methods involve exploratory research questions, inductive reasoning, an orientation to social context, and a focus on human subjectivity and the meanings participants attach to events and to their lives (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:178). For that reason, a good quality qualitative research study can be used to explore complex human behaviour and it can also be used when we do not know exactly what is happening (Kelly 2016:1). This suggests that qualitative research methods involve investigating the quality or nature of something (Waller et al 2016:5). With the use of the qualitative research methods, the researcher will be able to capture social life as experienced by the participants. In this regard, the researcher followed the qualitative social work research process proposed by Carey (2012:17-28), as it clearly depicts the structure and stages of the qualitative social work research process. This process comprises the following stages:

- The selection of an appropriate topic and development of a research problem.
- Reviewing literature relating to a topic.
- Creating a research proposal and defining research methodology.
- Applying the research method.
- Analysing data.
- Writing up findings and drawing conclusions.
- Disseminating findings.

When he chose the qualitative research process, the researcher was cognisant of the fact that the qualitative research process is often non-linear and non-sequential as asserted by Devers and Frankel (2000:253). The aforementioned stages of the qualitative social work research process proposed by Carey (2012: 17-28) provided the researcher with a framework in which he was able to describe how he applied the qualitative social work research process for this study.

These stages are illustrated in Figure 3.1 below.



**Figure 3.1: Carey's (2012) qualitative social work research process**

Each of these stages is now explored, beginning with the selection of an appropriate topic and development of a research problem as outlined in stage 1.

### **3.2 STAGE 1: SELECTION OF AN APPROPRIATE TOPIC AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

In this stage, the selection of the topic and the development of a research problem will be presented.

#### **3.2.1 The Selection of a Topic**

The selection of an appropriate topic is the first stage of the qualitative social work research process and it is one of the most difficult stages in any research project

(Carey 2012:46). In selecting the research topic, the researcher was motivated by the following reasons: social work teaching and practice, previous encounters with the topic, social policy on divorce, the high rate of divorce, and policy and practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons. These reasons are briefly explained below.

### **3.2.1.1 *Social work teaching and practice***

The researcher is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at UNISA and he has a keen interest in research topics relating to family counselling, couple's counselling, and divorce counselling. Apart from that, the researcher teaches the Case and Group Work practical work module at third year level and this module involves teaching students about the integration of different approaches, theories, and skills when counselling families, couples, and individuals. The module also requires an intensive literature study on challenges and/or social problems faced by people in their lives and about different intervention strategies used by social workers in addressing such challenges and social problems, including a literature study on relevant approaches, theories, and skills. The literature study is imperative for the lecturers, because it helps them in the process of developing study materials for students. And so, during the process of a literature study for the above-mentioned purpose, the researcher came across the topic of divorce and he developed an interest to investigate the topic further, more specifically regarding social work services to divorced persons given the adverse situation divorced persons encounter.

### **3.2.1.2 *Previous encounters with the topic***

The researcher worked as a generic social worker employed by the DSD in the Limpopo Province of South Africa for many years prior to joining UNISA. During the period of his employment, the researcher dealt with a number of cases reported to him involving divorced persons citing their inability to cope with the post-divorce challenges. The fact that divorced persons kept coming for social work services long after intervention by a social worker and the fact that there were no clear practice guidelines regarding social work services to divorced persons at that time influenced the researcher to pursue this research topic.

### **3.2.1.3 Social welfare policy on divorce**

The DSD is the focal point of actions aimed at supporting family life and the strengthening of families in the country (South Africa), and one of its key responsibilities is to coordinate the activities that would contribute to the successful implementation of the White Paper on Families (South Africa 2013:46). As a policy document that guides the implementation of social work services to families, the researcher observed that the White Paper on Families (South Africa 2013:22-30) did not include divorce as one of the most important issues that affects families in South Africa, despite the impact it has on family relations and the divorced persons. This is in contrast with Abbassi and Nori's (2015:21) assertion that divorce affects family relations in such a way that it becomes unbearable for both the divorced persons and the family members. Expanding on this, Ambrosino et al (2008:327) suggest that families undergo changes in composition as a result of divorce and those transitions become difficult for all family members, including the divorced persons. Therefore, the fact that divorce is not mentioned as one of the crucial issues that affects families in the policy documents motivated the researcher to explore further on the topic of divorce.

### **3.2.1.4 High rate of divorce**

The researcher was also motivated to investigate the topic by the fact that the divorce rate remains high in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:37) and across the globe (Wolfinger 2005:9). According to Simonic (2014:205-207) divorce brings adverse consequences to divorced persons. The fact that the statistics reflect a high divorce rate suggests that there is large number of people who are faced with the aftermath of divorce. Given the high rate of divorce in the country and worldwide, the researcher was keen to explore whether the nature of social work services to divorced persons addresses their needs, and hence he developed an interest in the topic.

### **3.2.1.5 Policy and practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons**

The researcher became interested in the topic, because he had a desire to develop practice guidelines that would inform social work services to divorced persons and policy guidelines that would assist the DSD in drafting social policies specifically on matters related to divorce. Apart from the development of the policy and practice

guidelines, the researcher's interest in the topic was driven by his belief that divorced persons would benefit from the study, since the practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons that are aligned to their needs will be developed.

The aforementioned reasons motivated the researcher to pursue the topic of this study and engendered commitment and enthusiasm. This resonates with Fawcett and Pocket's (2015:8) assertion that coming up with a good topic initiates the research process and engenders commitment, enthusiasm, and determination. The authors further mention that a good idea may need considerable refinement to translate into a viable research question and that without a good idea, a research project will not get off the ground. In other words, a good research topic begins with a good idea about a particular research endeavour and there should be a considerable link between the topic and the research questions. Similarly, a research topic might be represented by a component of social work practice of particular interest, or a social problem or general issue, which may require further investigation (Carey 2012:18). This suggests that the selection of a research topic is motivated by a particular interest regarding social work practice, a social problem, or any social issue, which requires further investigation. Thus, researchers cannot take the process of topic selection lightly, because it requires thinking sensibly about the planned research and why that particular research endeavour is significant. Researchers need criteria to choose the best topics and the best model that provides the best topics (Nikolenko, Koltvoc & Koltsova 2017:89). In so doing, researchers will be able to avert problems related to the selection of a suitable research topic.

### **3.2.2 Development of a Research Problem**

The development of a research problem is expansively elaborated on in Chapter One, section 1.1.2 of this report. It is therefore worth noting that the development of a research problem was based on the knowledge gap about the nature of social work services to divorced persons, social welfare policies concerning divorced persons, and guidelines that inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

Although there is literature on general social work services to individuals, groups, families and communities, the researcher could not find literature on the nature of social work services to divorced persons. Conversely, research on divorce has

demonstrated that the dissolution of a marriage at any point in the life course of a person can have negative outcomes for both divorced men and women (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). Divorced persons experience a higher prevalence of distress and lower levels of happiness and satisfaction with life in general, as compared to married persons (Symoens et al 2013:178).

Given the adverse situations faced by divorced persons, there is no doubt that appropriate social work services aimed at enhancing the well-being of divorced persons are necessary. At the present, social workers are trained to promote positive changes in working with individuals, groups, families, organisations, and the larger community (Zastrow 2014:68). This implies that social workers are not trained as specialists at the undergraduate level, but as generalists who provide services to individuals, groups, families, organisations, and the larger community, including divorced persons. Generalist social work practitioners utilise a variety of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities, to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being (Segal et al 2013:149).

Thus, social workers should be able to provide appropriate and needs-based social work services to divorced persons in order to promote positive changes in their lives. Based on the fact that little is known about the nature of social work services to divorced persons, the researcher questioned whether there are appropriate social work services to divorced persons and if these services address the needs of divorced persons. Likewise, Mnyango (2015:192) recommends that a study be undertaken focusing on the experience-based perceptions of divorced men and women about the social workers' involvement during the post-divorce stage. Moreover, there is nothing documented in terms of social welfare policy and social work practice guidelines.

The next presentation involves reviewing literature relating to the topic, as specified in stage 2 of Carey's qualitative social work research process.

### **3.3 STAGE 2: REVIEWING LITERATURE RELATING TO THE TOPIC**

In the previous chapter of the research report, the researcher provided a comprehensive theoretical orientation and the literature study in terms of different sub-themes. In this stage, the researcher presents the applied process of a literature review in terms of the following sub-sections, as described by Carey (2012:45-54): the purpose of a literature review, stages of the review, critical evaluation, key sources, and keeping records.

#### **3.3.1 The Purpose of a Literature Review**

Literature reviews are conducted for different purposes and they take different forms for various audiences (Torraco 2016:405). The main purpose of a literature review is to sharpen the researcher's preliminary considerations regarding his topic of study, method, and data source, rather than assuming a broader perspective and reporting what is known about a topic (Yin 2011:62). The literature review can also be written to (a) review, update, and critique the literature; (b) conduct meta-analysis of the literature; (c) review, critique, and synthesise the literature; (d) reconceptualise the topic reviewed in the literature; and (e) answer specific research questions about the topic reviewed in the literature (Torraco 2016:405). Without a thorough literature review, the researcher's understanding of the research topic will be limited.

For this study, the purpose of a literature review coincides with Carey's (2012:46) suggestion in that the researcher sought to:

- examine existing literature relating to the research question/problem and objectives;
- critically evaluate and contextualise or place into perspective such literature;
- discover policies and the best social work practices relating to the topic;
- improve the understanding of the research topic by critically evaluating historic trends, policies, and practices; and
- identify key themes and issues relating to the topic.

By conducting a literature review, the researcher develops a research idea, consolidates what is already known about a subject, and identifies any knowledge gaps and how the research could contribute to further understanding on the subject

(Winchester & Salji 2016:308). On the same note, Macfarlane, Kisely, Loi, Looi, Merry, Parker, Power, Siskind, Smith and Macfarlane (2015:11) assert that it is important for the researcher to be abreast of the historical and current developments in the topic of the research project. Consequently, it is imperative that every study should be preceded by a review of scientific literature, as this will give an understanding of previous work on the topic, as well as potential opportunities and pitfalls in relation to the topic. Thus, a literature review is the most critical aspect of research in that it helps the researcher to be well acquainted with his research topic. In other words, the researcher acquires more information about his topic in terms of the past and present situation. In this study, the review of literature defined the direction of the research in that the researcher examined, evaluated, and discovered information relating to his chosen topic with the aim of addressing the research question and/or research problem.

### **3.3.2 Stages of the Review**

A literature review is a process comprising different stages. For this study, the researcher adhered to the four stages of literature review recommended by Carey (2012:46), namely theory and philosophy, historical story and developments in the subjects, latest research and developments in the subjects, and social research and methodology. However, it should be noted that these stages are not compulsory.

#### **3.3.2.1 *Theory and philosophy***

This is the first stage of a literature review and it includes investigating the intellectual context(s) of any research related to a topic, for instance exploring the theories used in the past to address the theme and to check if the same theories could be used by the researcher in his research. According to Chambliss and Schutt (2013:19), a theory refers to a logically interrelated set of propositions about an empirical reality and it has a special place in social research because it helps the researcher to make connections to general social processes and large bodies of research. The researcher implemented this stage by means of exploring different theories and philosophies that were used in the past in relation to the topic under discussion. During the process of the literature review, the researcher observed that the studies conducted in the past focused more on how divorce affects women and children, and so the theories and

philosophies inherent were more in line with those studies. Thus, he could not find literature or studies conducted in relation to social work services to divorced persons.

Although most literature reviews focus on the research findings of the literature reviewed, some combine this with a focus on the research methods and theories used in the literature, whereas others focus on practices, programmes, or interventions (Toracco 2016:405). For instance, Creswell (2016:40) outlined four types of philosophy a qualitative researcher might choose from, namely positivism and post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory and post-modern.

- **Positivism and post-positivism** – includes hard science researchers and those who adopt a cause and effect perspective.
- **Critical theory** – adherents to this theory create change to the benefit of those oppressed by power.
- **Constructivism** – practitioners gain understanding by interpreting participants' perceptions.
- **Participatory and post-modern** – attracts those who believe in transformation on the basis of democratic participation between the researcher and the participants

For this study, the researcher adopted the participatory and post-modern philosophy based on its democratic stance to both the researcher and the participants. Moreover, the researcher found this philosophy to be more appropriate as it allows the participants to share their views out of their own free will and in a non-threatening environment. Apart from the participatory and post-modern philosophy, the researcher decided to use the strengths perspective, person-centred perspective, and ecological systems perspective for this study, based on their relevance to the topic under discussion. These theories are fully discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.9.

### **3.3.2.2 *History of developments in the subject***

This stage entails the background to the current thinking on the subject and mainly focuses on prioritising the historical trends because of their cumulative impact upon policy, legislation, and practice. Researchers often consider older publications as well as work that is more recent in order to establish if some changes have occurred over

time (Carey 2012:47). This resonates with Torraco's (2016:404) views that a literature review is used to review new emerging topics that generate a growing body of literature that may include contradictions or discrepancies between the literature and observations about the issue.

In the course of the literature review, the researcher focused on old and new literature in order to determine the historical development of the subject. The significance of focusing on the historical development of the subject is that the researcher is provided with a clear indication of how the same problem was addressed in the past, and also identifies gaps or contradictions that may have emerged over time.

### **3.3.2.3 *Latest research and developments in the subject***

This stage tries to bring the reader up to date with major developments in social work practice or research that links to a topic under investigation (Carey 2012:47). In other words, it addresses the present issues and also the latest thinking and practice. Reading the existing literature helps the researcher to clarify why the topic he is tackling is interesting or important and to whom (Waller et al 2016:37). The authors further suggest that if very little has been published on the researcher's topic, he may need to think quite creatively about how he will find relevant literature. Thus, the researcher determines the significance and the benefit of the study during this stage.

In the process of the literature review for this study, the researcher observed that no previous studies have been conducted focusing on social work services to divorced persons and that there are no policy and practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons.

### **3.3.2.4 *Social research and methodology***

This stage focuses on the approaches used by other researchers and focuses on how other researchers design their research or approach, so that the researcher can come up with his own methods (Carey 2012:47). A good literature review identifies gaps in the current knowledge base and assists the researcher to design a research project (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:260).

In this stage, the researcher observed that most previous studies conducted in the subject of divorce followed the qualitative approach. This helped the researcher to make the decision to follow the qualitative research approach based on its relevance to the study. The application of the qualitative approach is expansively presented in section 3.5 of this report.

### **3.3.2.5 Other stages of literature review**

Apart from the above-mentioned stages of a literature review by Carey, the following steps in conducting a literature review, as suggested by Creswell (2016:60-61), were followed by the researcher:

- **Identifying key words that would help the researcher to learn more about the topic:** The researcher used different key words related to the subject to learn more about the topic. In some instances, the assistance of the departmental librarian was sought to search for divorce-related publications.
- **Using those key words to search for a digital database:** The researcher accessed online digital copies through searching different digital databases by using different key words relating to the topic.
- **Identifying at least 50 research articles or books to get started:** The researcher started by identifying and reading 50 research articles and books about the topic.
- **Photocopying, scanning, and saving articles on the computer that are central to the research topic:** The researcher made physical copies of the articles that are related to the topic and saved copies of digital articles on his computer.
- **Drafting summaries of the relevant articles:** Relevant articles were summarised in a draft.
- **Writing a literature review and organising it by important concepts:** The researcher wrote a literature review and organised it according to the important concepts.
- **Designing a literature map:** A literature map containing a visual summary was designed in order to allow the researcher to understand how the study adds to the existing research.

### 3.3.3 Critical Evaluation

Critical evaluation is a key part of any literature review, as opposed to passive reading. Critical evaluation is about providing a personal and professional assessment of the quality of relevant publications and it might include looking carefully at the methodology for possible weaknesses, or maybe considering carefully the presentation of their arguments and conclusions for possible inconsistencies or deficiencies (Carey 2012:49). Similarly, Torraco (2016:420) postulates that critical evaluation should identify aspects of the topic that are missing, incomplete, or poorly represented in the literature, as well as inconsistencies or contradictions among publications on the topic. Through critical evaluation, the researcher also identifies areas in which new knowledge is needed in light of recent developments on the topic, including the inconsistencies in the relationship between research and practice on the topic. This means that the critical evaluation of literature involves carefully examining the main ideas and arguments presented in the literature through a critical lens.

In order to achieve the goal of critical evaluation, the researcher adhered to the following methods suggested by Carey (2012:50) in this study. Thus, the researcher:

- considered carefully the arguments presented by authors and whether they are sound and consistent;
- assessed the quality of evidence presented to support a thesis and general arguments;
- assessed if and how an article is linked to his own research and topic;
- assessed whether evidence originates from and is supported by credible sources, such as other people's research, data, or arguments;
- evaluated how an article or chapter compares to other publications, arguments, and research findings;
- explored whether the use of supporting theory is sound and how this compares to completing theoretical standpoints;
- assessed the strengths and weaknesses of any findings and discussions; and
- appraised the research methodology utilised in comparison to others.

### 3.3.4 Key Sources

A literature review relies on key sources of information, debates, and other forms of knowledge (Carey 2012:51). A distinction is commonly drawn between primary

sources of information, which include information collected from direct personal experience or research methods, such as interviews or focus group meetings, and secondary sources of information which include, amongst others, research reports, journal articles, and chapters in books. Table 3.1 below outlines the primary and secondary sources, as suggested by Carey (2012:51).

**Table 3.1: Primary and secondary sources**

<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Historical records and texts</li> <li>- Experience</li> <li>- Relevant people</li> <li>- Organisational records</li> <li>- Personal documents (letters, diaries, reports, etc.)</li> <li>- Observation</li> <li>- Film/Video</li> <li>- Statistical data</li> <li>- Original works of literature and art</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monographs</li> <li>- Textbooks</li> <li>- Government publications</li> <li>- Popular media</li> <li>- Research reports</li> <li>- Journal articles</li> <li>- Chapters in books</li> <li>- Previous dissertations</li> <li>- Specialist magazines</li> <li>- Internet articles</li> <li>- Databases</li> </ul>

In practice, the majority of sources for a literature review for qualitative social work research will be secondary sources and the most commonly utilised sources include journal articles, monographic textbooks, chapters in edited books, research reports, legislation, and government publications (Carey 2012:52). It is suggested by Waller et al (2016:38) that a comprehensive review of the existing scholarly literature, such as published books, book chapters, and peer reviewed journal articles, is expected in research carried out for academic purposes. Therefore, a convenient way to start with the literature search can be to use published review articles or academic textbooks to learn the background of a subject.

The researcher used textbooks, government publications, previous dissertations, chapters in edited books, and research reports as sources. However, his main source was published journal articles, as he holds the view that articles published in academic

journals are usually a good place to start because they often explicitly mention the 'gaps' identified in literature.

### **3.3.5 Keeping Records**

Keeping records offers a quick recollection of previously explored information and knowledge. According to Carey (2012:54), it is helpful to keep some kind of record of any literature sources accessed and the subsequent information and knowledge gained.

The author further indicated that the main details to keep a record of include the names of authors, titles of papers or books, dates of publication, the publishers and places of publication, and a detailed summary of the contents of the article, paper, chapter, etc.

The researcher kept electronic records of literature sources and the relevant information gained during the process of the literature review. The records were kept according to names of authors, title of the sources, dates of publication, and a detailed summary of the sources. In addition, the researcher used general notes and index cards and they were helpful in providing a more comprehensive system, which allowed the comparison of key points and helped to keep a record of the authors' names.

Stage 3 of Carey's qualitative social work research process, which involves creating a research proposal and defining a research methodology, is presented next.

## **3.4 STAGE 3: CREATING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND DEFINING A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the creation of a research proposal for this study will be discussed, followed by the definition of research methodology.

### **3.4.1 Creating a Research Proposal**

Once the researcher has completed the initial review of the related literature, he is then able to create a research proposal. In this study, the researcher compiled the research proposal, which was later presented and approved by the Research Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at UNISA. According to Carey (2012:24-

26), the research proposal should comprise the following stages: research question, aim, objectives, methodology, ethics, and timetable. In most instances, the research proposal contains a research design, which serves as a kind of road map for the research (Waller et al 2016:41). Consequently, the research proposal clarifies in detail what the researcher intends to do and how he intends to do it. A well-designed proposal can go a long way towards shaping the final research report and will make it easier to progress in later stages of the research (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:264).

There are six topics suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016:7) regarding the creation of a research proposal, to ensure a clear and logical rationale in support of the qualitative methods. These topics are:

- The assumptions of qualitative approaches in general and for the specific genre or hybrid approach of the study.
- The trustworthiness of the overall design.
- Consideration of the ethical issues that may arise.
- The choice of the overall design, with an accompanying rationale for selecting a site, a sample, the participants, or any combination of these.
- The rationale behind the selection of specific data collection methods and how these will help inform the research question.
- A realistic projection of the resource needs to implement the study as planned.

The above-mentioned considerations are crucial and signify the importance of the researcher arguing his competence to conduct the study. It is important for the researcher to demonstrate his competence to conduct the study and this should be evident through the research proposal.

In the creation of a research proposal for this study, the researcher implemented the following six stages on how to create a research proposal, as suggested by Chambliss and Schutt (2013:265):

- An introductory statement of the research problem was provided. This is where the researcher also clarified his interest in the study.
- A literature review, in which the researcher clarifies how his research problem and plans build on what has already been reported in a literature review on the same topic, was presented.

- A methodological plan was described, detailing how the researcher will respond to the particular mix of opportunities and constraints he might face.
- A budget, presenting a careful listing of the anticipated costs, was included.
- An ethics statement was provided, identifying issues relating to human subjects in the research and how the researcher will respond to them in an ethical fashion.
- A statement of limitations, reviewing the weaknesses of the proposed research and presenting plans for minimising their consequences, was provided.

The aforementioned stages were useful in providing a clear and comprehensive proposal that ultimately served as a guiding principle for this research project.

### **3.4.2 Defining a Research Methodology**

In some instances, the words methodology and method are often interchanged as if they are referring to the same thing. However, research methodology is a theoretical approach taken to finding things out, similar to a set of principles. Research methods are specific strategies for finding things out, such as interviews or observations (Waller et al 2016:3). Methodology refers to a set of ideas, theory, or philosophy that surrounds, encompasses, and literally holds together a research project (Carey 2012:83). There are three kinds of research methodology that can be followed by the researcher in the process of his research, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed methods (Creswell 2016:3). Each of these methods is briefly defined below.

#### **3.4.2.1 Qualitative research method**

The qualitative research method places an emphasis on insights, meanings, and interpretations (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:54). Moreover, qualitative research is about exploring understandings and experiences, and delving into the world of the everyday, as well as into that which is unusual or out of the ordinary. It is an approach to enquiry that follows the traditional ways of conducting the social, behavioural, and health science research process and in this research process, the researcher starts with a problem that needs to be solved, and then formulates a question which, if answered, will help address the problem (Creswell 2016:3). Qualitative researchers typically begin with an exploratory research question about what people think and how they act, and why, in some social setting (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:178). Consequently,

qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman 2016:2).

Instead of trying to arrive at a singular definition of qualitative research, the following features identified by Yin (2011:7-8) inherent in the qualitative approach are explained.

A qualitative approach is about:

- studying the meaning of people's lives, under real-world conditions;
- representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study;
- covering the contextual conditions within which people live;
- contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behaviour; and
- striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

The research followed the qualitative research approach in this study and the motivation for choosing this approach is provided in section 3.5.4 of this chapter.

### **3.4.2.2 Quantitative research method**

Quantitative research emerged in the 1820s from the positivistic tradition promoted by the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who applied principles of the scientific revolution to practical social purposes (Guo 2015:373). The author further highlighted that quantitative methods are merely tools that help researchers to quantify and test a theoretically derived hypothesis. According to Fawcett and Pocket (2015:72), qualitative researching is about determining the relationship between facts and measures of reliability, generalisability and validity, and these are backed up by established statistical tests which are seen as externally verifiable and are central to the methodology. This means that quantitative research is the kind of research that employs measurement procedures and other techniques, such as methods of statistical inference, to study truly quantitative attributes (Westerman & Yanchar 2011:146). Thus, the qualitative research approach relies on the use of formalised methods to describe what appears to be going on, to attempt to explain what is happening in terms of cause and effect, and to produce a range of measurements and statistical tests. The researcher did not use the quantitative research method in this study because he found it to be irrelevant to the study.

### **3.4.2.3 Mixed research methods**

Mixed research methods entail the researcher using both quantitative and qualitative orientations (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:81). It is a systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study for the purpose of obtaining a fuller picture and deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007:119). For such reason, researchers combine the collection of quantitative factual data with a qualitative approach to explore meanings, perceptions, and understandings so that the research question is explored from variety of angles. Mixed methods are mainly integrated in such a way that both the qualitative and quantitative methods retain their original structures and procedures. A fundamental assumption about mixed methods research in the social, behavioural, and health sciences is that it might potentially provide a better, broader, and more credible understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010:272). In view of the nature of mixed methods research, the researcher found it to be inappropriate for this study and decided not to use it.

More importantly, research methodology forms part of the research proposal as it identifies the ways in which data is collected and analysed, including the philosophical and theoretical framework that will support the project (Carey 2012:25). For such reason, the researcher incorporated a description of the research method he intended to follow in the research proposal that was presented and approved by the Research Ethics Committee. The next section involves applying the research method as detailed in stage 4 of Carey's qualitative social work research process.

## **3.5 STAGE 4: APPLYING THE RESEARCH METHOD**

Applying the research method relates to the fourth stage of the qualitative social work research process, according to the framework provided by Carey (2012:17) depicted in Figure 3.1 of this chapter. In this stage, the focus would be on the discussion of the application the qualitative research method in terms of the following sub-sections: the research questions, the goal of the study, the objectives of the study, the motivation for choosing a qualitative research method, research design, and data collection.

### 3.5.1 Research Questions

A research question is a question about the social world that the researcher seeks to answer through the collection and analysis of first-hand, verifiable, empirical data (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:18). A common criterion for what defines a research question is that it must be researchable or investigable (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013:11). Being researchable means that research questions have to be formulated in such a way that they can be investigated scientifically and answered empirically. Good research questions are researchable in that they are contained and specific enough for the proposed study to produce the data to answer them (Green & Thorogood 2014:36). Qualitative research questions typically begin with '*how*' or '*what*' in keeping with the concerns of inductive social research (Waller et al 2016:34). Whether the research is explanatory, exploratory or descriptive, it is important that it should be based on one or more clear research questions that have been framed appropriately for qualitative inquiry.

In developing the research questions for this study, the researcher considered the following criteria suggested by Creswell (2016:97):

- A research question begins with a word such as '*how*' or '*what*'. Typically, it does not begin with the word '*why*', which suggests a quantitative cause-effect language.
- It states the central phenomenon – the core idea the researcher wants to explore in a qualitative project.
- It identifies the participants in the study – the people from whom the data will be collected.
- It may identify the research site or the place where the study will be undertaken.

In consideration of the above-mentioned criteria, the researcher formulated the research questions for this study as follows:

- What is the nature of social work services rendered by social workers to divorced persons?
- What are the needs expressed by divorced persons with regard to social work services?

- How do the experience-based perspectives of social workers and divorced persons regarding social work services to divorced persons inform the development of social work practice guidelines and social welfare policies?

### 3.5.2 The Goals of the Study

The goal of the study refers to the purpose statement outlining the overall objective of the study (Creswell 2016:94). This is the most important statement, as it conveys the essence of the study. It is a statement indicating the general purpose of the project (Thomas and Hodges 2010:39). The purpose or aim of a research goal is the overall driving force as to why one wants to study a particular phenomenon (Carey 2009:23). According to Creswell (2016:95), a good purpose statement should include the following key elements:

- The researcher should use key notes to denote to the reader that his statement is the purpose statement. In other words, the researcher should start by saying “*The purpose or goal is...*”. The researcher could also talk about the intent of the study.
- The researcher should use an appropriate verb tense in the statement.
- The researcher should keep the statement short and to the point.
- The researcher should use non-directional language that opens up responses from the participants rather than closing them down.

The main goals of this research study were:

- To develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons.
- To develop an in-depth understanding of needs expressed by divorced persons with regard to social work services.
- To develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

### 3.5.3 The Objectives of the Study

Developing research objectives is the next step after identifying the research problem (McNab 2008:73). An objective tells researchers what exactly needs to be investigated in practical terms (Babbie 2007:114). Whereas goals are seen as being the desired long-term outcomes, objectives are regarded as being the specific, short-term outcomes to aid in achieving the broader goal (Besley, Dudo, Yuan & Ghannam

2016:361). This means that research objectives specify how the goals of the study will be attained.

In order to achieve the goals of this study, the following research objectives were proposed:

- To explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons.
- To explore and describe the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services.
- To explore and describe guidelines informing social work practice and social welfare policies.

Additionally, the following task objectives (i.e. the steps to take to realise the goal) were set in order to realise the aforementioned goals and research objectives:

- To obtain a sample of social workers who provide social work services to divorced persons and a sample of divorced persons seeking social work services through purposive sampling.
- To conduct semi-structured interviews in order to establish the nature of social work services provided by social workers to divorced persons, as well as the needs of divorced persons on how they would like to be supported by social workers.
- To sift through, sort, and analyse data according to the eight steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Tesch (in Creswell 2009:186).
- To explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons, as well as the needs of divorced persons with regard to how they would like to be supported by social workers.
- To draw conclusions on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services, and make recommendations on practice and policy guidelines for social work services to divorced persons.

#### **3.5.4 Motivation for Choosing a Qualitative Research Method**

For any researcher, the first major step is to select a paradigm and method to conduct his research (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta 2014:110). Methodology offers the researcher a theoretical and philosophical foundation, which in turn will then influence the

methods that should be employed to collect the information and data (Carey 2012:84). As indicated in Chapter One, section 1.3.1, and in the introduction to this chapter, the researcher opted to approach this research project from a qualitative perspective in order to realise the research goal as outlined in sub-section 3.5.2 of this report. The researcher decided to follow the qualitative research approach, because the strength of qualitative research rests on its ability to provide complex, textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey 2011:1). According to Yin (2011:6), qualitative research offers greater latitude in selecting topics of interest, because other research methods are likely to be constrained by the following:

- the inability to establish the necessary research conditions;
- the unavailability of sufficient data series or lack of coverage of sufficient variables;
- the difficulty in drawing an adequate sample of respondents and obtaining a sufficiently high response rate; and
- other limitations such as being devoted to studying the past, but not ongoing events.

Another motivational factor for the researcher to use qualitative research was based on the fact that the qualitative research method in exploratory research uses open-ended questions and probing, which gives participants an opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses as with qualitative methods (Mack et al 2011:4). By using open-ended questions, the researcher evokes responses that are:

- meaningful and culturally salient to the participant;
- unanticipated by the researcher; and
- rich and explanatory in nature.

Additionally, the following characteristics of qualitative research suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016:3) prompted the researcher to utilise the qualitative research method. Qualitative research:

- takes place in a natural setting;
- uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic;
- focuses on context;
- is emergent rather than tightly prefigured; and

- is fundamentally interpretive.

Qualitative researchers study things in their own natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret these things in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Ryan 2007:580). Equally, the following elements about the nature of a qualitative research study identified by Creswell (2016:6-9) also served as a motivation for the researcher to use the qualitative research method. These elements are as follows:

- In qualitative research, the researcher reports the voices of participants. This means that qualitative research involves how people talk about their things, how they describe their things, and how they see the world.
- The researcher goes out to the setting to collect data. Consequently, qualitative research involves going out to the people and studying them at first hand.
- The researcher looks at how the process unfolds. In qualitative research, the researcher studies the processes or what unfolds over time.
- Instead of focusing on a larger number of people, qualitative research focuses on a small number of people, but goes deep to develop the detail they provide to researcher.
- The researcher explores in an open-ended way. Thus, qualitative research is exploratory research, hence the researcher asks open-ended questions.
- The researcher develops a complex understanding. Qualitative research provides a complex understanding of a problem or situation.
- Qualitative research lifts up the silenced voices of marginalised groups or populations. This means that qualitative research works best when studying people who have not often been studied.
- Qualitative research creates multiple perspectives or views of the phenomenon. The best qualitative research shares information about the themes drawn from multiple perspectives.
- Qualitative research contrasts different views of the phenomenon. In the same way, qualitative research provides the researcher with an opportunity to contrast what is stated with what is not stated.
- Qualitative research studies sensitive topics. Qualitative research involves the study of emotionally charged topics that are hard to research, including divorce.

- The researcher reflects on his own biases and experiences. In other words, qualitative researchers are self-conscious researchers and are always reflecting on what they personally bring to a study.

Another advantage of using the qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses – that is, to ask why or how (Mack et al 2011:4). This means that in the qualitative research method, the researcher listens carefully to what participants say, engages them according to their individual personalities and styles, and uses “probes” to encourage them to elaborate on their answers. Therefore, the researcher found the qualitative research to be more relevant and appropriate for this study.

### **3.5.5 Research Design**

The explorative, descriptive, and contextual research designs were employed in this study. According to Williams (2015:69), a research design is a plan for discovering something significant that is not known already, and it shows that ideas can be transformed into action. Likewise, Green and Thorogood (2009:42) postulate that research designs refer to the logic of the study; the what, how, and why of data production. They are logical blue prints and they serve as logical plans, not the logistics often referenced by others (Yin 2011:750). Through the research design, the researcher demonstrates that the overall plan is sound and that he is capable of undertaking the research, capable of employing the chosen methods, and sufficiently self-aware and interested to sustain the effort necessary for the successful completion of the study (Marshall & Rossman 2016:100).

In other words, a research design is the overall plan of the study and it is vital for researchers to develop a clear, logical, and practical plan for their studies, otherwise the research process becomes impossible. The research plan should map out the entire research process and it should comprise, amongst other things, the purpose, frameworks, types of samples, and data collection methods. Additionally, it is important for the researcher to demonstrate that he reserves the right to modify the original research design as the research evolves and this includes changing the implementation plan during data collection (Marshall & Rossman 2016:100). This is

crucial, especially when the researcher is confronted with challenges that may require him to modify the original research design.

The research designs used in this study are expounded below.

**a) Explorative design**

An explorative design examines a subject in order to gain an understanding of the issue (Krysiak & Finn 2010:58). According to Fawcett and Pockett (2015:53), qualitative researching is about exploring understandings and experiences and delving into the world of everyday, as well as into that which is unusual or out of the ordinary, and places emphasis on insights, meanings, and interpretations. These views correlate with Green and Thorogood's (2009:25) sentiments that qualitative research focuses on understanding the world from the point of view of the participants in the study. Thus, qualitative research is explorative in nature as it explores participants' understanding of a particular phenomenon or life experience.

In view of the fact that little was known about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs expressed by divorced persons regarding social work services, an explorative research design was selected for this study. Based on this exploration, the study sought to develop guidelines that would inform social welfare policies and social work practices.

**b) Descriptive design**

The descriptive design was also used to achieve the purpose of this study. The purpose of descriptive design is to describe situations or events (Babbie 2010:93). Descriptive research designs are most useful for describing phenomena or events about which little is known, or identifying new or emerging phenomena (Rossman & Rallis 2012:34). Continuing this line of thought, Grove et al (2013:632) reaffirm that descriptive research provides an accurate portrayal or account of the characteristics of a particular individual, event, or a group in a real-life situation for the purpose of discovering new meaning. Descriptive design is therefore useful for the researcher to acquire descriptive accounts of the participants' experiences.

A descriptive design was used in this study in order to describe and present the detailed personal accounts of the participants' experiences, namely the social workers and the divorced persons, on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services.

**c) Contextual Research Design**

Apart from an explorative and descriptive design, a contextual research design was also used in this study. A contextual research design is described by Burns and Grove (2010:32) as a design which enables the researcher to focus on specific events in their naturalistic settings. Qualitative research methods have an orientation to social context and to the interconnections between social phenomena, rather than to their discrete features (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:179). For that reason, in qualitative researching there is a focus on a particular context (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:55). This means that a qualitative research study considers contextual diversity, which includes the physical setting, social context, cultural context, ethnicity, religion, and other contexts that shape the identity of the individuals concerned.

In this study, the contexts and/or settings in which social work services are provided, namely the private sector, NGOs, private practice, and government departments, were taken into consideration. In addition, the study also considered the following: the socioeconomic factor, gender, ethnicity, and the uniqueness of the participants' experiences.

A research design further explains the 'how' of research, based on decisions about what, who, when and where (Williams 2015:70). In this manner, a research design provides guidance in terms of what information should be collected, from whom the information should be collected, when the information should be collected, and where the information will be collected from. These questions relate to the population, sampling, sampling methods, and the determination of the sample size through the principle of data saturation, which are presented next.

### **3.5.5.1 Population from which the samples were drawn**

A population is the entire set of individuals or other entities to which the study findings are to be generalised (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:85). In the same way, Beins (2009:107) reiterates that the population is the entire set of people or data that are of interest to a researcher. A population involves research with people who belong to a particular place or data collection about large groups of people (Williams 2015:126). Through population, a researcher draws a sample for the purpose of data collection. This means that without the population to draw a sample from, it becomes difficult for the researcher to generate the findings.

The population for this study comprises:

- All social workers in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, employed in the private sector, at NGOs, in government departments, and/or in private practice, who are registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions; and
- All divorced persons (men and women) residing in the Gauteng Province of South Africa.

### **3.5.5.2 Sampling**

Sampling in its broadest sense relates to the selection of respondents for the research project to be carried out (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:75). It is the process of selecting participants, cases, and/or location(s) for the study (Waller et al 2016:62). Likewise, Chambliss and Schutt (2013:86) uphold the view that a sample is a subset of a population that a researcher wants to learn about. Once a population for the study has been identified, the researcher draws a sample of people that he wants to learn about. In so doing, the researcher selects the respondents for the study.

The sampling for this study involved the following:

- Social workers who provide social work services to divorced persons.
- Divorced persons who received or sought social work services.

The inclusion of social workers provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore and describe the nature of the social work services they provide to divorced persons.

On the other hand, divorced persons were able to share their own first-hand information about their needs regarding social work services.

### **3.5.5.3 Sampling methods**

Choosing sampling methods involves the selection of the specific units, as well as the number of units to be included in the study (Yin 2011:87). Sampling methods are intimately related to the goals of the research study and the paradigm within which it is operating (Waller et al 2016:62). It should be noted that qualitative and quantitative methods require different sampling techniques (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:52). The crucial distinction about samples is whether they are based on a probability or a non-probability sampling method (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:90). These sampling methods are briefly described below:

#### **a) Probability sampling**

Probability sampling refers to selecting a sample from a population in such a way that each member of the population has an equal chance of being part of the sample (Waller et al 2016:66). The probability sampling method is mostly used in quantitative research and the 'representation' becomes a key concept in ensuring that the probability of data sources and data collected by the researcher reflect a commonly accepted measure of the whole (Thorne 2016:96). Similarly, Fawcett and Pockett (2015:76) reiterate that the main sampling method used for quantitative research projects is probability sampling. The probability sampling method is a sampling method that relies on a random selection method so that the probability of selection of population elements is known (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:90). Through the random selection method, every element of the sampling frame has a known probability of being selected.

There are four different types of random samples suggested by Chambliss and Schutt (2013:92-95), namely: simple random sampling, systemic random sampling, cluster sampling, and stratified random sampling.

- **Simple random sampling** is a method of sampling in which every sample element is selected purely on the basis of chance, through random process.

- **Systemic random sampling** is a method of sampling in which sample elements are selected from a list or from sequential files, where every  $n$ th element is selected, for instance every 7<sup>th</sup> name on an alphabetical list, after the first element is selected randomly.
- **Cluster sampling** is a method of sampling in which elements are selected in two or more stages, with the first stage being the random selection of naturally occurring clusters and the last stage being the random selection of elements within clusters.
- **Stratified random sampling** is a method of sampling in which sample elements are selected separately from population strata that the researcher identifies in advance.

Probability sampling methods were not used in this study, as they were found to be irrelevant and inappropriate to the study.

#### b) **Non-probability sampling**

Non-probability sampling methods are sampling methods in which the probability of selection of population elements is unknown (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:90). Non-probability sampling methods are most often used in qualitative research (Waller et al 2016:66). According to Waller et al (2016:66), qualitative samples are based on the following:

- **Convenience sampling**, which refers to selecting participants who are easily available.
- **Snowball sampling**, where participants are asked to suggest other participants.
- **Purposive sampling**, which refers to selecting participants with particular criteria that will enable the researcher to answer the research question.
- **Theoretical sampling**, which is a specific approach to sampling that aims to develop theory.

In the same way, Chambliss and Schutt (2013:97) assert that non-probability sampling methods are often used in qualitative research and that they involve the following samples that are commonly used:

- **Availability sampling**, which is a sampling method in which elements are selected on the basis of convenience.
- **Quota sampling**, which is a sampling method in which elements are selected to ensure that the sample represents certain characteristics in proportion to their prevalence in the population.
- **Purposive sampling**, which is a sampling method in which elements are selected for a purpose, usually because of their unique position.
- **Snowball sampling**, which is a sampling method in which sample elements are selected as successive informants or interviewees identify them.

The researcher used the purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods in this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the settings and specific individuals within them are recruited by virtue of some angle of the experience related to the topic under study that might help the researcher to understand the topic better (Thorne 2016:98). In purposive sampling, a researcher deliberately chooses people who he/she believes will provide him/her with the basic and best data he/she requires (Carey 2012:39). Therefore, in purposive sampling each element is selected for a purpose, usually because of the unique position of the sample elements (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:97). For this study, the researcher purposively chose social workers who provide services to divorced persons, and divorced persons who received or sought social work services to participate in the study.

In a snowball sampling, the researcher begins with one or two participants and then builds his/her sample by moving on to interview other people recommended or introduced by the initial participants (Carey 2012:39). In so doing, the researcher identifies and speaks to one member of the population, and then asks that person to identify others in the population and speaks to them, then asks them to identify others, and so on (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:99). This is a method of finding research subjects where one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Cohen & Arieli 2011:424). With the snowball sampling method, the researcher managed to reach out to the research participants and recruit them for the study. Thus, the

purposive and snowball sampling methods were considered appropriate to adequately address the research goals and objectives.

The researcher used the following **criteria for the inclusion** of the first group of participants (**social workers**) into the sample:

- The participants must be working as social workers in the private sector, or at an NGO, or in a government department, or in private practice.
- The participants must have at least two years' working experience as social workers.
- The participants must have provided social work services to divorced persons since they started working as social workers.
- The participants must have received intake cases of divorced persons seeking social work services.
- The participants must be based in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.
- The participants must be willing and available to participate in the study.

Adding to the above, the following **criteria were used for the inclusion** of the second group of participants (**Divorced Persons**) into the sample:

- The participants must have been legally divorced from their partners.
- The participants must have received or sought social work services from a social worker employed in the private sector, or at an NGO, or in a government department, or in private practice.
- The participants must be residing in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.
- The participants must be willing and available to participate in the study.

The researcher further considered what Waller et al (2016:70) refer to as 'sufficiency', which means that participants represent the range of population members in terms of whatever social categories are considered relevant, for example ethnicity, class, gender, or region. It is for this reason that the researcher considered divorced persons of diverse gender, ethnicity and age, and social workers employed in different sectors with diverse work experience. It is important for the researcher to interview more than one person in different categories. The researcher considered 'sufficiency' in order to create a balance

and to avoid what Carey (2012:40) refers to as 'sampling bias', which is the under or over representation of characteristics of a population found within a sample.

#### **3.5.5.4 The determination of the sample size**

Sample sizes tend to differ depending on the nature of the research question and problem, as well as possible access-related issues (Carey 2012:41). Sample size is determined by several factors, such as the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, the type of qualitative design used by the researcher, the richness and extensive use of data, and the resources being used (Creswell 2016:110). In most qualitative research projects size is not the priority, but rather the quality of data collected and analysed remains the core objective (Carey 2012:41). For this reason, the sample size in this study was not determined at the beginning of the study, but was founded on the principle of data saturation.

The concept of saturation was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 as part of their influential grounded theory approach to qualitative research, which focuses on developing sociological theory from textual data to explain social phenomena (Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi 2017:591). And so, data saturation refers to the point in data collection when no additional issues are identified, data begin to repeat, and further data collection becomes redundant. According to O'Reilly and Parker (2012:192), data saturation means that data should continue to be collected until nothing new is generated. Furthermore, Constantinou, Georgiou and Perdikogianni (2017:1) suggest that the significance of saturation in qualitative research is to collect data until saturation occurs.

Data saturation further relates to 'informational redundancy', which occurs when no new information is forthcoming, and the researcher is hearing the same information over and over (Waller et al 2016:70). With informational redundancy, the researcher interviewed participants until he became empirically convinced that no new information was being offered by the participants. This resonates with Malterud, Siersma and Guassora's (2016:1728) assertion that during data collection the researcher sequentially compares information presented until exhaustive saturation is obtained. In this study, the researcher discontinued the data collection process and began to transcribe the audio-taped data for data analysis purposes when he realised that data

saturation had been reached. Data saturation was reached after 10 social workers and 10 divorced persons were interviewed.

### **3.5.6 Data Collection**

Data collection refers to a collection of organised information, usually the result of experience, observation, and experiments, and this may consist of numbers, words, or images particularly as measurements or observations of a set of variables (Yin 2011:130). Through data collection, the researcher obtains first-hand, primary data from the participants (Williams 2015:118). Data collection involves fieldwork, as it requires the researcher to go out into the field in order to collect data. The process of data collection consists of more than simply collecting different forms of data; instead it involves several steps that stretch from the selection of the site to designing forms for recording information (Creswell 2016:105). In qualitative research, there are four field-based activities from which data is obtained, namely interviewing, observing, collecting and examining materials, and felling (Yin 2011:130). Similarly, Creswell (2016:112) suggests that there are four categories of qualitative data, namely: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. Given the significance of data collection in the research study, it is vital for the researcher to ensure that the process of gaining access to participants is done properly and with diligence. The process of preparing the participants for data collection follows immediately after the researcher has gained access to them. The next discussion focuses on gaining access to participants and preparation for data collection, methods of data collection, and testing of the data collection instrument.

#### **3.5.6.1 *Gaining access to participants and preparation for data collection***

Gaining access refers to the process of gaining and maintaining entry to a setting or establishing working relations with individuals, in order to undertake a research study (Stephens 2009:69). Conducting a research study requires that special attention be paid to the way the researcher might gain permission to contact participants and his subsequent access to them (Yin 2011:104). Gaining access is a prerequisite for the research to be conducted and by gaining access the researcher finds and secures participants for research. Prior to the researcher gaining access to the participants, he must first be granted permission from the gatekeepers. Getting permission to ask people to open up to a researcher or to enter a setting to collect data often requires

approaching organisations' gatekeepers, either in a letter, via email, or over the phone (Marshall & Rossman 2016:107). Gatekeepers may introduce the researcher to valuable participants, but they may also halt the access process, try to expedite findings, or anticipate reports that they hope to be beneficial to their organisations (Peticca-Harris, Degama & Elias 2016:376). Consequently, gatekeepers are people who regulate access to the participants.

In a qualitative study, researchers often have to recruit participants to be involved in the study and this recruitment may require placing advertisements in newspapers, contacting sites (e.g. support groups), sending out letters or emails, posting flyers about the project, and asking for recruits (Creswell 2016:108). The process of recruiting participants has to be executed in such a way that participants will voluntarily decide to be involved in the study. A discussion on how the researcher gained access and recruited the participants for this study follows below.

**a) Gaining access to social workers**

The researcher is currently employed in the Department of Social Work at UNISA as a lecturer responsible for the Case and Group Work practical work module at third year level. By virtue of the researcher being responsible for the practical work module and the nature of UNISA as an open distance learning institution, the researcher works extensively and closely with the workshop facilitators, markers, and student supervisors who are employed at UNISA as independent contractors, but are permanently employed by different welfare organisations (including government departments, NGOs, the private sector, and private practices) across the country. Additionally the Practicum Hub, which is a component of the Department of Social Work at UNISA mainly responsible for the placement of students at the organisations for work-integrated learning, has a list of the contact details of the contact persons for each organisation. This facilitated easy access to social workers as research participants

The researcher began by requesting a list of different organisations from the Practicum Hub and the list contained the contact details of the contact persons for each organisation in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, which is his study area. Upon receiving the list, the researcher identified relevant organisations and

sent an email to the contact persons of each organisation to get access to the study area and permission to interview social workers. The email contained a letter explaining who the researcher is, the purpose of the study, the area of the study, the study's sample (i.e. who the researcher wanted to involve in the study), method of data collection, number of interviews to be conducted, and length of each interview, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the researcher. Furthermore, the rights of the prospective participants were also included. According to Creswell (2016:108), an easy way to reach a larger number of people is through an invitation sent through an email. Equally, Marshall and Rossman (2016:107) state that the recipients of this email should get a sense of whether they are right for the study and whether the benefits outweigh any discomfort that might be caused by participation.

The contact persons replied to the email sent by the researcher, acknowledging receipt of the email and promising to forward the email to all social workers in their respective organisations. Eventually, the contact persons of various organisations sent emails to the researcher confirming the details of the relevant social workers interested in participating in the study. This relates to Green and Thorogood's (2009:140) suggestion that researchers may invite gatekeepers or contact persons to recruit their peers. Subsequently, the researcher contacted the participants telephonically to secure an appointment for further discussion, to build a rapport, and to prepare them for data collection.

**b) Gaining access to divorced persons**

The researcher gained access to the second group of participants (divorced persons) through the social workers who are involved in the Department of Social Work at UNISA. These are social workers who are employed by UNISA as independent contractors and responsible for supervising students, facilitating workshops, and marking assignments, but they are permanently employed in different welfare organisations in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. Social workers work with individuals, groups, families, organisations, and larger communities to promote positive changes (Zastrow 2014:68). This means that social workers deal with different kinds of social problems reported by clients, including working with divorced persons.

The researcher requested a list containing the contact details of all the social workers contracted to UNISA as student supervisors, workshop facilitators, and markers from the Practicum Hub. From the list, the researcher sought relevant social workers who might be of assistance in the process of identifying divorced persons from their database who might be willing to take part in the study as participants.

Thereafter the researcher sent an email to the relevant social workers requesting the information from their caseload of divorced persons who received or sought social work services from their offices. According to Creswell (2016:109), through the use of snowball sampling the researcher is able to find the participants who can direct him to other participants. In other words, the researcher required referral assistance from social workers who have more information about the potential participants.

The email contained a letter explaining who the researcher is, the purpose of the study, the area of the study, the study's sample (i.e. who the researcher wanted to involve in the study), method of data collection, number of interviews to be conducted, and length of each interview, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the researcher. The rights of the prospective participants were also included.

The researcher further requested social workers to contact the divorced persons from their caseload and establish if they would be interested to meet with the researcher for research purposes. The social workers replied to the researcher acknowledging the email and committing to assist the researcher as requested. According Marshall and Rossman (2016:107), personalised email requests are more likely to receive larger and more committed responses from the potential participants. The researcher received emails from the social workers confirming the contact details of the participants who were interested in participating in the study. The researcher contacted the participants telephonically to make appointments for further discussion, data collection preparation, and to build a rapport. Home visits were conducted in this regard.

**c) Preparing social workers for data collection**

The researcher visited two individual social workers at their organisations during the process of data collection, as required by the social workers. The purpose of the first contact was to establish a rapport with participants, to obtain their consent to participate in the study, and to prepare them for data collection. The second home visit was to conduct interviews with the aim of collecting the data required to answer the research questions posed for the study. The preparation for data collection was based on the explanation and clarification of the information contained in the informed consent form with the aim of seeking informed consent in writing from participants. These sentiments correlate with Creswell's (2016:106) views that during data collection, researchers need to provide participants with the consent letters with which participants give consent for the provisions of data collection and are guaranteed their rights.

While seeking informed consent from participants, the researcher considered the assertion made by Thorne (2016:123) that although the setting and institution have explicit procedures and policies related to informed consent to participate in a study, the challenge of attending with integrity to informed consent has long been recognised as a particular challenge for qualitative researchers in general, because the focus is human subjective experiential knowledge and therefore one cannot fully predetermine what will happen in the research encounter. In other words, some organisations and institutions might have policies stipulating certain conditions for consideration prior to the signing of the informed consent form. However, the researcher cannot predetermine what will happen in the research encounter during data collection given the subjective nature of the qualitative research.

Obtaining informed consent for qualitative research involves the researcher clearly explaining the project to potential study participants (Mack et al 2011:11). The author further suggested that individual informed consent might be given either in writing or orally:

- Written consent means that a person receives a written form that describes the research and then signs that form to document his/her consent to

participate. For illiterate participants, the form is read to them and they make some kind of a mark in a place of a signature.

- Oral consent means that a person receives all of the information needed for consent either verbally or in writing and then verbally consents to participate. The participant does not sign a consent form and therefore it is described as waiving the requirement for documentation of informed consent.

The researcher opted for the written informed consent, as he found it more useful and manageable. In so doing, the researcher provided and explained the details contained in the informed consent form to participants to ensure that they understood all the information before they made the decision to either participate in the study or withdraw. The informed consent form contained the following information as suggested by Mack et al (2011:10), and it was explained to participants in the language of their choice:

- The purpose of the research.
- What is expected of a research participant, including the amount of time likely to be required for participation.
- The expected risks and benefits, including psychological and social.
- The fact that participation is voluntary and that one can withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions.
- How confidentiality will be protected.
- The name and contact information of the researcher to be contacted for questions or problems related to the research.
- The name and contact information of the chair of the departmental Research Ethics Committee who oversees the research.

The researcher explained to the participants the ethical considerations, and they are also given in Chapter One, section 1.6, and Chapter Three, sub-section 3.8.3. Through the explanation of the above-mentioned information, the researcher was able to build a rapport with the participants. A rapport is critical in the context of negotiations, since it provides a basis for creating trust and influences both the objective and subjective outcomes of negotiation (Bronstein, Nelson, Livnat & Ben-Ari 2012:1090). The researcher further afforded participants an opportunity to raise questions for further clarification, after which they signed the informed

consent form to confirm that they understood everything and that they had voluntarily decided to participate in the study. Informed consent forms were signed by the participants and submitted to the researcher. A second appointment for the purpose of data collection was made by the researcher and the participants.

**d) Preparing divorced persons for data collection**

As with the first group of participants (social workers), two visits were made to the second group of participants (divorced persons) individually at their homes, as preferred by them. The first visit was aimed at establishing a rapport with participants, to obtain their consent to participate in the study, and to prepare them for data collection. The importance of the researcher building a rapport with participants when conducting qualitative research is to ensure that they feel comfortable enough to share sensitive information.

The purpose of the second visit was to conduct interviews with the aim of collecting data for the study. As part of the preparation of participants for data collection, the researcher explained and clarified information contained in the informed consent form to participants. Formal informed consent is necessary for all qualitative research methods regardless of the sampling method used to identify potential participants and the strategies used to recruit them (Mack et al 2011:7). The authors further postulate that an informed consent form is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate. It means that an informed consent form is not just a piece of paper that describes in detail what the research is about, but it goes through the Research Ethics Committee for approval and it is signed by the participants and the researcher.

Apart from the suggestion made by Mack et al (2011:10) regarding the information to be included in the consent form, as explained in sub-section 3.8.3.1 of the report, the researcher followed the proposal made by Creswell (2016:106) regarding the information to be included in the consent form. The

following information contained in the consent form was provided and explained to participants as suggested by Creswell (2016:106):

- The right of participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any given time was explained.
- The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection was provided.
- Assurances of the participants' confidentiality were made.
- The known risks associated with participation in the study were explained.
- The expected benefits of participation in the study were explained.
- The signature of the participants and the researcher was required.

The researcher also clarified the ethical considerations to participants to ensure that they understood their roles. Participants were afforded an opportunity to raise questions for further clarification, after which they signed the informed consent form to confirm that they understood everything and that they had voluntarily decided to participate in the study. Providing an opportunity for participants to raise questions is part of building a rapport (Green & Thorogood 2009:112). A follow-up meeting was scheduled for the actual research interviews on a date and time most convenient to the participants. The methods of data collection are presented next.

### **3.5.6.2 *Methods of data collection***

Data collection methods involve a consideration of the best way to collect the information to address the overarching research question and subset of associated research questions (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:52). The methods of data collection include interviews, narrative interviews, participant or non-participant observation, questionnaires, and rating scales (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:52). Historically, interviews and/or focus groups, observations, and document collections have dominated qualitative research practices (Paulus et al 2014:70). This implies that qualitative data is mainly collected in different ways, including through formal interviews, participant observations, and focus groups. A good quality qualitative research study will gather data to answer research questions in a transparent way that convinces the reader of its authenticity, trustworthiness, and rigor (Kelly 2016:5). In order to achieve the above-mentioned, it is imperative for the researcher to decide about a suitable and comprehensive method of data collection at the onset of the study.

The researcher selected the interviews as a way of collecting data from participants for this study based on their convenient and effective nature. This account relates to Carey's (2012:109) assertions that interviews remain a cheap, convenient, and effective means to collect extensive and rich data within a reasonable period of time. Research interviews can be seen as a specific form of interaction in which the researcher and interviewee produce language data about beliefs, behaviour, ways of classifying the world, or about how knowledge is categorised (Green & Thorogood 2009:102). According to Fawcett and Pockett (2015:68), about 90% of all social science investigations use a form of interview to gather information from participants.

The type of interview used by the researcher to collect data is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews integrate a combination of pre-planned and spontaneous questions which allow the researcher to use his/her discretion to ask new questions in response to participants' answers or body language (Carey 2012:112). These questions can be asked in any order, depending on the circumstances. When using semi-structured interviews, the researcher is permitted flexibility while maintaining focus. However, it becomes hard for the researcher to maintain consistency, especially if the interviews are conducted by more than one interviewer (Williams 2015:131). Additionally, the researcher has a general plan for the topic to be discussed, but does not follow a fixed order of questions or word these questions in a specific way (Packer 2011:43). Thus, with semi-structured interviews the researcher uses questions from the interview guide, but he/she may come up with follow-up questions when he/she deems it necessary.

It is worth understanding that during the interview a researcher asks questions and listens to participants. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to know exactly the types of research questions to be asked during data collection. According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2013:14), there are four different types of questions that are central during the interviews, namely descriptive, comparative, exploratory, and normative questions.

- **Descriptive questions** – generate knowledge about what characterises a phenomenon, such as its substance (what it is), function (what it does), and

rationale (why it has certain qualities). A good example of a descriptive question is: “What is your experience of life after divorce?” Participants will respond by describing their post-divorce experiences.

- **Comparative questions** – produce knowledge about relations between phenomena, such as concomitance (to what extent the two phenomena relate), equivalence (to what extent two phenomena are similar), and difference (how two phenomena differ). An example of a comparative question is: “What kind of support have you sought or received during and after divorce?” In responding to this question, participants compare the kind of support they sought or received from the social workers.
- **Exploratory questions** – aim to generate knowledge about the contingent relations between phenomena and their attributes. They pursue correlation (whether there is a contingent relation between specific attributes of two phenomena), conditionality (whether that correlation is conditional on additional attributes), and causality (whether X produces a change in Y). An example of an exploratory question is: “How did you experience the services provided to you by the social worker?”
- **Normative questions** – aim to produce knowledge about how something should be done. These questions are normally about what should be done in order to improve something. An example of a normative question is: “How do you think social work services to divorced persons could be improved?” This question gives participants an opportunity to suggest, from their point of view, what should be done in order to improve services to divorced persons.

Consequently, the richness of an interview is heavily dependent on the researcher’s ability to pose follow-up questions. These follow-up questions are mainly open-ended in nature and they comprise open-ended elaborations, open-ended clarifications, and detailed elaborations (Marshall & Rossman 2016:150). In this study, the researcher mainly used open-ended questions during the interview with the aim of gathering more intense and rich information from participants. Open-ended questions are the most common approach in qualitative research, where interviewees are free to answer and explore queries in their own words and style (Carey 2012:113). With open-ended questions, the researcher was able to afford the participants an opportunity to express themselves freely and from their own frame of reference. In view of that, open-ended

questions give participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. Furthermore, Mack et al (2011:4) postulate that open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher, and rich and exploratory in nature.

For this study, the open-ended questions sought to explore and describe each participant's experiences about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services. The open-ended questions posed to participants in this study are given below.

**Questions for divorced persons:**

1. Would you please share with me your experiences of marital life prior to divorce?
2. What is your experience of life after divorce?
3. How did divorce affect you?
4. Would you share the kind of needs you have experienced after divorce?
5. Kindly describe the challenges you have experienced after divorce?
6. How did you deal with the post-divorce challenges you experienced?
7. Would you share the losses you have experienced as a result of divorce?
8. Would you describe the emotions you have experienced after divorce?
9. What kind of support have you sought or received during and after divorce?
10. Have you sought services from a social worker after divorce? If so, what kind of services did you receive?
11. How did you experience the services provided to you by the social worker?
12. Do you think that social work services should be provided to divorced persons?  
Please motivate your answer.
13. How do you think social work services to divorced persons could be improved?
14. What kind of advice would you give to other couples that are going through divorce?

**Questions for social workers:**

1. What is your experience in social work?
2. What kind of cases do you mainly deal with at your organisation?
3. What theoretical approach do you use at your organisation?
4. What is your experience of dealing with cases involving divorced persons?

5. What are the main problems raised by divorced persons?
6. Kindly describe the kind of social work services sought by divorced persons.
7. What kind of social work services do you provide to divorced persons?
8. Do you find the theoretical approach you use when dealing with divorced persons helpful? Kindly motivate your answer.
9. Are you satisfied with the kind of social work services you provide to divorced persons? Kindly motivate your answer.
10. What kind of challenges do you experience in providing services to divorced persons?
11. From your point of view, what should be done to overcome these challenges?
12. Kindly describe when and how you refer divorced persons to other sources.
13. Do you think that social workers should provide services to divorced persons?
14. How do you think social work services to divorced persons could be improved?

The above-mentioned questions helped the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' views regarding the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services. In order to gain a full understanding of the participants' views on the topic, the researcher applied the necessary interviewing skills. The interviewer's skills have an important influence on the comprehensiveness and complexity of the information that participants provide.

The researcher also applied the following suggestions by Yin (2011:136-139) on how to conduct a successful qualitative interview:

- **Speaking in modest amounts.** The researcher implemented this by speaking less and providing an opportunity for participants to speak more through open-ended questions.
- **Being non-directive.** The researcher allowed participants to share their experiences in their own way and describe the world as they perceive it.
- **Staying neutral.** This was implemented by ensuring that the researcher's body language, expressions, and words were carefully kept neutral.
- **Maintaining a rapport.** The researcher maintained a good rapport with participants and this was done by ensuring that the researcher avoided conversations that might do harm to participants.

- **Using an interview protocol.** The researcher used the interview guide to ensure that similar questions were asked of all participants, though follow-up questions may have differed depending on participants' responses.
- **Analysing when interviewing.** The researcher decided on when to probe for more detail, when to move on to other questions, and when to modify the original plan to accommodate new revelations.

Additionally, the researcher considered the following suggestions by Mack et al (2011:38) regarding what the researcher must do during the interview. The researcher:

- encouraged participants to elaborate on their answers without expressing approval, disapproval, judgement, or bias;
- kept track of the questions, yet let the conversation develop naturally; and
- managed the interview, while still respecting the principle of viewing the participant as the expert.

In order to achieve the above and to gather data from the social workers and divorced persons, the researcher applied the following interviewing skills: rapport building, listening, attending, probing and questioning, and empathising.

- a) **Rapport building** involves the researcher's ability to quickly create interviewer/participant dynamics that are positive, relaxed, and mutually respectful (Mack et al 2011:38). In so doing, the participants are able to talk freely, openly, and honestly about the research topic. Building a rapport is a close and harmonious relationship in which there is a common understanding (Bronstein et al 2012:1091). A researcher needs to build a good rapport with the participants (Yin 2011:138). With this skill, the researcher was able to create a safe space for participants to feel free to share their experiences. The researcher also avoided conversations that might do harm to participants.
- b) **Listening** is one of the communication skills used in order to understand the experiential world, perceptions, and realities of the person (Grobler et al 2013:49). According to Corey et al (2014:37), "active listening involves absorbing the content, noting gestures and subtle changes in voice or expression, and sensing underlying messages." In order to communicate effectively, it is essential

to develop good listening skills (Zastrow 2015:169). The researcher used the skill of listening to understand participants' experiences and perceptions without imposing his frame of reference.

- c) **Attending** is the way in which a facilitator orientates himself/herself physically and psychologically during the interview session in order to enable the person sharing his/her experiences to feel at ease (Grobler et al 2013:47). Through the skill of attending, the message is thus conveyed that the researcher is open to the participant and that he/she can trust the researcher with his/her experiences (Grobler & Schenck 2009:46). Therefore, attending is one of the behaviours that must be practiced throughout the interview session. This skill enabled the researcher to demonstrate that he was present with the participants throughout the interview.
  
- d) **Probing and questioning.** The researcher should ask open-ended questions to encourage participants to talk and these questions normally begin with 'what' and 'how' (Creswell 2016:131). In so doing, participants are able to express themselves according to their own understanding and interpretation of the question. Open-ended questions direct the person to a heightened awareness of the moment (Corey et al 2014:39). Open-ended questions place no limit on the reply and give a person a measure of control over the answer (Kadushin, in Mohapi & Schenck 2009:95). The researcher asked for more information and asked for an explanation of ideas. Probes include specific wording, such as the following: "tell me more", "I need more detail", "what is an example of that?", "could you explain your response more?", or "what does that mean?" (Creswell 2016:131). Using the skill of questioning and probing, the researcher enabled participants to share their experiences freely and without limit.
  
- e) **Empathising** means being able to see what the participant's world is like to him/her (Grobler et al 2013:54). This means that the researcher attempts without prejudice or preconceived ideas to hear and understand the participant, and conveys this understanding to the participant verbally and non-verbally. When expressing empathy, it is essential to mirror what was said in a non-judgemental way that will help the interviewer to grasp the essence of what the other person

is thinking or feeling (Zastrow 2015:208). Moreover, the core of the skill of empathy lies in being able to openly grasp another's experiences while at the same time maintaining one's separateness (Corey et al 2014:38). The skill of empathy enabled the researcher to understand participants from their frame of reference without prejudice or preconceived ideas.

### **3.5.6.3    *Testing of the data collection instrument***

The testing of the data collection instrument for this study was done through a pilot study. A pilot study is referred to as a feasibility study that comprises small-scale versions of the planned study, trial runs of planned methods, or miniature versions of the anticipated research in order to answer methodological questions and guide the development of the research plan (Kim 2010:191). This means that the pilot study is intentional and is planned from the beginning of a proposed project and before the actual investigation. Piloting data collection tools involves subjecting the tools to a smaller version of a proposed study conducted to develop or refine the data collection tools (Grove et al 2013:703). In so doing, the researcher is able to confirm that there are no obvious errors or omissions in the instrument before it is used.

The pilot study is an integral part of the research process in preparation for data collection and it provides a means of assessing whether the questions actually elicit the sought data (Burkard, Knox & Hill 2011:87). When conducting a qualitative inquiry, researchers can pilot a study to assess the acceptability of an interview or an observation protocol, or both (Kim 2010:193). In other words, a pilot study helps researchers when assessing and preparing for their interview techniques and they can use it to self-evaluate their readiness, capability, and commitment. Likewise, Johanson and Brooks (2009:394) postulate that a pilot study is often recommended to investigate the feasibility of a study.

The purpose of the pilot study in this research endeavour was to test the data collection instrument and the methods of data collection outlined in sub-section 3.5.6.2 of the report. The researcher conducted the pilot study with divorced persons and social workers in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, where the actual study was to be conducted. The importance of conducting the pilot study in the same geographical

area of the study is to obtain accurate feedback on the data collection instrument informed by individuals who have a similar background to the actual participants.

Since the pilot study is a small-scale version of the actual study (Kim 2010:191), the researcher selected two participants from each of the two sets of participants, namely social workers and divorced persons. In selecting these participants, the researcher used the same criteria for inclusion as outlined in sub-section 3.5.5.3 of the report. Furthermore, the researcher used similar methods of data collection as outlined in sub-section 3.5.6.2 of the report. The pilot study provided insight into the intensity and the complexity of the issues under investigation. The data collected during the pilot study provided insight regarding the practicality of the envisaged research methods and it helped in the planning of the actual data collection phase. The pilot study also provided an opportunity for the researcher to improve his interviewing skills. Therefore, the researcher used the outcomes of the pilot study to establish whether or not changes are required. The pilot sample did not form part of the final sample of the study. The information obtained from these interviews were not analysed. For that reason, the pilot sample did not form part of the final sample of the study.

The next section involves analysing the findings and data outlined in stage 5 of Carey's qualitative social work research process.

### **3.6 STAGE 5: ANALYSING FINDINGS AND DATA**

The activities of analysing findings and data relate to stage 5 of the qualitative social work research process according to the framework of Carey (2012:17), as depicted in Figure 3.1 in this report. Analysis is the search for meaning in relation to the research purpose or question (Stephens 2009:98). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016:214), qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes. Similar views are shared by Chambliss and Schutt (2013:206) that qualitative data analysis refers to techniques used by a researcher to search and code textual, aural, and pictorial data and to explore relationships among the resulting categories. In the light of the above, the researcher analysed data in order to search for the meaning in relation to the research question.

Data analysis begins once the researcher begins to collect data and intensifies later during the research process (Carey 2012:26). In the same way, Chambliss and Schutt (2013:207) postulate that qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as data are being collected rather than after data collection has ceased. Therefore, data collection and analysis typically go hand in hand as the researcher builds a coherent interpretation (Marshall & Rossman 2016:215). For this study, the researcher began with the process of data analysis as data were collected.

There are many different approaches to data analysis (Paulus et al 2014:115). In other words, data can be analysed with different methods and approaches. Amongst other methods and approaches, Chambliss and Schutt (2013:209) suggest the following steps for qualitative data analysis:

- Documentation of the data and data collection.
- Conceptualisation and coding.
- Examining relationships to show how one concept may influence another.
- Authenticating conclusions by evaluating alternative explanations, disconfirming evidence, and searching for negative cases.
- Reflexivity.

In addition, Marshall and Rossman (2016:17) suggest the following steps to qualitative data analysis:

- Organising the data.
- Immersion in the data.
- Generating possible categories and themes.
- Coding the data.
- Offering interpretation.
- Searching for alternative understandings.
- Writing the report.

In view of the above-mentioned methods and approaches to data analysis, it is apparent that qualitative data analysis transforms data into the findings. As already explained in sub-section 3.5.6.2 of this report, semi-structured interviews were used in this study to collect data from participants, meaning that data were collected in the form of words. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Furthermore, the researcher translated all interviews that were conducted in other languages, as preferred by participants, into English. Each line of the transcripts was numbered by the researcher to ensure that data were well organised.

The researcher followed the eight steps of Tesch's approach to data analysis as outlined by Creswell (2009:186) and already stated in Chapter One, section 1.5.1. The researcher used Tesch's approach, because it is regarded as classical work in the analysis of data when utilising the qualitative approach. The descriptive analysis technique of Tesch's eight steps as cited in Creswell (2009:186) was applied as follows:

- The researcher read through all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole and jotted down the themes as they emerged.
- The researcher picked one transcript and read through it while writing down the meaning of what was being read in the margin. The researcher proceeded to read all the transcripts in the same manner.
- After all the scripts had been read, the researcher made a list of all themes identified. These themes were grouped together according to their commonalities and were classified into columns marked as major themes, unique themes, and leftover themes.
- The researcher took the list of themes and revisited the data. The themes were abbreviated as codes and the codes were written alongside the appropriate portion of the text. The researcher then reviewed the coding scheme and observed whether new themes emerged.
- The researcher found the most descriptive words for the themes and placed them into categories. The researcher drew the linking lines between categories to show shared relationships.
- The researcher made a final decision on the abbreviation for each of them and wrote them in alphabetic order.
- The researcher wrote down the data of each category and made preliminary analysis of the data.
- The researcher recorded the existing data, as it seemed necessary. The researcher analysed the two sets of data (divorced persons and social workers) in the same manner, but separately.

The transcripts were also provided to an independent coder to conduct a qualitative data analysis as a way of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher's findings were compared with the findings from the independent coder's report during a consensus discussion facilitated by the researcher's promoter. The comparison of the themes and sub-themes with the storylines were done to assess consistency. A detailed description of the themes and sub-themes is presented in Chapter Four and Five of this report.

The next discussion involves writing up the findings as outlined in stage 6 of Carey's qualitative social work research process.

### **3.7 STAGE 6: WRITING UP THE FINDINGS**

The process of writing up relates to stage 6 of the qualitative social work research process according to Carey's (2012:17) framework. Writing is a symbolic system that articulates what we know (Colyar 2009:254). The researcher's journey of writing begins with the writing of doctoral dissertations and continues with the writing of research articles, conference papers, and books (Cloutier 2016:69). This implies that the process of writing should begin early in a research project. The advantage of beginning the task of writing as early as possible includes avoiding any need to write up a long report or dissertation in a relatively brief time towards the end of the study, and it increases the quality of the final document, since the researcher will have more time to complete and reflect on the work (Carey 2012:17).

For that reason, the researcher began with the writing up process after every stage of the qualitative social work research process outlined in Carey's framework. The researcher started the process by writing up the research proposal, which was later presented and approved by the departmental Research Ethics Committee, as explained in section 3.4.1 of this report. The researcher continued with the writing up process during data collection and data analysis as explained in section 3.5.6 and section 3.6 of this report. This happened when the researcher transcribed the audiotaped interviews and analysed the data. Therefore, the writing up process happened in every step of the research study. Through the process of writing up, the researcher is compelled to think in new ways about data, considering the connections

within data, and between the data and the broader literature (Green & Thorogood 2009:254). This means that the researcher's reputation is formed on the basis of what and how he writes. According to Fawcett and Pocket (2015:125), the researcher's writing carries an imperative to disseminate research findings and new knowledge that ultimately is of benefit to service recipients, service users, colleagues, students, policy-makers and other researchers. The authors further postulate the following reasons for the writing up process:

- To persuade the reader to take action.
- To persuade the reader to accept a particular view.
- To express understanding or support for a cause.
- To affirm a continuing position.
- To establish the author's reputation in a particular field.

The aforementioned reasons are of paramount importance during the writing up process and the researcher considered them throughout the process in this study.

Adding to the reasons stated above, Stephens (2009:118) suggests that writing up the research findings involves the following types of reports:

- **The natural history**, in which the report reflects the different stages of the research process as they progressed over time.
- **The chronology**, which is temporally organised, but reflects the development of the phenomenon being studied.
- **Narrowing and expanding the focus**, whereby the analysis moves backwards and forwards between specific observations and in consideration of broader structural issues.
- **Separating narration and analysis**, whereby the qualitative data are presented first before theoretical issues are addressed.

The writing up process might take a different formats and sequences. In most instances, the process of writing up starts with a brief introduction, followed by the text broken up into subsections, and concludes with a summary to bring everything together (Winchester & Salji 2016:311). Usually, the writing up format includes the introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methods, findings and initial analysis, further analysis, conclusions, and implications (Williams 2015:234).

For this study, the researcher followed the structure of writing a research dissertation or report suggested by Carey (2012:237-238), which comprises the six sections discussed below.

### **3.7.1 Explaining the purpose of the research**

This section includes why the researcher undertook the research and details the research questions or social problem being explored (Carey 2012:237). It further includes the aims and objectives of the research. For this research study, explaining the purpose of the research is covered mostly in Chapter One, as it reflects the general introduction, research problem, the significance of the study, research goal and questions, and the research methodology.

### **3.7.2 Describing how the research was done**

This section includes how the research objectives guide the researcher's work, what research methods were applied, the theoretical orientation that influenced the research process, methods of data analysis, and the findings (Carey 2012:237). For this study, the description of the application of the qualitative research process for investigating the chosen topic is presented in Chapter Three, whereas the theoretical framework and literature review are reflected in Chapter Two of the report.

### **3.7.3 Presenting the findings from the research**

This section involves the presentation of the research findings and it is usually the largest section of most reports and dissertations (Carey 2012:237). The findings of this research study are extensively presented in Chapter Four (**divorced persons**) and Chapter Five (**social workers**).

### **3.7.4 Discussing and analysing the findings**

In this section, the researcher attempts to contextualise his findings by comparing them with previous research and factors that might impact the findings (Carey 2012:238). It is also expected of the researcher to extract meaning and ways by which the findings can be linked to social work practice. Therefore, the findings of this research study are expansively discussed and analysed in Chapter Four (**divorced persons**) and Chapter Five (**social workers**).

### **3.7.5 Reaching conclusions**

This section deals with questions regarding what the researcher has discovered and learnt from the study completed (Carey 2012:238). It also includes the improvements and revisions that might be made regarding social work practice. The overall conclusions of the study are outlined and presented in Chapter Six.

### **3.7.6 Making recommendations**

This section involves how the research findings might influence the future practice and how policy, legislation, or general practices need to be revised (Carey 2012:238). However, this is a relatively succinct section. The overall recommendations of the study are outlined and presented in Chapter Six.

In addition, the researcher considered the following practical aspects of writing suggested by Green and Thorogood (2009:263), namely writing clear, accessible prose, avoiding jargon, taking care with vocabulary, and using accurate translations.

The next section involves the dissemination of the research findings as outlined in stage 7 of Carey's qualitative social work research process.

## **3.8 STAGE 7: DISSEMINATION**

Dissemination relates to stage 7 of the qualitative social work research process in terms of Carey's framework. In this section, the dissemination of the findings, data verification, and ethical considerations will be presented.

### **3.8.1 Dissemination of the Findings**

Dissemination represents the distribution or spreading out of research findings and it may influence the practice or the lives of other people, including service users or colleagues (Carey 2012:241). The goal of research is not just to discover something, but also to communicate that discovery to a larger audience, which includes government officials and the general public (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:272). Similarly, Thorne (2016:240) reiterates that qualitative research by its very nature is meant to be relevant to a particular audience. According to Williams (2015:231), research reports

need to be written in a way that they are accessible to the audience. In other words, qualitative research reports are written for a particular audience. On the other hand, deciding on an audience for dissemination involves questions on how and where to publish, including through media (such as radio, television, and newspapers); the internet; a poster or report; journals, books, or magazines; or a presentation at a conference or group meetings (Matthews & Ross 2010:473).

The researcher considered the following forms of dissemination suggested by Carey (2012:241):

- a) **Simply handing in the research dissertation to be marked.** Since this research study forms part of the doctoral study, it is required of the researcher to hand in the dissertation to be marked by three external markers, of which two markers are from local universities and one marker is from an international university.
- b) **Allowing a colleague to read the dissertation.** The dissertation shall be read by the researcher's promoter/supervisor (who is also a colleague in the Department of Social Work at UNISA) and amended to her satisfaction prior sending it out for marking.
- c) **Making the research available to the public, for instance in the library and on the internet.** It is required of the researcher to send a hard copy and an electronic version (PDF file) of the dissertation to the university librarian (UNISA). The librarian will ensure that the dissertation is readily available on the library shelves and subsequently on the internet.
- d) **Allowing research findings to directly influence our beliefs and those of other people.** The research findings will include the description of the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services, and it will ultimately describe how the divorced persons would like to be supported by social workers.

- e) **Allowing findings to influence social work practice.** The findings will influence social work practice, since practice guidelines for social workers that are aligned to the needs of divorced persons will be developed. Furthermore, policy guidelines that would assist the DSD in developing social policies relating to divorce will be developed.
- f) **The discussion of research findings with social work colleagues or service users and carers.** The researcher intends to discuss the research findings with colleagues in the Department of Social Work at UNISA and social workers in different settings. The findings will also be discussed with the DSD, as it is a lead department in social services in South Africa and responsible for the development of social welfare policies.
- g) **Writing an article for a social work magazine or an academic journal.** The researcher intends to publish an article/articles in local and international academic journals.
- h) **Presenting an oral paper at a conference.** The researcher also intends to present a paper at local and international conferences.
- i) **Integrating any findings in future research.** Based on the findings, the researcher intends to expand the scope of his research to other provinces in future.

Likewise, Creswell (2016:52) states that the researcher must adhere to the following issues during the stage of dissemination or reporting information:

- Refrain from plagiarising.
- Avoid falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, and conclusions.
- Avoid disclosing information that would harm participants.
- Communicate in clear and appropriate language.
- Keep raw data and other materials safe.
- State who owns the data from the study.

The above stated issues relate to data verification to ensure the trustworthiness of data and ethical considerations, which will be presented in the next sections.

### **3.8.2 Data Verification**

Data verification aims at establishing the trustworthiness of data collected as well as the research findings. According to White, Oelke and Friesen (2012:246), trustworthiness is vital to the success of qualitative studies. On the other hand, Fawcett and Pockett (2015:33) define trust as the confident belief in and reliance upon the moral character and competence of another person. The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are worth paying attention to (Elo, Kaariainen, Kantse, Polkki, Utraiainen & Kyngas 2014:2). The authors further state that trustworthiness is often presented by using the terms credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity. These views resonate with Marshall and Rossman's (2016:46) statement that the terms credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity offer a set of procedures to ensure that the researcher has met the standards of trustworthiness. In order to achieve the objective of trustworthiness, the researcher must adhere to methods accepted as scientifically sound in the qualitative study.

The researcher presented a comprehensive plan on how data was envisaged to be verified in order to check the trustworthiness of research findings using Guba's model as outlined in Chapter One, section 1.5.2. Guba's model is regarded as classical work in the verification of collected data. In this section, the researcher presented how the requirements to ensure trustworthiness were met. According to Guba's model (in Krefting 1991:215-222), there are four characteristics that ensure trustworthiness, namely truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

#### **3.8.2.1 Truth-value**

Truth-value seeks to check if the findings of the study are a true reflection of the experiences of the research participants (Krefting 1991:215). This implies that truth-value seeks to check the credibility of the findings. Credibility is the capacity to be believed or believed in (Lock & Seele 2017:2). In the same way, Tracy (2013:248) defines credibility as the trustworthiness, plausibility, and good character of a researcher and his study, which affects the believability of the research findings. The

researcher used the following credibility strategy in order to achieve the truth-value of the findings:

- **Interview technique**

Participants were prepared prior to the collection of data to ensure that they felt comfortable while sharing their life experiences. Moreover, a rapport and trust were established during the initial visit to the participants, which was intended for the preparation for data collection. The researcher also discussed the ethical considerations with participants during the process of preparation for data collection. In order to allow for the flow of the interview and an in-depth exploration of issues under discussion, the researcher used the skills that are comprehensively discussed in sub-section 3.5.6.2, namely listening, probing, questioning, and empathy.

- **Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to a situation where the researcher produces similar results to strengthen the credibility of the study, using multiple methods (Tracy 2013:250). In the same way, Chambliss and Schutt (2013:250) postulate that triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to study one research question. The principle of triangulation pertains to the goal of seeking at least three ways of verifying or corroborating a particular event, description, or fact being reported by the study (Yin 2011:81). Through triangulation, the researcher compares multiple methods to ensure the credibility of the research findings. It is also about building evidence from different sources to establish themes in the study (Creswell 2016:191).

Triangulation was achieved in this study, as the researcher collected data from multiple data sources, namely social workers and divorced persons. The social workers are employed in different settings, namely in NGOs, government departments, the private sector, and private practice. The divorced persons are men and women who belong to different ethnic groups and have diverse experiences relating to divorce. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and participant observations to collect data from participants. The researcher used a voice recorder to capture the verbal responses of participants, while non-

verbal communications were observed and captured in a notebook. Data was analysed by an independent coder and the researcher, under the guidance of the promoter.

- **Peer examination**

Peer examination involves discussing the research process and findings with researchers who are experts in qualitative research (Krefting 1991:219). It is the review of a project by someone who is familiar with the research being explored (Creswell 2016:194). The researcher worked closely with the promoter, who is knowledgeable about qualitative research. The transcripts of interviews were made available to the promoter in order for her to critique and assess the interpretation of the direct quotes. The researcher also used an independent coder to assist with the interpretation of the research findings.

- **Authority of the researcher**

The researcher is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at UNISA and one of his key performance areas, apart from tuition and community engagement, is research. Moreover, the researcher supervises and provides support to students registered for their Master's degree in Social Work and therefore he is familiar with the research process. In the course of his duties, the researcher has attended numerous workshops and training sessions on qualitative research. In addition, the researcher was employed as a generic social worker at the DSD in the Limpopo Province for seven years where he worked, amongst others, with clients experiencing difficulties and unable to cope with the aftermath of divorce. All of this served to his advantage.

- **Member checking**

Member checking is when the researcher takes the participants' themes or entire stories back to them and asks them whether their themes or stories are an accurate representation of what they said (Creswell 2016:192). For this study, the researcher did member checking during the transcription and translation of data, as he identified some gaps in the transcribed interviews. The researcher revisited the relevant participants and, in some instances, contacted them telephonically to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the data.

### **3.8.2.2 *Applicability***

Applicability refers to the likelihood that an intervention could be replicated in a new setting (Burchett, Dobrow, Lavis & Mayhew 2013:16). Applicability may also be referred to as the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or to other groups. There are two perspectives of applicability identified by Guba (in Krefting 1991:216) that are appropriate for qualitative research. The first perspective suggests that the ability to generalise is not relevant in many qualitative research projects; each situation is defined as unique and thus is less amenable to generalisation. Generalisation refers to the fact that research can be generalised by its readers and made to apply to their own research projects, scenes, or even personal lives (Tracy 2013:249). The second perspective of applicability in qualitative research is referred to as fittingness or transferability, which is one of the criterion met by the research when the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity or goodness of fit between the two contexts. According to Burchett et al (2013:16), transferability refers to the potential for a study's effectiveness to be repeated in a new setting. Similarly, Tracy (2013:250) reiterates that transferability is a means of determining resonance in a qualitative study and it permits readers to make connections between the findings presented in one study and those of other works.

In order to ensure applicability, the researcher utilised the strategy of generalisability and transferability, which is when the research findings are able to fit into contexts other than that of the study situation, but which have some similarities. In so doing, the researcher used the purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure applicability and these methods clearly stipulate how participants were included. Exploratory, descriptive, and contextual designs were used in order provide an extensive description of the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of the divorced persons regarding social work services. In order to check the generalisability and transferability of the findings, the researcher provided a comprehensive description of the research methodology applied.

### **3.8.2.3 Consistency**

Consistency of data refers to whether the findings would be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context (Krefting 1991:216). Thus, consistency refers to the extent to which repeated administration of a measure provides the same data, or the extent to which a measure administered once, but by different people, produces equivalent results. The strategy of dependability must be applied in order to establish consistency. Dependability means that the inquiry processes are explicit and include the chronology of research activities and processes (Jones, Torres & Arminio 2014:37). The idea of dependability emphasises the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs (Trochim & Donnelly 2008:149). Thus, dependability relates to the consistency of the research study over a period of time and across researchers.

In order to ensure the consistency of the findings, the researcher presented the exact methodology, which describes how the study was conducted. The researcher and the independent coder agreed on the themes and sub-themes during the consensus meeting facilitated by the supervisor/promoter to check consistency.

### **3.8.2.4 Neutrality**

Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations, and perspectives (Krefting 1991:216). Neutrality is established through the strategy of confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which others can confirm or collaborate the results (Trochim & Donnelly 2008:149). It further refers to the degree to which findings of study are genuine reflections of the participants investigated (Hays & Singh 2012:201). Without the strategy of confirmability, it would be difficult to achieve neutrality. In qualitative research, objectivity is the criterion of neutrality and is achieved through rigor of methodology through which reliability and validity are established.

In order to meet this criterion, the researcher focused on the neutrality of data rather than the neutrality of the researcher. Literature control was used to compare and confirm data collected for the study. The researcher also used credibility to establish the truth-value of the study and achieve neutrality through interview technique,

triangulation, peer examination, and authority of the researcher, together with applicability of the study. The guidance provided to the researcher by the promoter throughout the research process was also useful in achieving neutrality.

### **3.8.3 Ethical considerations**

Ethics is a set of rules of morally good conduct and requires a focus on matters of relationships with the participants, with stakeholders, with peers, and with the larger community involved in the study (Marshall & Rossman 2016:52). The history of the development of the field of ethics in research has been largely built on disastrous breaches of humane, ethical values (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:60). The general aims of research ethics is to protect the participants and other interested parties in the research, as well as to maintain professional research standards, promote public confidence in the research, and minimise legal risks (Gibson & Brown 2009:60). These sentiments signify the importance of researchers behaving ethically at all times in order to preserve the integrity of the research and findings.

The researcher observed the following ethical considerations for this study: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, data management, debriefing and beneficence.

#### **3.8.3.1 *Informed consent***

A brief overview of the researcher's intended research should be supplied to participants to allow them to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate (Carey 2012:101). Through the informed consent form, the researcher ensures that participants are fully informed about the purpose of the study, that their participation is voluntary, that they understand the extent of their commitment to the study, that their identities will be protected, and that there are minimal risks associated with participating (Marshall & Rossman 2016:52). Consent must be given by persons who are competent, have consented voluntarily, are fully informed about the research, and have comprehended what they have been told (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:46).

The researcher informed all participants in this study about the purpose of the study, their role in the study, and that their participation is voluntary. The researcher also ensured that they understood what they would be committing themselves to, that their identities would be protected, and that there are minimal risks associated with

participating. This information was provided to participants during the initial contact, after which they made an informed decision to participate in the study, followed by the signing of the informed consent form. The researcher proceeded with data collection once the participants had signed the informed consent forms.

### **3.8.3.2 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Confidentiality and anonymity involves how the researcher will protect participants from any risks of their opinions, actions, or attitudes being open to public scrutiny (Carey 2012:102). Through confidentiality, the researcher is able to ensure the anonymity of participants (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:37). According to Greener (2011:146), confidentiality and anonymity mean that researchers must take steps to ensure that research data and data sources remain confidential, unless participants have consented to the disclosure thereof. Keeping research data and data sources confidential means that the researcher must ensure that plans have been made for their storage and that access to them is restricted. This means that the research data and data sources remain confidential unless participants have consented to their disclosure.

The researcher maintained the principle of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Information gathered from the participants was not divulged to anyone. Furthermore, the researcher avoided using the real names and identifiable characteristics of participants and he also avoided mentioning the names of places in the report by making use of pseudonyms. The researcher adhered to the principle of anonymity by using alphabetical references during the dissemination of the research findings.

### **3.8.3.3 Data management**

Researchers should always think carefully about how they store and distribute data (Gibson & Brown 2009:62). Secure storage is important, because data loss can wreck a project and waste money (Williams 2015:114). The author further postulates that ethical considerations often dictate that data must be kept safe and destroyed at certain points. The above-mentioned articulations signify the importance of the development of a data management plan by the researcher. A data management plan is a document that describes how the researcher will treat his/her data during a project

and what happens with the data after the project ends (Michener 2015:1). For that reason, the researcher must be able to develop a data management plan which clearly stipulates how he/she will treat data during and after the study.

For this study, the researcher asked the participants' permission to utilise a voice recorder and notes to capture data. The researcher further elaborated to participants that the audiotapes, notes, and transcripts would be coded to disguise their identity. In order to protect the participants' information, the researcher kept all records, namely voice records, written notes, and transcripts, in a locked place. The typed data was password protected and saved on the researcher's laptop and on a memory stick device. Access to information was limited to the researcher, the promoter, and the independent coder, as explained to participants. The researcher intends to erase all recordings on the voice recorder and destroy all notes and transcripts once the research is completed.

#### **3.8.3.4    *Debriefing and beneficence***

Debriefing involves researchers informing subjects after the study about the study's purposes and methods and evaluating participants' personal reactions to the study. On the other hand, beneficence is a way of minimising possible harms and maximising benefits (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:45). Debriefing and beneficence involves the researcher assisting participants in minimising any possible harm and rectifies any misunderstandings that may have arisen in their minds after the completion of the study. More specifically, beneficence requires a commitment to minimising the risks associated with research, including psychological and social risks, and maximising the benefits that accrue to research participants (Mack et al 2011:9). Through beneficence, the researcher does whatever he/she reasonably can to ensure that participants are not harmed by participating in the study (Marshall & Rossman 2016:52). This signifies that the researcher must ensure that participants are not negatively affected by participating in the study.

Given the difficult life experiences of the participants and the phenomenon being studied, there is no doubt that the interviews may evoke some intense emotions. Some participants had adverse life experiences after divorce and emotions were inevitable during the interviews. In order to minimise the emotional and psychological harm to

the participants, the researcher debriefed participants immediately after each interview to ensure that the emotions that surfaced during the interviews were all dealt with. The researcher also obtained written commitment from the relevant service providers who were willing to provide further counselling and interventions in the areas closer to participants. As a result, participants who required further interventions were referred to these service providers.

The summary of Chapter Three will be presented in the next section.

### **3.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter presented a description of how the qualitative research process was applied in the study using the seven stages of Carey's framework. The first stage of the qualitative social work research process in Carey's framework was presented as the selection of an appropriate topic and development of a problem. In this stage, the researcher extensively explained different factors that motivated him to select the topic and subsequently how the problem developed. The second stage of the Carey's framework is about reviewing literature relating to the topic. In this stage, the researcher explained the purpose of a literature review, stages of the review, critical evaluation, key sources for the review, and keeping records. Stage 3 of Carey's qualitative social work research process is about creating a research proposal and defining a research methodology, and this stage was presented shortly after stage 2. In this stage, the researcher discussed the process he followed in creating the research proposal. The researcher presented the research proposal to the departmental Research Ethics Committee and it was later approved. The research methodology, including the qualitative method, quantitative method, and mixed methods approach, was also defined.

Stage 4 of Carey's qualitative social work research process is about applying research methods. In this stage, the researcher presented the following: research questions, the goal of the study, the objectives of the study, the motivation for choosing a qualitative research method, research design, and data collection methods. The researcher used the qualitative research approach, as he sought to describe and explore the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of

divorced persons regarding social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social welfare policies and social work practice. Exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research designs were used to depict how the study was conducted. This was followed by the discussion of the population, sampling, and sampling methods used. The researcher chose purposive and snowball sampling to select relevant participants for the study. The determination of the sample size through data saturation was also explained. Data collection was discussed in terms of how the researcher gained access to participants and prepared participants for data collection, as well as the methods used for data collection and the testing of the data collection instrument.

Data analysis was presented in stage 5 of Carey's framework, as it is about analysing the findings and data. Tesch's eight steps of data analysis were used for this study. After the presentation of data analysis, the researcher presented stage 6 of Carey's framework and this stage is about writing up the findings. In this stage, the structure of writing followed by the researcher was extensively discussed. The final stage of qualitative social work research by Carey is dissemination. In this stage, the researcher discussed the dissemination of the findings, data verification, and ethical considerations. Dissemination includes the research report and communicating the research findings to others. The process of data verification and how it was applied using Guba's model of trustworthiness was also described. The chapter concluded with the presentation of the ethical considerations applied to this study.

The research findings supported by the literature control will be presented in the following chapters, namely Chapter Four (**divorced persons**) and Chapter Five (**social workers**).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS: DIVORCED PERSONS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter Three of this research report, the focus was on the discussion of the application of the qualitative research process implemented by the researcher. In that chapter, the researcher outlined how he followed Carey's (2012) qualitative social work research process, which clearly depicts the structure and stages of the qualitative social work research process. The goal of the study, as formulated at the onset of this research project, was to develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs expressed by divorced persons with regard to social work services, in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

In order to realise this goal, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two interest groups, namely 10 divorced persons and 10 social workers, on an individual basis. The themes and literature for these two groups of research participants are given in two separate chapters, namely Chapter Four (divorced persons) and Chapter Five (social workers) of this research report.

In this chapter, the researcher will present and discuss the research findings that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with the first group of participants, namely divorced persons. This includes the presentation and discussion of the demographic data of the research participants and an overview of the themes, sub-themes, and categories. It should be noted that there was a consensus discussion on the research findings that took place between the researcher, the independent coder, and the supervisor/promoter.

## 4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In order to give clarity to the data collected, it is essential that the demographic particulars of the participants in the study be described, as their background and personal experiences might affect how the participants respond to the research questions. The demographic particulars of the 10 divorced persons who participated in the research are presented in the table below.

**Table 4.1: Demographic particulars of the participants (divorced persons)**

Participant (pseudonyms)	Age	Gender	Race	Ethnicity <sup>1</sup>	Occupation	Number of years since the finalisation of divorce	Level of education	Marital Status
Adelaide	49	Female	Asian	Indian	Nurse	10	Diploma	Divorced
Belinda	39	Female	White	Afrikaans	Volunteer	3	Bachelor degree	Divorced
Cebisa	37	Male	Black African	Zulu	Warder	5	University student	Divorced
Derik	44	Male	White	Afrikaans	Police officer	15	Grade 12	Married
Engenase	55	Male	Black African	Tswana	Unemployed	7	Grade 12	Divorced
Fikile	45	Female	Black African	Venda	Admin clerk	3	Diploma	Divorced
Goitsemanng	48	Male	Black African	Tswana	Liaison officer	9	University student	Divorced
Helen	45	Female	Black African	Coloured	Admin clerk	9	Grade 12	Married
Innocent	32	Male	Black African	Tsonga	Defence force	3	Grade 12	Married
Jaqueline	34	Female	Black African	Sotho	Counsellor	2	Grade 12	Divorced

As reflected in the table above (Table 4.1), the demographic particulars of the participants are categorised in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, occupation, number of years since the finalisation of divorce, level of education, and marital status.

### 4.2.1 Age

Participants were between the ages of 32 and 55. Moreover, four of the participants were between the ages of 32 and 39, five of them were between the ages of 44 and 49, and only one participant was 55 years old. In other words, no participant was below the age of 32 or above the age of 55. This coincides with the statistics on marriages

<sup>1</sup> Ethnicity refers to a social group that shares a common culture, tradition, or language

and divorces in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:6-7), which reflects that the median ages at divorce in 2013 were 43 years for men and 39 years for women, and that there were fewer divorces revealed among the younger generation (less than 25 years old) and the older generation (65 years and older).

#### **4.2.2 Gender**

The profile reflects that five of the participants were females and another five were males. The researcher considered what Waller et al (2016:70) refer to as 'sufficiency', which means that participants should represent the range of population members in terms of all relevant social categories, including gender. In so doing, the researcher wanted to create a balance and avoid what Carey (2012:40) refers to as "sampling bias", which is the under or over representation of characteristics of a population found within a sample. The researcher was also cognisant of the assertions by Perrig-Chiello et al (2015:388-389) that whether men and women differ with regard to adaptation is rather controversial, because some studies found that men adapt better and more quickly to a new situation, some found just the opposite, and others did not find any gender differences at all. Adding to that, Bowen and Jensen (2017:1369-1373) postulate that limited empirical support exists for gender differences in post-divorce life satisfaction amongst divorced persons.

#### **4.2.3 Race and ethnicity**

Participants are from diverse races and different ethnic groups. About six participants are Black Africans from different ethnic groups, for instance two of them are Setswana speaking, one is Tshivenda speaking, one is Xitsonga speaking, one is Sesotho speaking, and one is isiZulu speaking. In addition, there are two white Afrikaans speaking participants, one English speaking Indian, and one Afrikaans speaking Coloured participant. The mid-year population estimates of South Africa (StatsSA 2015b:9) reflect that there are 44 227 995 Black Africans, 4 832 916 Coloureds, 1 362 002 Indians/Asians, and 4 534 008 Whites in South Africa. In other words, the majority of South Africans are Black African, followed by Whites, Coloureds, and Indians/Asians. Additionally, there are different ethnic groups in each of the aforementioned races, for instance the Black African race is comprised of Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Setswana, Sepedi, Sesotho, isiNdebele, isiZulu, siSwati, and isiXhosa speaking people, whereas in the White population there are English and Afrikaans

speaking people. The White Paper on Families (2013:8) in South Africa reflects that the largest proportion (27.3%) of divorces granted were for marriages that lasted between five and nine years and was mostly among Black Africans, Coloureds, and Indians. This was followed by marriages that lasted less than five years (20.9%), which was more common among the White population.

#### **4.2.4 Occupation**

Nine of the 10 participants have full-time jobs and only one is unemployed. There is one professional nurse, one social worker, one correctional officer (Warder), one police officer, two admin clerks, one community liaison officer, one colonel from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), and one HIV/AIDS counsellor. Although the second group of participants as presented in Chapter Five of this report comprises social workers, it is worth noting that the participant who is also a social worker here was by no means involved in the second group of participants. The statistics on marriages and divorces in South Africa (StatsSA 2015a:6-7) reflect that divorce is likely to be initiated by any person, regardless of his/her occupation. For example, in 2013 about 12.7% of the plaintiffs were reported to be in clerical and sales occupations, 8.9% were managers and administrators, and 7.5% were professionals, semi-professionals, and administrators. Although the number of plaintiffs is reported to be high amongst the clerical and sales occupations, there is no huge difference between the managers, professionals, semi-professionals, and administrators. In addition, divorce may not strictly be limited to those who are employed, as it is also eminent among the unemployed. This view correlates with Bowen and Jensen's (2017:1365) sentiments that divorce rates are likely higher among the unemployed, as compared to those working part-time or full-time.

#### **4.2.5 Number of years after the finalisation of divorce**

The number of years after the finalisation of divorce varies between the minimum of two years and the maximum of 15 years. Upon closer scrutiny, the number of years for five of the participants ranges between two and five years, and between seven and 15 for the remainder of the participants. Four of the latter participants reported being divorced between seven and 10 years, and only one reported being divorced for 15 years. Most of the participants' marriages lasted for less than 10 years, and based on that fact they may find it difficult to enter into new marriages within a short space of

time. This is evident given the fact that marriages of between zero and nine years are at the greatest risk of ending in divorce (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1365).

#### **4.2.6 Level of education**

There are three participants who reported having academic qualifications and seven who have only passed matric (grade 12). One of the three who reported to have an academic qualification has just completed a Bachelor's degree in social work, another one obtained a diploma in nursing, and the other one has a diploma in public administration. Two of the seven participants who passed matric (grade 12) are studying towards a Bachelor's degree at a university. In other words, the majority of the participants had only passed matric. According to Shafer (2012:1504), divorce rates are high among the least educated men and women. A study conducted by Bowen and Jensen (2017:1369-1373) revealed high levels of post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction among divorced persons who had attained a high level of education. These views imply that divorced persons with lower levels of education are more likely to demonstrate lower levels of post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction than those with higher levels of education.

#### **4.2.7 Marital status**

Seven of the participants (which constitutes the majority) had not married again and three of them had remarried. The average interval between the finalisation of divorce and getting married again is three years. According to Bowen and Jensen (2017:1369-1373), divorced persons who remarry or live with a partner are more likely to experience higher levels of life satisfaction than their counterparts who are not involved in a committed relationship. However, the fact that the majority of the participants did not opt to remarry after a divorce could be attributed to Shafer's (2012:1505) views that divorced persons are more likely to search for a new partner with a very different socio-demographic profile than their first spouse. In other words, divorced persons would rather choose not to marry someone who has a similar socio-demographic profile to that of their ex-spouse. Likewise, McCarthy and Ginsberg (2007:117) state that when a person stays angry at their ex-partner, the second marriage is often distracted or controlled by fights about money or parenting with the ex-spouse. Therefore, struggling with issues from the first marriage subverts developing a satisfying and stable second marriage.

The data collected from these participants were analysed and a comprehensive discussion of these findings takes place in the next section.

### 4.3 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES

This section describes the various themes, sub-themes, and categories as they emerged from the analysis of the data collected. The findings were sub-divided into the following nine themes:

1. Divorced persons' accounts of their marital life experiences prior to divorce and why they divorced.
2. Divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce.
3. Divorced persons' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce.
4. Divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce.
5. Divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce.
6. Divorced persons' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce.
7. Divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received.
8. Divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons.
9. Divorced persons' advice to other couples.

An exposition of the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the information provided by the divorced persons is presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: An overview of the themes, sub-themes, and categories (divorced persons)**

Theme 1: Divorced persons' accounts of their marital life experiences prior to divorce and why they divorced	
SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
1. Nature of relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good relationship initially</li> <li>▪ Good and bad relationship initially</li> <li>▪ No communication</li> </ul>
2. Reasons for divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spouse had an extramarital affair/s</li> <li>▪ Abused by partner</li> <li>▪ Alcohol/drug abuse</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spouse resigned from job</li> <li>▪ Child's disability grant</li> <li>▪ Cultural differences</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2: Divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce</b>	
1. Positive outcomes of divorce	
2. Negative outcomes of divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty dealing with the divorce</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3: Divorced persons' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce</b>	
1. Stigma	
2. Children's well-being	
3. Financial difficulties	
4. No support from the church	
<b>Theme 4: Divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce</b>	
1. Financial losses	
2. Loss of companionship	
3. Loss of self-esteem	
4. Loss of trust in the opposite sex	
5. Loss of security	
<b>Theme 5: Divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce</b>	
1. Anger	
2. Regret	
3. Wanted to kill self and/or children	
4. Feelings of loneliness and rejection	
5. Positive emotions	
<b>Theme 6: Divorced persons' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce</b>	
1. Informal support systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from friends and colleagues</li> <li>• Support from the family</li> </ul>
2. Formal support systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from a psychologist</li> <li>• Children taken to a psychologist/social worker</li> <li>• Spiritual support</li> <li>• Support via a helpline</li> <li>• Support group</li> <li>• Employer's wellness programme</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 7: Divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received</b>	
1. Sought social work services	
2. Social work services not known or not readily available	
<b>Theme 8: Divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons</b>	
1. Specialised services	
2. Counselling services should be available	
3. Social work services should be provided on a long-term basis	
4. Support groups are needed	
5. Information is needed	
6. Psychologists are needed more	
<b>Theme 9: Divorced persons' advice to other couples</b>	
1. Find out about the available resources	
2. Do not rush into a new relationship	
3. Do not rush into divorce	

In the next section of this discussion, each one of the main themes and accompanying sub-themes and categories (where applicable) will be presented and confirmed or endorsed by direct quotes from the transcripts of the interviews. The identified themes, sub-themes, and categories with their supporting storylines from the transcripts will be compared and contrasted with the body of knowledge available.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Divorced persons' accounts of their marital life experiences prior to divorce and why they divorced**

This theme was deduced from the information provided by the participants in answer to the researcher's question: "Would you please share with me your experiences of marital life prior to divorce?" Although not directly asked about the reasons for their divorce, all participants' responses to this request were dominated by the circumstances leading up to the reasons for their divorce. It was evident that the participants' need to first explain the reasons for their divorce was more important than merely sharing their marital life experiences. According to Wolfinger (2005:17), couples who end their marriages may display problems years prior to the breakup. These views attest to the fact that most divorced persons experience some form of marital complications long before the actual divorce occurs. When a marriage functions well, it meets intimacy and security needs better than other relationships (McCarthy & Ginsberg 2007:119). In other words, a marriage that functions well does not necessarily end in divorce in most instances. Success in married life, according to Sarkar (2015:91), depends on the edifice built on mutual trust, understanding, love, affection, service, and self-sacrifice, and once this edifice is shaken, marital happiness will be shattered into pieces. This resonates with McCarthy and Ginsberg's (2007:119) assertion that when a marriage is fatally flawed, abusive or destructive, psychological well-being is subverted and the marriage is more likely to end in divorce.

In this study, the participants' accounts of their marital relationship are given in two sub-themes, namely the nature of the marital relationship and the reasons for divorce.

##### **4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Nature of the marital relationship**

Under this sub-theme, three categories are given, namely good relationship initially, good and bad relationship initially, and no communication.

**a) Good relationship initially**

A good marital relationship is crucial, as it symbolises the well-being of a marriage. According to Cohen, Geron and Farchi (2010:728), a good marital relationship comprises the following nine components: mutual acceptance, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sex and affection, children and parenting, family and friends, and equalitarian role orientation. This could possibly mean that if these components do not exist in a marriage, it may not function normally and will ultimately end in divorce. Successful romantic relationships promote personal well-being, whereas failure to establish and maintain such relationships has been associated with both physical and emotional distress, which could lead to divorce (Cui, Fichman & Pasley 2008:1226). Moreover, Balswick and Balswick (2007:73-74) state that some researchers have identified three categories of factors that are predictive of a good marital relationship, namely:

- Background and contextual factors, which include age at the time of marriage, level of education and income, and occupational stability.
- Individual traits, which include physical and emotional health, lack of neurotic traits, level of self-esteem, and similar values, attitudes and beliefs.
- The couple's interaction with each other.

These factors are assumed to bring strength and quality to the marriage and their absence may result in distress and/or divorce. Participants in this study highlighted that they enjoyed a good marital relationship initially. This perception was articulated by Cebisa, Fikile, Derik, and Innocent as follows:

**Cebisa** shared his experience: *"...I got married at a very young age. I was 24 years of age but when I paid the lobola I was 23 years old, so it was a good marriage. We relocated to Mpumalanga in 2005 after my training as a warder and that where we stayed. Remember, we did not have families that side so that made us to be very close. Life was good, we were hassling, trying to make a living there and there, because I was the only one working at that time. My focus was on her trying to get the licence, working at the retail stores, but generally life was good. Nothing much because I was working, renting a flat, but later I moved*

*to the state house which was a bigger house and that is where we had our second child together and eventually had a white wedding” [Cebisa 21-30].*

Although the couple married at a young age, Cebisa voiced the opinion that everything went well in their marriage initially. They stayed far away from their parents and Cebisa seems to believe that it gave them an opportunity to bond and enjoy their marriage. Despite the good times spent together in their marriage, the couple ended up dissolving their marriage and this tells us that their marriage did not go according to their expectations. According to Holley, Yabiku and Benin (2006:1729), persons who marry earlier are more likely to get divorced than persons who marry later in life. These views resonate with Balswick and Balswick’s (2007:302) assertion that inadequacies in role performance, unfaithfulness, disagreements, lack of understanding, and low companionship satisfaction have been found to contribute to divorce among those who marry at a young age. The authors further reiterate that couples who marry young are socially and psychologically unprepared for a relationship as demanding as marriage. For that reason, some form of support is necessary to assist couples who marry at a young age. Financial and emotional support from family, help with childcare, health-related information, parenting classes, and professional consultations are some of the resources that may help these marriages to succeed (Segal-Engelchin, Huss & Massry 2016:727).

**Fikile**, who lived with her husband-to-be for 9 years before marriage, explained their relationship as follows: *“...I can say before our marriage life was great, to tell you the truth. My ex-husband was unemployed and it happened that my mother passed on, but before she died she encouraged us to get married. But let me explain the life before. According to me, I was treated as a queen because always when I came back from work I would find a cup with just a tea bag waiting for me, with no water and no sugar. He would wait for me to enter the house and ask me to bath first before he could give me a cup of tea. My children were also well taken of by him. I am one person who enjoys fast food. I like pleasing people when I have money, but with him it was a different thing altogether. If it happens that he gets R100 the first thing he would do, would be to check the finished items in the kitchen and he would buy it... Our life was great until my mother*

*intervene to say you cannot stay with somebody in the house while you are not married. So that resulted in a fight between me and my mother, because I did not want her to interfere with my household” [Fikile 49-64].*

According to **Derik**, his marital relationship was also good initially: *“I met this lady and a year later we were married. At that stage you feel you love this person, you want to carry on and build life with her” [Derik 139-140].*

**Innocent** felt that his marital relationship was mainly good, and this is what he said: *“Well, I would say it was normal, sometimes it was good. I knew her from the lower grades at school up to high school level, until when she decided to change the school and move to somewhere else. We then met again in 2007” [Innocent 37-39].*

Based on the above-mentioned responses, it is apparent that most participants enjoyed a good marital relationship initially. This means that there was understanding amongst the couples and their marriages were functioning according to their expectations. This relates to Balswick and Balswick’s (2007:79) assertion that a marriage is a companionship grounded in romantic attraction, self-fulfilment, and ego-gratification. Similarly, Shen (2005:335) postulates that a couple’s closeness, personality issues, and sexual relationship are factors that reveal the importance of a good marital and interpersonal relationship amongst married couples. These factors also include families and friends, and they are said to be the most important factors associated with marital satisfaction.

In other words, when marital satisfaction prevails amongst married couples, the marriage is less likely to end in divorce. The fact that the participants end up dissolving their marriages is an indication that somewhere along the journey of marriage something went wrong or things did not go according to their expectations or plans. In the same way, Balswick and Balswick (2007:79) state that as the marriage continues, few marriages are capable of delivering what they promised in the way of personal fulfilment and satisfaction.

Although participants articulated their experience of a good relationship initially in this category, the next category provides an analysis of participants' experiences of the marital relationship as both good and bad.

**b) Good and bad relationship initially**

A marital relationship is a unique relationship where one can find the deepest experience of intimacy in life, friendship, and comfort, as well as betrayal and possible hurt (Petty 2006:2). Thus, a marital relationship comprises both good and bad experiences. According to Cullington (2008:11), there are times when married couples enjoy good times, for example good sex and going on a holiday together, but sometimes it is the opposite. This is the situation where married couples find themselves with someone who is loving and lovable, and on the other hand the person seems hostile and suspicious.

The following excerpt encapsulates **Belinda's** description of the marital relationship as both good and bad: *"I think it was good and bad. It was good in the sense that when he came back home it would be good, because we would plan to go together on leave and we would plan things together as a family, whereas as he would be gone I would not really social much because it did not feel good for me as a mother whose husband is away to go out gallivanting with friends and all of that. So, I would rather be at home with the kids and rather doing that. That how I started with the counselling, is to just put effort somewhere else and not just be at home all the time. And then, that was difficult is just that not just having someone to go out there on weekends and do something as a family was a challenge but when he was back home it was good, it was not bad"* [Belinda 58-67].

It is clear that Belinda enjoyed the marital relationship only when her ex-husband was at home, as they would do things together as a family. However, she did not feel the same way when her ex-husband was away, as she would do most things on her own. According to Shen (2005:336), if the purpose of marriage is to enjoy the companionship of a compatible partner, then when one spouse realises that they are not compatible it can justifiably be interpreted as grounds for ending the marriage. This means that companionship amongst married couples enhances

marital quality and the relationship, as these couples would do things together. Furthermore, Cohen et al (2010:731) suggest that the concept marital quality encompasses the following core components of the marital relationship: mutual acceptance, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sex and affection, children and parenting, family and friends, and equalitarian role orientation. These components are areas in which married couples can experience closeness and pleasure, and also potential sources of marital problems and conflict. Additionally, Petty (2006:13) mentions that in most instances couples enter marital relationships with a set of unspoken expectations and this is the basis of bad relationships. The unspoken expectations and the assumption that spouses can read each other's minds is a recipe for relationship breakdown (Balswick & Balswick 2007:85).

In the next category, lack of communication is presented as one of the participants' accounts of their marital relationships prior divorce.

**c) No communication**

Communication in the marriage can be characterised as a series of declarations and demands that each spouse makes on the other (Balswick & Balswick 2007:95). Partners or spouses communicate by expressing themselves in an open manner and they make an effort to understand each other's point of view and respond accordingly. Positive communication skills allow married couples to move along the dimensions of flexibility and cohesion in any direction required by the circumstances of their marriage (Rhoden 2003:249). This means that lack of communication by married couples is more likely to damage the marital relationship and ultimately the marriage itself. Similarly, Preller (2013:4) suggests that a lack of communication in any area of a marriage can cause major damage to the relationship. This was found to be the case in this study as described by **Derik** and **Fikile**, who described a lack of communication in their marital life.

**Derik** explained: *"...I realised that we are two different people with different personalities. She is a very quiet person and in contrary I am this outspoken person, loud with a sense of humour. I like networking and being around people. I like making things happen. You know I am an occasional drinker and on weekends I would love to go out and have a glass of beer or two. I am a social*

*person and she is not. In the beginning we could talk but a year later... second marriage I realised that we are no longer communicating. We are living past one another” [Derik 151-158].* He continued: *“She was a jealous person. I am a police officer and at four o’clock they would call you and you have to rush out. So she thought I was seeing my first wife. She later on understood that I was not seeing my first wife and I had explained to her, but she was still jealous. I could not go to the people and people could not come to our house, we were a close family. We sat there looking at one another, I would do the gardening, painting walls and later sit and watch the television. We would not talk for about four to five hours, the only talk would be, do you want coffee, yes, do you want bread, no, and that’s it... To be honest with you I could not just carry on like that. I felt claustrophobic, it was pressing me. It was pressuring me. To be honest with you, I would sit here at work for at least 20 minutes before I could decide to go home. It was like a ritual, how was your day, it was good. Then she would prepare some food and I would sit and watch television. Later on, you would be asked, do you want some coffee, milk and so on... Nothing like a proper family interaction” [Derik 170-190].*

**Fikile** also explained: *“It is true that the husband is the head of the family, but once you become the father and want to trace every movement of your wife that marriage will not last. In my marriage there was no longer communication at all” [Fikile 169-172].*

The above-mentioned excerpts from participants encapsulate that lack of communication was the nature of their marital relationships and it negatively affected their marriages. Cohen et al (2010:740) confirm that lack of communication in a marriage results in a poorer quality marital relationship, prevents the spouses from expressing their liking for and acceptance of one another, their sexual and affective relations, and their consensus about leisure activities, and it also impacts conflict resolution. In the same way, Farbod, Ghamari and Majd (2014:1) suggest that lack of communication is a major issue leading to dissatisfaction in couples’ lives. Through communication, married couples are able to negotiate changes and clarify key issues related to their

marriage and, in so doing, it results in possible changes in the interaction (Noland 2008:20).

The next sub-theme provides an analysis of participants' accounts of their reasons for divorce.

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub-theme: Reasons for divorce**

In recounting their pre-divorce lives, divorced persons described the circumstances that led to them deciding to get divorced. These are given under the following categories: spouse had an extramarital affair/s, abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, spouse resigned from job, child's disability grant, and cultural differences.

##### **a) Spouse had an extramarital affair/s**

The spouse having an extramarital affair/s was the main reason for divorce, as cited by most of the participants. **Adelaide** explained how an extramarital affair/infidelity cost her marriage: *"...I would have not imagined my ex-husband to have behaved in that manner. Because I was one person in my household, I was not short of anything and when I started hearing about the stories about him and I just thought it's not true, maybe people are envious because everything was up and going. But then when I started doing a bit of homework and I started to think this man goes fishing on Friday and he goes straight to work on Monday morning and he comes back home from work Monday afternoon without any fish. You know, then I started like putting things into perspective and I started questioning and he started being abusive on me. Strangely enough I had just fallen pregnant with my third child during that time. This is what made me to question everything... it was a lot of uphill, it was a lot of verbal abuse. It was like you have everything so what more do you want, because I am spending time with my friends and me not knowing that the other type of a friend it was a female friend"* [Adelaide 53-68].

At first, **Cebisa** did not believe his wife was having extramarital affairs, but then found out that it was true. Excerpts from the interview reveal this: *"I never thought of her cheating on me, even the uncle, I did not believe him. I just said to him, that not true, my wife likes good times, anyway that was our lifestyle. We would*

go all out, to Durban, parties... For me it only changed when I started registering for social work and I could not go around like I used to do before... I would receive phone calls from people taking about my wife and the group of friends she associated herself with" **[Cebisa 96-103]**. "At the time I was not active on the Facebook and people would tell me that they saw my wife with another man on the Facebook. When she comes back we would begin to fight about so many things... She was forever not in the house. Even the lady who used to assist us in the house would ask me what is going on and I would say to her I really don't know. It builds up until I discovered by myself that indeed she was cheating on me. But still I sat her down and told her that you have really changed and I used to tell her that... Now I could confirm that my wife was cheating on me" **[Cebisa 115-124]**. **Cebisa** explained how things came to a head: "The neighbours would also come to ask where she is, it seems like she is hardly home these days. You see, that night there was something eating me up. I was filled with anger and just wanted to beat her up and I eventually decided not to do that. Then I decided to take her phone and go through it... I went through her phone and I saw it all. Besides the cheating there were other conversations she had with other people taking about me, it was sad" **[Cebisa 178-205]**. He continued: "I am not talking about only one guy, there were like four guys she was with and I don't know on what level. I do not have proof that she was having an affair with them, but I could tell that she was with those men the entire weekend" **[Cebisa 209-212]**.

Later, **Cebisa's** wife left him and went to live in another area. After some time had passed, she visited him: "She then said to me I want to come back home and if you do not want me to come home I will divorce you. I said to her go on with divorce. She could not take the kids, because it was in the middle of the year. I thought she was bluffing when she spoke about divorce, but eventually she filed for divorce... Even if she did not initiate divorce, I would have divorced her. I thought about divorce immediately she moved out of the house. My attorneys advised me to wait a bit since she has already filed for divorce herself" **[Cebisa 259-269]**.

**Derik** explained how the motivation behind his first divorce was his wife having an affair: "...she is nurse. At one stage I got a phone call from someone alerting

*me that she has got an affair. I said to the person, if you have the courage to tell me that my wife has an affair with the doctor, then come to me, come around the table and make these allegations then we sort it out and he said to me no ways, I am just telling you as a concerned person... It was anonymous, but later on after divorce I found out that it was people who work with her who caught her red-handed in a cubicle or something. When I confronted her about it at that stage, she said to me it was all jealousy... when I look back the signs were there, but I just did not see it because I could not fault her on anything... He would buy her a cell phone for Christmas... I then asked how does a doctor buy you cell phone then she gave excuses. Then at one stage she was on a training course and she came back with a laptop at home... Again I said to her how a doctor buys you a laptop... she would say it is jealousy because she is studying and all that. When we got divorced, we firstly separated and... then I found this person who said to me do you remember my phone calls and I said yes, then she said I phoned you. After that everything came back and I said to myself I have been so stupid, I should have listened to this person... Then she says she wants the divorce” [Derik 39-74].*

Moreover, **Belinda** explained how she became suspicious and found out that her husband was having an extramarital affair: *“It was actually a bad situation how divorce started, because he just said he want divorce because he has outgrew our relationship and it was very sudden. It was just after the birth of the second daughter. I got myself the private investigator and found out that he was actually seeing someone else. He moved out of the house with the other lady so it was the third party that led to our divorce and he eventually acknowledged it. They actually met in the Facebook and that is the problem with the long-distance relationships, because you have got too much time apart from each other to can do other things. The electronic stuff and all that... I think that contributed to our divorce” [Belinda 46-54].* Belinda continued: *“...it came out of a blue. We were still on holiday when he said he wanted to divorce. There was no sign for me to show that, you know what, this marriage is not working for me. And that’s made me think that there was somebody else. There is no way... it cannot be because how can you be planning your holiday, just bought a new car, just bought a new*

*house and all of that and just planned a second child, if you are not happy in the marriage. It was all of a sudden, it really was” [Belinda 70-77].*

**Enganese** and his wife divorced three times. The first and third divorces were because of his wife’s extramarital affairs: *“There were so many things that happened when we divorced for the first time, we were still young at the time. I caught her red-handed with another man having sex in our house. We fought about it, because I just could not tolerate it but later on we reconciled. We had already divorced by then, but later we reconciled and got back together” [Enganese 40-44]. “...she cheated with the neighbour. Before I caught them, she would dispute the allegations and claim that the guy bring the video cassettes for us to watch since he does not have the DVD machine. Later on she alleged that we were watching the pornographic videos and the feelings evoked while watching the video, he never proposed love to me. We reconciled and I said to her I understand because I also cheated on you. She once stabbed another lady after realising that I am cheating with that lady” [Enganese 70-76].*

When asked who filed for divorced, **Enganese** stated that his wife had filed for divorce each time and gave the reasons as follows: *“Even today she is still stating the same reasons that she believed she made a huge mistake and she does not think I would forgive her. She once cheated with her cousin after passing matric and I was so angry to an extent that I ended up burning her house. But I was remorseful about my actions and I asked for forgiveness... She is currently in love with the police officer and she always tell me that I cheated on you so many times and I do not think that you will forgive me, you may pretend to have forgiven me but one day you will raise it. One small mistake would be enough to evoke your emotions” [Enganese 83-94].* Referring to the police officer, Enganese explained: *“She cheated on me for the third time and that was prior to our third divorce” [Enganese 174].*

**Helen** described how her husband had extramarital affairs during their marriage and had a child with another woman: *“...soon after he got to Cape Town... people talk sometimes and I confronted him, which was not a shock to me. Obviously, he denied, he even said to me I did not even touch the woman’s hand, so how*

*can it be my child? That child is the exact image of that man and some people confuse him with my last born because they look exactly the same... (husband having extramarital affairs) was constant in our marriage. He made me feel so useless in fact there is no description to that. You just feel like you are not human enough... I once caught him in bed with a woman, not knowing that I was in the house and my child was only seven at that time. He did not realise that I was in the house with my boy when he brought this woman in. To my surprise, the lady was a friend of mine at that time. When I confronted her, she told me that she did not know that I was expecting a babe and that my ex-husband told me that we were no longer together... He actually attacked me when I got them together and that was before we moved to Pretoria” [Helen 66-98]. “At some stage he stopped the (divorce) proceedings and requested the magistrate for the postponement and when the magistrate asked him why, he said that is my wife standing in that box and I do not want to divorce. Given all of this and mind you, his girlfriend is sitting in that court to support him” [Helen 135-138].*

After describing his wife’s partying habits and how she was never home, **Innocent**, who was stationed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for a length of time while his wife was in South Africa, explained: “...she always justified that she was lonely every time she cheats on me... At one time I was at the car wash in North West and as I was having a chat with another guy, I then realised that he is from the same area my ex-wife comes from. When I asked him if he knows her, he said to me don’t tell me about that prostitute” [Innocent 46-58]. “...I asked to be transferred back home so that I can be home full-time to see what is happening, but also to be closer to my wife” [Innocent 174-176]. He came back and his wife left: “As days went by, I got to know that she is in love with one police officer she works with. I left it like that. Then one day she sent me a message on my phone asking me why I was not saying anything. I said to her, I told you so many times to come back home, but you did not want to do so. She said I cannot come back to you anymore. After three months, I was involved in a relationship with someone and the neighbours told her. She called to say, it is hardly four months I left and now there is someone already in the house. I told her that you made it clear that you won’t return back to the house and so there is nowhere that I would stay alone. I said to her you are gone and there is nothing

*I can do, then she hung up the phone... after some time she said to me it is better to apply for a divorce because this marriage is long dead” [Innocent 202-212].*

Based on the above-mentioned excerpts, it is evident that most of the participants mentioned an extramarital affair/s as the main reason for their divorce. This is not strange, as a number of studies conducted in the past have found that divorced persons will often cite extramarital affairs/ infidelity as a reason for divorce (Allen & Atkins 2012:1478). Likewise, an analysis of retrospective reports from a national sample of divorced persons highlights infidelity as one of the leading reasons for divorce (Williamson et al 2016:1121). In their articulations that extramarital affairs were the main reason for their divorce, most of the participants showed some distress to demonstrate how badly they were affected by it. These sentiments correlate with Amato and Prevetti's (2003:607) views that divorced persons who cite an extramarital affair as the reason for their divorce experience high levels of subjective distress following marital disruption. When trying to establish the reasons why married individuals indulge in extramarital affairs, Cullington (2008:32) suggests that having an affair is an expression of resentment or hopelessness, and/or a wish to hurt a partner or provoke a response from him/her. The author further postulates that an affair offers hope, excitement, sex, and the zest of revenge for the anger in the marriage. Whatever reasons provided, it is clear that extramarital affairs/ infidelity bring changes in the marriage and lead to the irretrievable breakdown of a marital relationship. Apart from that, extramarital affairs highly distress the spouse who is being cheated on and spouses who indulge in cheating seem to be aware of this fact. As reflected in the above excerpts, the extramarital affairs/ infidelity happened secretly until the other spouse discovered it. In addition, the participants cited changes in their marital relationships that prompted an eagerness to establish the cause of these changes, which is ultimately how they found out that there was a third person in their marriages.

The next category involves the analysis of abuse as one of the reasons for divorce based on the participants' accounts.

**b) Abused by partner**

Abuse is a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within the relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm and distress (Midgley 2016:105). In so doing, perpetrators use abusive behaviour as a tactic to gain power and control over their victims (Stylianou, Postmus & McMahon 2013:3187). In other words, any form of abuse negatively affects the well-being of the abused. On the same note, Theran, Sullivan, Bogat and Stewart (2006:951) state that being abused by a partner negatively affects the well-being of the victim. For that reason, abuse during marriage, which comprises physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse, is cause for divorce (Watson & Ancis 2013:171-174).

Apart from infidelity, divorced persons in this study cited abuse as one of the reason for their divorce. **Adelaide** highlighted the verbal abuse she experienced from her husband: *"...I started like putting things into perspective and I started questioning and he started being abusive on me... it was a lot of uphill, it was a lot of verbal abuse. It's was like you have everything so what more do you want, because I am spending time with my friends and me not knowing that the other type of a friend it was a female friend"* [**Adelaide 60-68**].

As for **Fikile**, this is how she expatiated on the experience of abuse in her marriage: *"It happened that my ex-husband knew that somebody gave me a lift. When I arrived home, he accused me of cheating with the guy who gave me the lift, forgetting that those people were taking care of my health. It was just so unbearable for me and everything was sinking in my head. I then realised that I have married a wrong person. Once you get abused emotionally, it hurts more unlike physically, because you can get healed. My ex-husband is a junior pastor and when they make intercession we would go together. When he preaches at church, you could hear that he was preaching about my situation with him. He would say things like, a married woman must not answer phones in the presence of his husband and so on. It demoralises your spiritual level as well, too. At that time, I was taking notes of all the abuse he subjected me to. I got fed up with what people have been saying about us"* [**Fikile 153-166**]. **Fikile** explained how abuse led to her divorce: *"...I was tired of being abused emotionally, I was so*

*badly affected by the abuse to such an extent that I was no longer able to pray. I can say that I was also affected spiritually. To be honest with you there was no longer sexual attraction between us to an extent that we would face different directions. The marriage was dead already and there was no need for it. The pastors tried to reconcile us, but if the feelings are dead there is nothing which can be done. I found no reason to remain in the marriage. It does not mean that people should only divorce when they are physically assaulted or abused by their partners, no. You can also get hurt emotionally, spiritually and so on” [Fikile 186-196].*

**Goitseman** explained that he had abused his wife: *“After three years things got worse and the families were interfering. I also became abusive and she was very supportive during that time. At that time, I was diagnosed with bipolar due to challenges that I was facing in my life. I think sometimes when you are trying to rebuild your marriage and work things out, you get blackouts and do things that you were not supposed to be doing. Every time I explain what I was going through, it was seen as an excuse” [Goitseman 62-68].* He concluded that abuse was one of the main reasons his wife divorced him: *“...due to abuse and the tension in the house, she initiated divorce three years later” [Goitseman 87-88].*

On the other hand, **Helen** herself experienced all kinds of abuse: *“There is a whole basket of things. But in my opinion, there was just no respect at all. There was also an abuse in different forms, physical, financial, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, you name it, it was there. You know, unfortunately for me it took me some time, because I was raised in a family wherein they did not believe in divorce. I was raised by my grandparents and they always told me that when you are married, you are married for life. You cannot come out come rain or water, there is no turning back from there. That is why it took me so long to eventually decide that enough is enough... He (husband) always had this saying that if I cannot have you then no one else will. He threatened my life so many times believe me. At some stage I had to move out of the house and hide somewhere, fortunately a friend tipped me that he just had a serious talk with these notorious 28 gangsters in Cape Town... In fact, he wanted me to be raped.*

*But after all these I went back to the man thinking that the man loves me. As I said we came back to Cape Town, but the physical abuse was worse” [Helen 38-82].*

As is made clear from the above extracts, most participants had experienced different forms of abuse in their marriages prior to divorce. This relates to a study conducted by Watson and Ancis (2013:171-174) which reports different forms of abuse during marriage as the cause of divorce:

- A number of divorced persons described experiences with physical abuse during their marriages, which included punching, slapping, choking, and pushing, as the cause of their divorce.
- Divorced persons noted many instances of emotional and verbal abuse during their marriages.
- Divorced persons reported that their abusers were economically abusing them in different ways, for instance by giving them meagre allowances, restricting their access to the funds, and sabotaging their financial livelihood.
- Divorced persons noted that they experienced various forms of sexual abuse during their marriage, for instance sexual coercion, threats, sexual assault, and partners withdrawing sex from them.

Therefore, there are participants who were victims of abuse during the marriage, for example Adelaide, Fikile and Helen, and those who were perpetrators of abuse, such as Goitsemanang. Nonetheless, divorce is imminent when abuse happens in a marriage, regardless of whether the person is the victim or the perpetrator. This resonates with Flaherty’s (2010:225) views that no instance of abuse is acceptable, and Preller’s (2013:2) assertions that any form of abuse, including physical, verbal, emotional, psychological or financial, leads to divorce.

In the next category, alcohol/drug abuse is expounded as one of the reasons for divorce based on the participants’ articulations.

**c) Alcohol and drug abuse**

Divorced persons articulated alcohol and drug abuse as some of the reasons for divorce. Alcohol/drug abuse is a chronic progressive use that causes interruptions to daily life to the point that some individuals may become unable to function without these substances (Marsal, Jackson & Harrison 2007:321). According to Holmila, Raitasalo and Kosola (2017:363), the abuse of alcohol and drugs leads to complex problems. For that reason, married couples are not exempted from these kinds of problems if one or both of them abuse alcohol and/or drugs. This means that there is a connection between alcohol/drug abuse and marital problems, and these problems are likely to lead to divorce. In this study, Jacqueline and Goitsemanang articulated that their marriages were negatively affected by alcohol and/or drug abuse, and eventually crumbled.

**Jacqueline** married her husband, after having helped him to overcome his drug abuse habit. She explained how he began using drugs again: *“...when I asked him he would tell me that he was sleeping. Every time I come back from work, I would find the house in a complete mess and when I asked him he would always come with excuses. He started getting sick, with sicknesses I do not understand. He would get shivering in one second and when you ask him later he would not even remember of him getting sick. And the interaction he was having, the people he was hanging around with made me believe that he was back on drugs. When my son’s teacher told me that she was very scared to let my son go, because it looked like your husband was high and it is not the first time that he would come that way, that let me to separate within the household, but I did not want to separate as parents. What I asked of him was that, can we have our time apart in the house, but looking after our children together as parents” [Jacqueline 48-59]*. Later she initiated the formal divorce proceedings and the couple divorced.

Goitsemanang admitted that his alcohol abuse also played a role in his wife divorcing him: *“...alcohol was the other thing that contributed towards my divorce. I was a drunkard and a soccer fanatic at the same time. It made things worse because I would follow Bloemfontein Celtic wherever they are playing... The little time I could get was during the weekends, because I travel a lot with*

*work related matters, but I was not using that little time for my family instead I was using it for my friends” [Goitsemanang 45-51].*

In this case, Goitsemanang used to abuse alcohol, and his ex-wife who was deeply devoted to a particular religious denomination did not like it. Although Jaqueline is not affiliated to any religious group, she is adamant that her ex-husband’s abuse of drugs led to their divorce. On the same note, Marsal et al (2007:321) suggest that alcohol and drug abuse is connected to acts of violence. Similarly, Kalmijn et al (2011:160) affirm that alcohol and drugs lead to partner violence/ domestic violence and increase the risk of divorce. Apart from partner violence and domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse also lead to financial constraints among married couples, as money would mostly be spent on alcohol and drugs, instead of on something that would benefit the entire family. Therefore, the marriage is more likely to collapse due to these continuous financial constraints. In other words, limited financial resources stress marriages and increase the risk of divorce.

Unemployment due to a spouse’s resignation from his/her job is expounded in the next category as one of the reasons for divorce.

**d) Spouse resigned from job**

During marriage, a spouse’s unemployment can trigger the beginning of the divorce process, due to both the psychological damage of losing a job and the economic strain of losing a share of the household income (Tumin & Qian 2017:1390). According to Poortman (2005:169), there is a higher risk of divorce if the husband is unemployed or has lost his job, and this is caused by financial hardship within the marriage. Thus, employment fulfils basic needs and unemployment prevents individuals from fulfilling those needs (Andersen 2009:5). In other words, unemployed brings financial strain and contributes towards the dissolution of the marriage.

**Fikile’s** husband resigned from his job and he stayed unemployed instead of getting a new job. This is how she explained her ordeal: *“Things went well until when he was no longer working. We got married in 2006 and in 2007 my mother*

*was very ill and she got admitted at the hospital and later on passed away in February 2007. Later he just decided to resign from his job even today I do not know what his reasons were... I cannot even explain to anybody why he resigned. Then I took the responsibility of being the mother and the father and life went on... I took care of everything in the house. I was paying for the bond house, water, electricity, food, and school fees, I was doing everything but I hold on. We continued together regardless of everything. I asked him to check for vacancy in the internet and he agreed, only to find that he was not applying at all. Sometimes I would encounter issues in the house and I kept them to myself not knowing that it was destroying me. As a result I would be admitted to hospital due to major depression that I suffered" [Fikile 78-94].*

From the aforementioned excerpt, it is clear that unemployment destroys marriages, and it is even worse when the spouse resigned from his/her place of employment without valid reasons. According to Tumin and Qian (2017:1390), unemployment creates economic hardship and psychological stress, which can easily jeopardise the stability of a marriage. Traditionally, men are viewed as the breadwinners or providers for their families and women as caregivers, and therefore when the husband is unemployed it creates more economic hardship within the marriage. This view is reaffirmed by Bear and Glick (2016:2), who state that conventional gender roles cast men as the breadwinners or the family's main financial providers, and women as caregivers or the family's main caretakers.

The role conflict experienced by married men who become unemployed exacerbates the marital strain that follows from the financial difficulties of unemployment, and often ends in the breakup of the marriage (Tumin & Qian 2017:1390). In other words, the husband who is unemployed remains at home and suddenly assumes the caretaker role and the wife who is employed becomes the main provider/breadwinner for the family, as in Fikile's case. Furthermore, Andersen (2009:6) reiterates that unemployment negatively affects the well-being and self-image of a person. As a result, it is possible that Fikile's well-being and self-image were affected, because both of them (husband and wife) were employed prior to the husband's resignation and they lived a certain kind of a lifestyle. Consequently, when the husband decided to resign from his job, Fikile

had to take financial responsibility for everything in the house and that further weakened their marriage until it resulted in divorce. This means that Fikile's marriage was strained, as they could not afford some of the basic needs they used to be able to afford when both of them were still contributing financially. According to Preller (2013:2), when times are tough financially, marriages take strain. On the same note, Killewald (2016:697) states that limited financial resources stress marriages and increase the risk of divorce.

Another category under the sub-theme listing the participants' reasons for divorce is the child's disability grant, and it is deliberated in the next section.

**e) Child's disability grant**

This category emanated from Engenase's articulations, who divorced the same wife three times. In his articulation, he postulates that the reason for his second divorce was not based on the fights or conflicts between him and his wife, but instead it was because of an arrangement made between the two of them to prevent their child's disability grant being terminated. The verbatim response below demonstrates how **Engenase** explained his situation:

*"When we divorced for the second time it was not because there was a fight between us, it was due to the fact that our first-born daughter is mentally challenged" [Engenase 47-49]. "Our second divorce was influenced by the sickness of our child... The government wanted to stop her disability grant, because my wife's details were reflecting on the system as an employee of the government and therefore it was kicking the child out of the system. We then decided to divorce so that the grant could be transferred into my name since I was working at the private college and I was at the brewery before, therefore I do not have the persal number and they would not trace me. We then divorced so that I could be granted the custody of the child and retain the grant" [Engenase 98-106]*

South Africa has developed a diverse system of social protection mechanisms to address inequality and poverty, which includes assisting people with disabilities through targeted grants (Hanass-Hancock, Nene, Deghaye & Pillay 2017:2).

According to Mutasa (2012:2), the following grants are received by people living with disabilities in South Africa: the Care Dependency Grant for children under the age of 18 who have a disability, and the Disability Grant for adults above the age of 18 who have a disability. These grants are meant to counter the financial insecurity and vulnerability of poverty among people living with disabilities. However, literature suggests that disability increases the risk of poverty through lack of access to employment opportunities and poverty increases the risk of disability through poor access to services, risky environments, and food insecurity (Hanass-Hancock et al 2017:2). It is for this reason that grant recipients are subjected to a disability screening or assessment committee, which comprises health and social service practitioners, to ensure that grants are paid to well-deserving recipients. The disability screening/assessment is prone to classification errors, with some individuals receiving disability benefits even though they do not qualify (Mutasa 2012:30). This means that it is possible for people to alter their profile in order to qualify, as in the case of Engenase's situation.

Clearly the reason for Engenase's second divorce was not because of marital conflicts. It was an arrangement between himself and his wife in order to allow their daughter to continue receiving the Care Dependency Grant, because custody would be granted to Engenase who was not working for the government at the time. In this case, the Care Dependency Grant was another source of income given the fact that only Engenase's wife was employed. Engenase's situation tells us that divorce may happen without marital conflicts. It means that divorce may happen based on arrangements between the spouses in order to achieve a particular objective or serve a particular purpose or certain interest. This type of divorce is also known as uncontested divorce, whereby spouses agree work together on the terms of divorce (Preller 2013:112).

The next category under this sub-theme pertains to cultural differences and it was provided as one of the reasons for divorce.

**f) Cultural differences**

Goitsemanang referred to the cultural differences between himself and his wife as a contributory factor to their divorce. Culture is a particular stable way of acting, behaving, doing, knowing, mediating things, and communicating with other people (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane 2016:310). A study conducted by Buunk and Dijkstra (2017:17) reveals that both men and women showed an overall preference for a marital partner from their own cultural and ethnic group. On a similar note, Tsay and Wu (2006:166) state that previous studies have shown that people prefer to select spouses with similar traits to their own. Thus, marrying someone from an outside group deserves more sociological attention since it may lead to an unstable or even conflicting relationship (Tsay & Wu 2006:166). This means that misunderstanding and unacceptance of a spouse's cultural practices might lead to a conflicted marriage relationship. Adding to that, it may also increase the likelihood of divorce, as in Goitsemanang's case. This is how he articulated his situation:

*“My marriage was a mess from the beginning and I think it was because of the cultural issues as I told you earlier that I am a Tswana person and got married to a Zulu woman. I think it is our love that made our marriage stronger and our marriage to be functional but the foundation was not good at all, and already there was a child on the way... Again the cultural things came into play again, because she was a Ndebele. They had to do things together as a family like the rituals and so on and the church that she went to was the Zion Christian Church”*  
**[Goitsemanang 19-23; 121-124].**

The participant seems to hold a strong belief that a marriage functions well when married couples share a homogeneous background. This correlates with the findings of the study conducted by Tsay and Wu (2006:166) that although the formative factors of assortative marriages have shifted away from homogamy in terms of ascribed status, such as social origin, race, ethnicity and religion, to homogamy in terms of achieved status, such as educational attainment and occupation, homogamy continues to dominate the marriage market. This is based on the notion that having a partner with the same cultural background reduces the risk of conflicts and disagreements.

For that reason, 'cultural differences' was given as the main reason for divorce in Goitsemanang's marriage, as the couple had vast differences in terms of cultural practices, for instance rituals and religious affiliation.

In this theme, the divorced persons' accounts of their marital life experiences prior divorce were presented. In the next theme, the divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce will be presented. Their accounts will be presented in terms of sub-themes and categories where applicable.

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce**

Divorced persons were asked to give accounts of their lives after divorce. Their responses are given in two sub-themes, namely the positive and negative outcomes of divorce.

##### **4.3.2.1 Sub-theme: Positive outcomes of divorce**

While the effects of divorce seem grave, some individuals who go through divorce experience positive outcomes (Frisby et al 2012:716). Divorced persons who experience these positive outcomes are more resilient to divorce. These sentiments relate to the view of Sbarra et al (2015:109) that most people are psychologically resilient and fare quite well following divorce. Moreover, Frisby et al (2012:716) postulate that the results of divorce can be positive when problems between divorced persons are resolved effectively. In this case, divorced persons would view divorce as a starting point for a new, better life (Gahler 2006:371).

Some of the participants in this study expressed the positive aspects of their lives after divorce, as confirmed by the following responses:

*"Like I said, because it was not a normal marriage in the sense of him being away and coming back, what happened is that I had more friends than before coming over, male and female friends coming more and more. I was invited more to parties, braais and all that over the weekends. Suddenly I had a social life which I neglected before while going through this. In that sense suddenly that support came and it was better for me... So what happened is that suddenly friends stood up for me and said to me, you know what, I am going to do that for you" [Belinda 136-147].*

**Goitseman** found life after divorce difficult at first, but then explained how he recovered: *“All my life I have been having a fear of living alone. I would say divorce gave me a chance to do things on my own. All I wanted was to live happily and I did not want to live the life that was lived by my father. I did not want to keep divorcing and make my children suffer. It was tormenting and I still believed that we would reconcile. It was difficult to recover, because I had to support my children and I had to support myself. It was an advantage for my parents, because they thought that it was time for me to do things for them forgetting that I am still responsible for my family even after divorce. It was difficult to find a way of living by myself and still being able to support my children, but after some time I recovered fully and that was after two years. My wife would see that and say to me there is something which has changed about you, she would say you are no longer this shouting person and you are now doing the things that you could not do before. She would say there is something different about you... and eventually I decided to get married again”* [Goitseman 90-103].

**Adelaide** mentions having peace after her divorce: *“I had a lot to lose at that time, because I was married to a very, very rich man. But then I thought we did not have peace. We were always anxious... I mean the kids and I... you have a little bit of regret. But then I think the peace that you have is priceless, it’s not worth anything in the world”* [Adelaide 14-16; 171-173].

The aforementioned excerpts resonate with the notion by Frisby et al (2012:716) that divorced persons experience feelings of happiness and freedom, and demonstrate progress by reinventing themselves following divorce. In so doing, divorced persons demonstrate resilience in divorce, which normally occurs as a result of other factors, including relationship quality and support (Frisby et al 2012:716). This means that divorced persons are more likely to experience divorce positively, provided that there is support available and that they find divorce as the only solution to their problems. In addition, some individuals who exit divorce with relatively few negative outcomes demonstrate resilience by being able to maintain stable, healthy levels of psychological and physiological functioning (Frisby et al 2012:716).

It should be noted that although there is evidence of considerable resilience following divorce, such evidence is limited (Malgaroli, Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno 2017:1). Similarly, Sbarra et al (2015:112) state that although most people are resilient in the face of divorce, most people suffer enormously when their marriage comes to an end. In other words, some divorced persons experience an improvement in well-being, although many experience a decline (Mooney et al 2011:172). This means that the majority of evidence reflects that divorced persons are negatively affected by divorce. The negative outcomes of divorce based on the participants' accounts of their lives after divorce are presented next.

#### **4.3.2.2 Sub-theme: Negative outcomes of divorce**

Under this sub-theme, two categories are given, namely difficulty dealing with the divorce and loneliness.

##### **a) Difficulty dealing with the divorce**

Divorce is a highly aversive event and it has been shown to significantly impact physical and psychological well-being (Malgaroli et al 2017:1). More recent reviews of the literature on divorce continue to reveal negative outcomes for divorced persons, as they often experience deteriorated physical and psychological conditions for years after divorce, including guilt, depression, distress, and intimacy issues (Frisby et al 2012:716). In the same way, Sbarra et al (2015:109) reiterate that divorce is an upheaval that often entails a wide variety of challenges, including: substantial financial changes and legal involvement; the renegotiation of parenting relationships and management of co-parenting conflicts; changes in friendships and social networks; moving; and a host of psychological challenges. This means that divorce is one of the most stressful life events in a person's life and extremely difficult for divorced persons to deal with.

In this study, divorced persons highlighted that divorce was very difficult for them to deal with and these views were articulated by **Adelaide** as follows: *"It was very hard. It was the hardest thing that ever happened to me in my life. Even my exams it was not as hard as going through that. Even child birth was not as hard as going through that. Because it was like I said that you bank your life on this,*

*and suddenly you pull back and you are on your own. The only time you could talk about this is when you are having coffee with your friends, you know... So it was very hard, there was lot of hard work and it would take a very strong person to overcome everything, especially if you have children it becomes hard. I think people stay in abusing relationships, in unhappy marriages, just for the sake of their kids. But then I did not teach my children to disrespect their father or dislike their father, because if anything was to happen to me, they would still have him..." [Adelaide 89-101].* She continued explaining what was most difficult for her: *"For me as a person, I kept going back, I kept on having flashbacks. I become obsessive in my own mind. I would keep think, what is it that he is doing on the other side. Who is he with? Why is he with her? Things like that. But then gradually when you think about it and you see them together, you beginning to accept that he has moved on. He also has denial that maybe there is a chance but then it does not work... I thought to myself... you know when you are going through tough times, you beginning to think that maybe I should have let it be, but then it would have destroyed me. Yes, regrets did happen, but then those regrets were just normal human behaviour. But then I was not going to look back to those damages occurred to me. I was not prepared for that... it is still there because you think, I could have this, I could have that. I think it's normal to have those flashbacks, because sometimes I would think that if I had stayed in that marriage, I would be the most spoiled female who had everything. I would not have kept quiet about my partner's behaviour. I am not just the person who would say right is wrong, and wrong is right, that's it" [Adelaide 89-126].*

*"At first it was difficult, it was very difficult, especially because suddenly you are alone as a student social worker, you are alone at the victim empowerment centre, but yet you cannot maintain your own relationship so how can you advise or think about telling other people how they should handle their relationships if you cannot handle your own relationship? That was challenging for me emotionally, because you would sit down and say are you really in an emotional space where you can advise somebody and provide counselling. So that took a bit of time for me" [Belinda 88-95].*

**Engenase** shared his difficulties: *“It was a matter of lifting yourself from the pain, but also to show her that she cannot win the children although she thinks that she is cleverer than anybody else. I said to her, you are divorcing me and after that you want to take my children away from me, you are being cruel. It means that you will now become my enemy. You will be my first enemy, because you have destroyed my life, you have destroyed everything I have planned. I may look stupid, but whatever I was doing was for you, taking you to school and everything I did was purely for you, but now you have divorced me because you are now cleverer”* [Engenase 255-263].

**Fikile** also shared the following: *“To tell you the truth it was hard. I am the plaintiff and I am supposed to be happy, but after the finalisation of divorce I sat down alone and asked myself if I had done the correct thing. I asked myself if I should not have done something to save my marriage... I regretted that maybe we should have consulted with the psychologists and the psychiatrists for professional assistance. Later on I came into my senses that we can go to the professionals for help, but if he does not want to change it won't help. Truly speaking it affected me so badly. Divorce is not a simple thing to be honest with you. It is not easy to take such a decision, especially if there are children involved. I also explained to my children that I am divorced with your father, but I did not want to mention the bad part of it. I told them that we still communicate and that they still have access to their father. As time goes on I realised that my second-born child is becoming more affected, because he was full of anger, he did not want to listen when I talked to him. Eventually you get irritable and want to beat the child forgetting that it is the way he feels. He did not want to understand that I am divorced with his father and that makes me think that maybe I should not have divorced him”* [Fikile 198-215].

**Cebisa** explained how he experienced life after divorce: *“Apart from the children, the divorced person also becomes disoriented somehow, because you are used to put on the wedding ring and now you find yourself all over the place. You are not stable anymore... In terms of having so many girlfriends and so on. They also bring their own stress and you begin to realise that this is not the one I am looking for. Although my wife did some wrong things for me, but she was a good person.*

*There are good memories and good qualities she had that I can think of. So it becomes difficult to adjust to new challenges looking at where you are coming from. I think I had four girlfriends now and the main reason being you start comparing and all that. My wife was very smart and she really disappointed me. I had a beautiful wife, a thinker and she was very ambitious. I was sorted and she would make things happen for us as a family... I knew that when she was on top of something it would surely happen. So it becomes difficult to adjust to all these other girls, mind you, I got married at a very young age and I have dated her since 18 years" [Cebisa 357-372].*

**Engenase** continued sharing his difficulties: *"It is difficult, divorce can make you miserable. You become unstable in the sense that you may think of killing her, but later you ask yourself questions like, who is going to take care of the kids when she is dead. You end up not knowing what to do" [Engenase 473-476].*

These excerpts articulated by the participants attest to the fact that the post-divorce life experience is very difficult for divorced persons. From a large number of potential life events, divorce has been rated as one of the most stressful, with a large general impact on the life situation of the divorced persons (Gahler 2006:371). It is a relatively common stressful life event that is purported to increase the risk of all-cause mortality (Sbarra et al 2011:454). In addition, divorced persons more often suffer from anxiety, depression, anger, feelings of incompetence, rejection and loneliness, and also exhibit a higher mortality risk, particularly behaviour-related mortality such as suicide, motor vehicle accidents, and homicide (Gahler 2006:372-373). As a psychological and interpersonal stressor, divorce has the potential to disrupt biological processes that are important to a person's health and well-being and in so doing can increase the risk of health problems (Sbarra et al 2011:455).

The next category is loneliness, and it was articulated by participants as one of the aspects of their lives after divorce.

**b) Loneliness**

**Innocent** indicated that he felt very lonely after divorce and this is how he said it: *“Staying alone is not easy, especially if you are not used to that. Sometimes you would come back home and find yourself alone and lonely. I was forever tired emotionally. Divorce made me to be forever away from the house, I was forever on the road. Did not care whether the house was clean or not, as long as I could see myself out of the house”* [**Innocent 254-258**].

**Innocent** added: *“The other thing is that divorce made me to be an alcoholic. I was forever drinking alcohol thinking when I am drunk I would be okay, forgetting that when I wake up in the morning the problems would still be there. Eventually I accepted that whatever happened has happened, but it was not easy I must tell you... I wanted to keep myself busy at work by taking more overtime duties. I would volunteer to take those long trips at work hoping that I will forget”* [**Innocent 265-272**]. He also referred to having lots of girlfriends. *“To be honest with you I was heavily involved with lots of ladies after divorce until I realise that what I was doing was wrong and it won’t help me with anything, because I was killing myself... For me it was a way of coping with divorce and a way to prove that I can still be involved with other women despite being divorced and rejected by my ex-wife. I made a conscious decision to sit down and look at the things that I want as a person. Ladies would come and go in my house and it was not a good thing”* [**Innocent 339-349**].

As in Innocent’s case, studies repeatedly show that divorced persons, in addition to the lack of a partner, generally have smaller networks than individuals living with a partner (Gahler 2006:374). According to Terhell, Van Groenou and Tilburg (2004:719-720), about half of the relationships in the pre-divorce network are lost within two years after divorce and these losses mostly concern relationships that were shared with the former spouse, such as in-laws and mutual friends. Similar sentiments are shared by Gahler (2006:371), namely that divorced persons have smaller social networks and are more likely to lack social support.

Because he was feeling lonely, Innocent indulged in alcohol abuse. Studies have consistently shown higher rates of drinking among individuals who are divorced

and many of these studies suggest a prospective relationship between divorce and increased alcohol use (Kretsch & Harden 2014:138-139). Thus, people who experienced the loss of an intimate relationship, such as a marital relationship, could escalate into more serious issues, including alcohol and substance abuse (Frisby et al 2012:716). Additionally, the increase in alcohol use following divorce may result from both the loss of the protective effects of marriage and the additional burden of emotional, interpersonal, familial, and financial stress that divorce often incurs.

Apart from alcohol abuse, Innocent was involved in multiple sexual relationships due to loneliness. Most people find that divorce seriously influences their relationships with the opposite sex (Clapp 2000:184). In other words, divorce can leave divorced persons feeling suddenly exposed, devastated and alone (Cullington 2008:47). Because of the devastation and loneliness, divorced persons are more likely to involve themselves in multiple sexual relationships in order to acquire comfort and company. It is worth noting that this loneliness does not only refer to the need for company, but also the need to be connected in all aspects.

In this theme, divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce were presented. The next theme presents divorced persons' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce.

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Divorced persons' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce**

Divorced persons are confronted with several challenges after the dissolution of marriage (Saleh & Luppacini 2017:184). Previous research has documented the challenges faced by divorced persons, which include stress, a lower standard of living, and difficulty parenting (Ruppanner 2012:638). According to Perrig-Chiello et al (2015:387), there is a great body of empirical evidence that associates divorce with challenges that may have detrimental effects on the well-being of divorced persons.

In this study, divorced persons were asked to describe the challenges they experienced after their divorce and these are described in four sub-themes, namely stigma, children, financial, and no support from church group.

#### **4.3.3.1 Sub-theme: Stigma**

A stigma is defined as an attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context, which includes being the target of negative stereotypes, being rejected socially, being discriminated against, and being economically disadvantaged (Madera 2013:458). Supporting this definition, Toyoki and Brown (2014:715-716) suggest that a stigma is generally understood as an attribute that is deeply discrediting and that reduces an individual from a whole and usual person, to a tainted, discounted one. In other words, a stigma affects the identity of an individual and can marginalise him/her to the extent that he/she feels like a social outcast. A social outcast is a person who is rejected or cast out from their home or society (Saleh & Luppicini 2017:188).

Based on the nature and the implication of a stigma on the stigmatised individuals, it is clear that divorced persons are not exempted from social stigma. In their study, Saleh and Luppicini (2017:188) reveal that the divorced person being blamed for the divorce experiences stigma. The study further reported that divorced persons were faced with the social consequences of divorce, which include rejection, exclusion, and lack of respect.

When asked to describe the challenges they experienced after their divorce, divorced persons in this study articulated that they were stigmatised and the excerpts below attest to this.

*“Is the stigma. I know more especially of the Indian community. It’s like when you are divorced or single, you cannot even venture, and you cannot go to a party. You cannot go to a function, because you are the one who is single out there. You cannot go with the partner. If you go to the party or a function, it’s very awkward. It gives you the sense of incompleteness. It’s like maybe I should not be at that place” [Adelaide 160-165].*

*“But also the dignity and the stigma it is so painful. You were a married man before and all of a sudden you are a divorced person it is hard. I have only started now to be all over the place, I was never like that before” [Cebisa 419-422].*

*“But again, although your friends invite you, you feel like a burden in a way to them and some of them judge you. They judge you in the sense that you were married and suddenly divorced, so there are two sides of friends after divorce... There is a stigma and some of the people may even accuse you for having started a divorce. I had to build up a new group of friends and I would invite them for a braai, but I am not a smoker, I am not a drinker. I used to smoke four to five years ago. To be honest with you, I want to smoke once again now. I now crave cigarette and I am not sure if it is a coping mechanism or not. I once took a cigarette from my friend, but luckily, I felt sick after smoking it. Even now, if somebody smokes next to me, I would inhale the secondary smoke. I don’t know if it is a coping strategy, but I crave cigarette a lot” [Derik 199-211].*

*“And the other issue was that suddenly I am a single mom and the stigma attached to that especially with school functions and the whole circle of friends that you previously had. That all changed. The religious group changed in the sense that I had the religious study group and they were all married ladies and when I told them that I am going through divorce then suddenly it was like... you should go pray about it. And when I was about to see a lawyer they would say you cannot just give up on your marriage. But was that realistic for me to just sit and pray about it while in fact he is going on with the divorce and he is seeing a lawyer and all that? I have two children and I had to see someone who would go through all the legal documents provided to me and sort that out. They would say you don’t believe in God, you don’t believe that God will sort out all your problems and I would tell them that for people to be in a marriage, it has to come from both sides. So that was suddenly strange things for me explaining to people” [Belinda 96-110].*

Certainly, participants in this study suffered from stigma in different forms. Because of the negative reactions by society, Adelaide could not go to parties anymore, Cebisa felt like he had lost his dignity and could not go anywhere, Derik had to build a new group of friends, and Belinda had to find a new religious study group. According to

Madera (2013:458), stigmatised individuals tend to try to obviate disgust, avoidance, and negative interactions. Instead of connecting to family, friends, and the rest of society as part of a couple, divorced persons begin to interact with them as a single person. It is possible that society may even take the side of one of the divorced persons (Stoner 2009:13).

A common finding in the literature on stigma is that people generally have negative reactions toward stigmatised individuals, particularly in dyadic, face-to-face interactions (Madera 2013:458). A study conducted by Saleh and Luppicini (2017:187-188) in Saudi Arabia reports the following regarding the social stigma surrounding divorced persons:

- Divorced persons suffer from inferiority and stigmatisation within society.
- Divorced persons (especially women) suffer inequality and unfairness in society.
- Divorced persons are blamed for being divorced.
- Divorced persons are viewed as criminals by society.
- Divorced persons are viewed by society as having committed a sin by divorcing.

In addition, divorced persons also expressed that they were faced with challenges regarding their children after divorce and this is presented in the next sub-theme.

#### **4.3.3.2 Sub-theme: Children's well-being**

Studies show that children are vulnerable to negative effects emotionally, socially, behaviourally, developmentally, and academically (Al-Zamil, Heijazi, Alshargawi, Al-Meshaal & Soliman 2016:177). On the same note, Kim (2010:487) reaffirms that the majority of studies in the literature on divorce finds that parental divorce has adverse effects on children's development. These findings resonate with Lansford's (2009:141) sentiments that there is agreement among most researchers that children experiencing parental divorce are at risk of a variety of negative developmental outcomes. Based on the above sentiments, it is clear that children are equally negatively affected by their parents' divorce. Their well-being is also likely to be negatively affected, especially if their parents are no longer able to take care of them as they used to prior to divorce. These views are confirmed by Haugen's (2007:661) statement that some children suffer as a result of the divorce, because their custodial parent is unable to care for them properly. The inability of parents to take care of their children could be caused by what Al-Zamil et al (2016:178) refer to as parental

transition difficulties during the post-divorce stage. In other words, parents who are unable to adjust to new challenges in life may experience problems providing adequate care for their children.

Undoubtedly, divorced persons get worried when their children are negatively affected by divorce. In this study, participants expressed that one of the challenges they faced after divorce is related to their children. Some of the participants who voiced this challenge were Belinda, Cebisa, Derik, Fikile, and Helen.

**Belinda** explained the challenges she faced after divorce regarding her children: *“It was hard, because they were boys. I just thought that the best thing to do would be to do things that a man would do then. So I learned how to ride a bike, because he never used to come to the house after the divorce. He was free now to do whatever. I would go to the survival camps with them. Then I started doing a lot of stuff with them. I would be part of everything that they would do. I would also invite their dad and he would not come. But then I knew that they still have me”* [Belinda 231-237].

**Cebisa** also shared his challenges: *“You know, when you have children, divorce affect children, and if you love your children you will see the disorientation part in their lives. My son never coped although I took him to psychologist to get assistance. It did not help at all. He still hopes that his mother and I will get back together at some point. Even now he is not coping and the challenge for me is to get him cope with the situation. The other challenge is that he does not approve when I have an affair with anyone, or if I have a girlfriend”* [Cebisa 336-342].

Referring to his children, **Derik** explained: *“I can say the contact was there in the beginning then she started blocking it at a later stage. Later on I tried writing letters and eventually I contact... I have two (children). The other one is studying chemical engineering at the university and the other one is doing grade 9. For almost 8 – 9 years, I haven’t got contact with my children at all”* [Derik 89-93].

**Fikile** also explained the challenges she faced after divorce that concerned her son in particular: *“As time goes on I realised that my second-born child is becoming more affected because he was full of anger, he did not want to listen when I talked to him.*

*Eventually you get irritable and want to beat the child forgetting that it is the way he feels. He did not want to understand that I am divorced with his father and that makes me think that maybe I should not have divorced him” [Fikile 211-215].* She explained further: *“Sometimes at school they would call me to let me know that my child is rude in class and he is always fighting with others. I then thought of meeting with his father just to explain to him the effect of divorce on the child. It was a huge damage and I am the one who is supposed to be saving my children... He was so full of anger to such an extent that he did not want to talk to any person. When you try to talk to him he would say that he never anticipated that I will divorce his father. Even when you try to explain to him, he does not understand. All he wants is to see his mother and father together. It destroyed him such that his performance at school deteriorated” [Fikile 221-232].*

This is how **Helen** explained her challenges: *“My son wanted to make life miserable for me at some stage. We were forever fighting, but I knew that it has got something to do with his father because he was phoning him secretly... He was in high school, about 13 or 14 years. It was heart-breaking, but I just told myself that let me be strong. I have been protecting them all along and I just decided that maybe it is time for this boy to go and experience his father on his own without me being there to cover... He went. He was in boys’ high school at that time and he went. Of course the father was happy about it, but he went amiss for two years. His school results were dropping every year. At some stage he asked me if he could come back home and when I asked him why he said that his father would leave him in the house for a weekend alone. He is forever drunk, and he comes home with different girlfriends. He eventually came back in grade 11 this side, in fact I went to Cape Town and I brought him back here, he had failed so badly” [Helen 258-274].*

The participants above alluded to the challenges they have faced after divorce regarding their children. These participants mainly refer to the emotional state of their children, as they were demonstrating an inability to cope with their parents’ divorce. The study conducted by Al-Zamil et al (2016:181) reports that children whose parents are divorced become vulnerable to various forms of emotional pressure, such as fear, sadness, and worries, and social effects, such as struggling to maintain a balanced social interaction with both parents. Supporting these findings, a study conducted by

Lofthus and Skorpen (2016:162) reveals that the children of divorced parents reported more symptoms of anxiety and depression, a lower subjective experience of wellness, and more school related problems. The life stress perspective suggests that divorce presents a change in the social environment of the children, which is reflected in the deterioration of the quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, exposure to interpersonal conflict, and a decline in the standard of living (Al-Zamil et al 2016:179).

According to Belinda, Cebisa, Fikile and Helen, they were worried about the change in their children's behaviour and the emotional state of their children, especially male children. However, this does not mean that female children are not equally affected by parental divorce. There is an expectation that originates from social learning theory that male children need a male role model in order to develop a healthy, masculine self-image and appropriate sex-type behaviour (Fischer 2007:479). Helen's son moved between both parents, spending some time staying with each one of them separately. Generally, children who often move between their parents after divorce are trying their best to adjust to their new situation and to develop strategies to cope with the loss and grief they suffered from the absence of the parent they are apart from (Lofthus & Skorpen 2016:162). Just like adults, children need to be assisted to go through the pain of divorce, otherwise the pain never disappears, even for the most resilient children (Lofthus & Skorpen 2016:162). Therefore, divorced parents must ensure that their children are assisted to cope with the aftermath of divorce.

Studies have reported that parent-child relationships often begin to deteriorate during divorce and become even more troubled after the finalisation of divorce, because parents are so consumed by their own crises (Clapp 2000:88). For that reason, it is very important for divorced parents to maintain a relationship with their children after divorce. By the same token, Kalmijn (2015:738) reiterates that many studies have shown that there are negative long-term consequences of divorce on the parents' relationship with their children. When children have close, supportive, and reliable relationships with their divorced parents, they have most of the emotional benefits of an in-tact family (Clapp 2000:89).

The next sub-theme presents financial challenges as one of the challenges expressed by divorced persons.

### 4.3.3.3 *Sub-theme: Financial difficulties*

Divorce causes a sharp fall in income (Zagorsky 2005:408). Divorced persons experience substantial declines in income after divorce and they start out with fewer resources (Lavelle & Smock 2012:414). The decline in their income is mostly influenced by the fact that divorced persons are compelled to share their debts and assets in the event of divorce. According to Stoner (2009:13), married couples undergo financial divorce when they decide to divorce. In financial divorce, the income, property, and debts that have been accumulated during the marriage are divided between the spouses. In most instances, divorced persons continue to share their income with the ex-spouse, especially if there are children involved. This means that the income that used to support one household will now have to somehow stretch and support two households (Stoner 2009:13). It is also possible that a divorced person has to bear the financial burden regarding the children alone, especially if the other parent is unwilling to assist. Saleh and Luppicini (2017:190) reaffirm that divorced persons who have children, especially women, tend to suffer financial losses due to unpaid alimony from the other parent. In other instances, the divorced person in a lower income bracket and who pays alimony suffers financial strain, as he/she will be taking care of two households. This relates to a study conducted by Bowen and Jensen (2015:1371), which reveals that divorced persons in lower income brackets are more likely to face economic challenges.

In this study, Derik, Cebisa, Fikile, and Helen share their post-divorce financial challenges. When asked about the challenges, **Derik** responded: *“It is the financial burden... In the sense that I am paying maintenance that side and she also want to be taken care of this side. Now, I must build up something from nothing again. Remember, I had a house and I had everything, so now I have to build up my small little house again. I have to buy teaspoons, carpet, a glass, it sounds stupid. It becomes a step back, instead of moving forward”* [Derik 193-199].

**Derik** further stated: *“Every month I am paying maintenance, but I do not have access to my kids. At one stage I informed the magistrate and he said I should take the matter to the family advocate office. When we left the office my wife was laughing at me. The*

*maintenance is high I must tell you and it is straining me so badly financially. Financially, I am straining, but my kids come first” [Derik 98-101].*

**Cebisa** referred to the loss of some of his pension after his divorce: *“I think I managed to cope looking at the things I have lost, for instance, my pension money that was divided for her to get a portion of it” [Cebisa 315-316].*

**Fikile** also referred to having to part with 50% of her pension money: *“...what almost destroyed my heart is when he was demanding 50% of my pension money. I tried to remain strong at that time, but when I got to work the following day I cried so bitterly. I tried for a long time until my boss noticed it and I explained to him that we have drafted the settlement and my husband is claiming 50% of my pension money. He then said to me your pension money will only start from 2006 until the last day of your divorce. He said from the first day at work until the day you got married, it would be all yours. He said to me, money is nothing just release and open your heart... I do not understand if he wanted to revenge, but that is the only thing I would say I have lost and I have made peace with it” [Fikile 253-267].*

**Helen** also shared her financial challenges: *“He defaulted so many times with the maintenance orders. He just defaulted from the first day, because he said no court will decide for what I have to do. So it was a constant battle. Remember, how nicely he planned this, when the divorce was still in the process he actually arranged the transfer for him to move back to Cape Town and he left me here with my three children. He phoned the bank and said to them, take your house now and he stopped paying for the bond. He arranged for the water and lights to be switched off. My child was still a babe and he left... I had to arrange a place as soon as possible. I am thinking that if the bank takes the house and we are married in community of property, then I will be left with a debt. For him it would be easy, because he earned lot of money and there was no way for me that I would be able to do that and it would hamper my future. Then eventually he agreed that we sell the house instead of the bank repossessing it. He had stopped paying for something like six months. It was part of the court order that he should pay for the bond and the electricity, he just neglected it... Eventually he got the house sold after a long battle. He did not want me to benefit from the house and I said to him it is fine for me, as long as I am not in the debt” [Helen 163-185].*

**Helen** further explained her financial challenges: *“What I also experienced with my ex-husband is that we had a certain standard of living, just to give you an example, the little daughter would have six packs of yoghurts, excluding weekends. And after divorce he had the courage to tell the court that... she have three yoghurts in a day, she can do with one. And I said okay you were living... in the same house and you know the lifestyle that we used to live, so how can you pushing the child because you are no longer with us. He further said to us you can use sunlight soap instead of using lux and I said no we cannot use lux now, because you are no longer in the house. It must be seen as petty things, but it made a huge impact in our lives. Besides the down scale, in fact everything was a down scale for us you were forced to”* [**Helen 219-229**].

As reflected in the aforementioned extracts, the participants articulated the financial challenges they were confronted with after divorce. Derik and Helen’s challenges relate to alimony, but in different ways. According to Derik, he is contributing a lot of money towards the maintenance of his children and it has reduced the amount of money he has left each month to use for himself. This correlates with Zagorsky’s (2005:410) views that divorce increases expenditure and leaves divorced persons with little money to use on themselves. On the other hand, Helen’s ex-husband defaulted on his maintenance payments for their children many times and this caused a lot of financial strain for her. Both Derik and Helen’s financial challenges can be linked to what Stoner (2009:19) refers to as the sharing of income between two households. In other words, the income that barely paid the bills of one household prior divorce is now expected to cover the expenses of two households. With regard to Cebisa and Fikile, their main financial challenge is when they had to share their pension money after divorce. In South Africa, when couples are married in civil union or in community of property, each partner has a claim against the other’s pension fund (Preller 2013:98). In this case, the pension fund is equally shared between the divorced persons.

Given the above, it is clear that financial well-being and economic independence after divorce reduces financial strain. Financial well-being is defined as total family income in the prior calendar year, divided by the square root of the number of family members in the household (Killewald 2016:703). This means that the total family income would be sufficient to cater for all the family members and their individual needs.

The next challenge is the lack of support from a church group, which is presented in the following sub-theme.

#### **4.3.3.4 Sub-theme: No support from the church**

In the past, the emphasis in marriage was on commitment to the marriage as an institution, therefore the notion that a couple should stay married for life involved the view of marriage as a sacred institution that must be upheld at all costs (Balswick & Balswick 2007:88-89). According to Sarkar (2015:93), marriages are made in heaven. Married persons and their fellow parishioners may have divergent opinions if they decide to divorce and they will have to discern the blurry lines of religious and societal values (Murray 2002:191). For instance, Christians believe that God desires permanence in marriage and that married Christians must do all they can to save their marriages (Balswick & Balswick 2007:309). Moreover, a marriage is associated with some religious ceremonies and requires social approval (Sarkar 2015:2).

In this study, **Belinda** received no support from her church group, and was judged instead: *"...there is a whole change of relationships and friends that occur when divorce happened... It was difficult for me, because it was not even my decision, it was him who started everything and why am I all of a sudden. I am still dealing with it now religious, asking God to say what was the plan in that, what was the whole thing in that marriage, relationship and the friendship that went wrong... the whole (church) study group issue. And I did not go to that church any more. I stopped that, because I felt that I was being judged in that group and I said that never will I go to such a group. Instead of being supported you are getting this... So I am still not going to church really, I am focusing on my own spiritual journey with my God at the moment. So that is where I am at"* [**Belinda 116-133**].

Some religions have completely prohibited divorce, which makes it difficult for married couples to divorce (Duzbakar 2016:126). However, most religions are recognising that "until death parts us" is not always logical or healthy for the couple involved and therefore they are making it possible for their members to divorce, but the level of acceptance divorced persons experience, explicit or implicit, varies (Murray 2002:190). In other words, church members who decide to divorce their spouses are

more likely to receive resentment from the church members, as in Belinda's case. The resentment experienced by the divorced person from fellow church members contradicts Clapp's (2000:156) assertion that support groups are often available through churches and that they can be of great help to divorced persons.

Well-established literature has linked religious support and psychological adjustment to an individual's ability to cope with stress (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1372). In other words, support from fellow church members enables the divorced person to cope better with the aftermath of divorce. This means that lack of support from church members exacerbates the stress and leads to further strain. This was the case with Belinda, who identified lack of support from her church group as one of the challenges that she faced after divorce. Instead of getting the support she needed, she felt judged for having divorced her husband. A study conducted by Hong and Welch (2013:53) revealed that hope surfaced out of the participants' faith in God, as in Belinda's case.

In conclusion to this theme, **Enganese** summed up all the challenges experienced by divorced persons as follows: *"Divorce has never done any good. It destroys everything. I liken divorce to death sentence, because when you say you don't love somebody, the person would look at how much he has lost. You can only pretend and put a smile for other people to see, but deep down your heart you are hurting, you are dying. The only thing that comes to your mind would be revenge just to ensure that you give the person the same pain that she gave you. You can do so because she has taken away everything you love, she has taken away the house, she has taken away the kids, and therefore you can only pretend to be smiling and you take away everything she loves too. You would want her to feel the pain too. She would only hear that her sister has died not knowing that I am the one who sent the hitman to kill her. She would only hear that her boyfriend has been ambushed not knowing that I would be one who sent people to do so. You see, divorce takes us backwards. You think of the investments and the efforts you have put into the marriage and all of a sudden someone wants to pull out. It is sad"* [**Enganese 433-447**].

The above-mentioned narratives capture the challenges, agony, and frustrations experienced by divorced persons as presented in this theme. The next theme presents divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce**

Loss is an elementary human experience and refers to the transitory nature of human existence in which parting is immanent (Jakoby 2015:110). According to Tark, Bedard, Kleck and Roe-Sepowitz (2008:2-3), a loss includes a sense of detachment that may lead to disconnection from others, a crumbling of self, emotional distress, difficulty in coping, and pursuing destructive coping strategies, such as self-isolation and the abuse of alcohol and substances. Thus, it is clear that loss evokes some emotions and has some consequences. There are different forms of loss and divorce is one of them. A marriage entails, amongst other things, sexual, economic, and social rights and obligations for the married partners (Madathil & Benshoff 2008:222), and the dissolution of a marriage causes losses to both partners. Similarly, Cullington (2008:43-53) postulates that divorced persons may lose their houses, neighbourhoods, income, children and friends, self-worth, and innocence. Expanding on this, Emery (2012:40) states that divorce involves the loss of lover, a mate, a partner, children, extended family, friends, control, trust, security, home, savings, cherished possessions, and financial plans. This means that loss due to divorce brings changes in the lives of divorced persons. In this case, change implies a loss of control and a threat to the continuity of everyday life (Jakoby 2015:111). Consequently, unless the divorced persons recognise their loss, it will be hard for them to develop new supportive structures (Donner 2015:381).

Participants in this study were asked to explain the losses they had experienced as a result of divorce. Their responses are reflected in five sub-themes, namely financial losses, loss of companionship, loss of self-esteem, loss of trust in the opposite sex, and loss of security.

##### **4.3.4.1 Sub-theme: Financial losses**

**Belinda** explained how her financial situation had been affected by divorce: *"...he is still paying maintenance. The girls have everything they needed, but it is not like it was before. So in the sense we really go a level down. I am renting a place now; I am driving a smaller car. Now we have to budget, but previous it was not the case since he was earning dollars not that we were spending money wildly, but if you needed to*

*take the girls out, it did not require a second thought, you just did it but now you have to plan for everything you need to do” [Belinda 168-174].*

Helen also spoke of having to downscale: “...it made a huge impact in our lives. Besides the downscale, in fact everything was a downscale for us you were forced to” [Helen 228-229].

In contrast, **Jacqueline** stated that her financial position improved after divorce: “It actually became better when he left, because it was now two left mouths to feed even if now the helper has now come on. To be honest with you, I felt less burdened, because he had standards he wanted to maintain. He wanted to eat out, he would not opt for a cheaper stuff like I would see a pair of shoes on sale, you see, I would buy myself a pair of shoes for R50 and he would want three pairs of R150 each. I asked myself why because this person was not working” [Jacqueline 279-285].

Based on the above-mentioned excerpts, it is clear that Belinda’s financial situation was negatively affected by divorce. This resonates with Murray’s (2002:191) assertion that divorce often brings financial loss. On the same note, Zagorsky (2005:410) reiterates that divorce increases expenditure and leaves divorced persons with little money to use on themselves. Furthermore, Kalmijn and Van Groenou (2005:460) postulate that divorce negatively affects household income.

Jacqueline’s financial situation improved after divorce. Guru (2009:301) confirms that an independent income, sufficient housing, and good employment are all necessary conditions in developing confidence and the ability to build resilience against personal and social adversities, such as divorce. Although Jacqueline’s financial situation had improved after divorce, most divorced women remain financially affected by divorce. This view relates to Kalmijn and Van Groenou’s (2005:460) assertion that divorce negatively affects women’s income. In the same way, Lavelle and Smock (2012:414) reiterate that women experience a loss of economic resources after divorce. Although the participants in this study did not mention the issue of gender, it should be borne in mind that divorced men are equally affected by divorce, as they too experience financial loss after divorce. This is attested by Goitseman’s assertion, who is the father of two children: “It was difficult to find a way of living by myself and still being

able to support my children” [Goitseman 94-95]. Additionally, Bowen and Jensen (2017:370) reiterate that limited empirical evidence exists regarding the impact of divorce on the lives of divorced men and women as it pertains to gender differences.

The next sub-theme presents the loss of companionship as articulated by the divorced persons.

#### **4.3.4.2 Sub-theme: Loss of companionship**

Divorce involves the loss of relationships that were shared by the divorced person with their former spouse, such as in-laws and friends (Terhell et al 2004:720). The lack of a spouse results in divorced persons feeling lonely, as they are used to living with their ex-spouse (Kalmijn & Van Groenou 2005:457). Additionally, the loss of companionship because of divorce has some negative consequences, which include emotional, social, and economic distress (Drew, Heesacker, Frost & Oelke 2004:381-382). The responses below from Jacqueline and Belinda demonstrate their views of the loss of companionship due to divorce.

**Jacqueline** shared her experience: *“Firstly I missed having him, I mean the person I knew not this crazy him. So I had a friend in him, I had somebody who could help me out with the kids and so on and I had to face life all by myself and alone. The kids also missed their father, because they were close to their father so that has been so difficult. Getting home and not having someone to talk to”* [Jacqueline 264-269].

**Belinda** also shared her accounts on the loss of companionship: *“...it was about suddenly being a single mother and taking all the responsibilities that come with it. Although it (the marriage) was long distance, at least there was someone I could talk to just like a companion. Suddenly all of that is gone and everything is all on you now. All the responsibilities and the planning were suddenly on one person”* [Belinda 178-182].

Married couples share a household not only for childbearing, but also for some friendship benefits, which include both utility and pleasure (Fullam 2012:666-667). This means that the end of the marriage implies the end of such friendships, which may result in loneliness and boredom. This was the case with both Jacqueline and

Belinda, who alluded that they felt they had not only lost a spouse, but also lost a friend due to divorce. They were compelled to make all the decisions and take full responsibility for their children after divorce. Divorce further brings changes in networks and this may exacerbate the loss of companionship. Research on network changes after divorce points to the high prevalence of network losses shortly after divorce (Terhell et al 2004:733). Structural conditions also contribute to network losses after divorce and may restrict the development of new relationships (Terhell et al 2004:722). In other words, divorce may result in the loss of companionship with the ex-spouse and contribute towards the loss of other significant relationships, including family members. Moreover, it may restrict the development of new relationships, which may lead to loneliness.

In the next sub-theme, the loss of self-esteem is presented as one of the losses experienced by divorced persons.

#### **4.3.4.3 Sub-theme: Loss of self-esteem**

Self-esteem is viewed as a generalised feeling that one is a worthwhile or likeable person, deserving the respect of others (Miller & Moran 2006:8). Evidence suggests that marriage provides a strong positive sense of identity and self-worth to married partners (Soulsby & Bennett 2017:360). As a result, divorce is more likely to negatively affect the identity and self-worth of divorced persons. Similarly, Clapp (2000:40) suggests that divorced persons' feelings of self-worth generally take a plunge after divorce. The study conducted by Saleh and Luppicini (2017:193) confirms that divorced persons are likely to suffer from low self-esteem and lack confidence due to divorce. Similarly, Clapp (2000:40) reiterates that divorce is usually very hard on self-esteem, as it evokes feelings of rejection, worthlessness, and failure.

In this study, **Engenase** spoke of his loss of self-esteem: *"...you end up getting tempted to drink alcohol too much, being involved with so many girlfriends. It becomes a competition in the sense that you think if you can have a girlfriend maybe she would be jealous and come back. You think of so many things, for instance, you wish the security company car which transport money can just be in an accident so that you take all the money. You just think that if I can have six million Rand one day, maybe she would come back... When a woman decide on a divorce it means there is*

*something wrong. I concluded that she is divorcing, because I do not satisfy her sexually, or maybe because I do not have money, but she remains the one who knows the reasons behind... It does affect the self-esteem, because you do not know the reason because her decision. You begin to ask yourself so many questions, like what is it that the other men have that you do not have?" [Engenase 299-314].*

Jacqueline shared her experience: *"So in terms of a loss, it took me a while in terms of signing the papers, because I was thinking that the society would think that you have failed, even today my mother does not accept that I am divorced she thinks that it is my fault. She thinks that I did not behave like a wife and that I did not respect my husband..." [Jacqueline 324-328].*

It is clear that both Engenase and Jacqueline's self-esteems were affected by divorce. Engenase feels that he is the cause of the divorce for not being able to satisfy his wife sexually and not being able to take care of her financially. As a result, his self-esteem was affected so much that he resorted to multiple sexual relationships, hoping that his ex-spouse would be jealous and come back. Jacqueline's self-esteem was also affected, as she feared that society would hold her responsible for the divorce. Moreover, her mother blamed her for the divorce and this contributed towards the loss of her self-esteem. In both Engenase and Jacqueline's situations, their self-worth and perceptions of their own competence were affected due to divorce. According to Miller and Moran (2006:8), the definitions of self-esteem fall within two categories, namely those which focus primarily on self-worth and those which are based upon an individual's judgement of competence. Adding to that, Clapp (2000:163) suggests that self-esteem is enhanced by new accomplishments. And so, it is necessary for divorced persons to develop some new interests or hobbies.

The loss of trust in the opposite sex is presented in the next sub-theme as one of the losses experienced by divorced persons.

#### **4.3.4.4 Sub-theme: Loss of trust in the opposite sex**

Trust is the willingness of a person to be vulnerable to the actions of another person based on positive expectations regarding the other person's motivation and/or behaviour (Lumineau 2017:1555). In other words, trust is about holding positive

expectations regarding another person's conduct, and in contrast mistrust is about holding negative expectations regarding another person's conduct. Divorced persons may suffer from a loss of trust, anxiety, and increased worry about being hurt in future relationships (Frisby et al 2012:719). After divorce, divorced persons may have no interest in either dating or sexual intimacy (Clapp 2000:184). Divorce may damage a person's ability to trust, and as a result diminish the intimacy and emotional bond with a new partner (Tark et al 2008:3).

In this study, Innocent, Fikile, Jacqueline, and Engenase shared their experiences on how they lost trust in the opposite sex.

**Innocent** shared how he lost trust in women: *"...I can say that I lost trust in women, because I no longer trust. I do not trust my wife now because of what happened with my ex-wife. Like now she called me just to tell me that she wants to pass at the shops to buy something and I do not trust that she is telling me the truth. That is why I say I no longer have trust and I do not trust that my wife would go to the shops alone without seeing other men, and it is killing me. My ex-wife broke the trust that I had for women"* [**Innocent 404-410**].

**Fikile** also shared her experience: *"I also had thinking that all men are the same and did not believe that a man would be telling the truth if he says he loves me. In fact, I was no longer interested to be in a relationship anymore thinking that even the next person will treat me the same way I have been treated by my ex-husband"* [**Fikile 281-284**].

**Jacqueline** inferred that she had lost her trust in men after her divorce, when speaking of her new relationship: *"It also made me realise that not all men are idiots and they abandon their children. Just to restore all the trust that was destroyed and having not to beg for attention is nice... And to have somebody now is restoring my faith in men and in relationships and I can also see myself maybe getting married again. Before that I never thought I would get married again, but now I can see myself with one person only. I told myself that I was done with the marriage and maybe I would only just play around and all that but now I have a different perception altogether. I can now*

*see myself in a family setting once again and also having somebody I can rely on, somebody I can talk to about my day” [Jacqueline 403-417].*

**Engenase** mentioned the following: *“You just feel like all woman are the same to an extent that you can end up being a serial killer. You may want to inflict pain to the entire women in the world. When you see a young girl growing up, maybe a 12 or 13 years old, the only thing that comes to your mind is that she is going to hurt somebody’s feelings one day. She is going to raise somebody’s hope and end up divorcing him. You end up miserable” [Engenase 341-346].*

According to Van de Rijt and Buskens (2006:128), the decision to trust depends on the following three main variables:

- A person’s estimate of the probability that the other person pursues relational goals.
- A person’s own interest in a marriage and potential gains of such a marriage.
- Loss of trust as a result of the previous long-term relationship.

As provided in the above-mentioned excerpts, participants lost their trust in the opposite sex, based on their life experience prior to divorce and because of the divorce itself. Besides, they have lost interest in marriage and the potential gains of such a marriage, hence they hold the view that all people of the opposite sex are the same. These sentiments contradict Van de Rijt and Buskens’ (2006:129) assertion that if a person has trusted/invested in a previous relationship, he/she is more likely to be interested in a long-term relationship and he/she can be expected to cultivate a long-term relationship in future. The aforementioned sentiments do not correlate with the experiences of the participants in this study, because the extracts reflect a loss of trust in the opposite sex and an unwillingness to commit to a long-term relationship again. In other words, their confidence and positive expectations regarding the opposite sex is lost. According to Lumineau (2017:1555), confident positive expectations refer to a belief in, a propensity to attribute virtuous intentions to, or a willingness to act on the basis of another’s conduct. Conversely, confident negative expectations refer to a fear of, a propensity to attribute sinister intentions to, or a desire to buffer oneself from the effects of another’s conduct. From the participants’ extracts, it can be said that the divorced persons lost trust in the opposite sex as a result of divorce.

The loss of security, which is presented in the next sub-theme, is one of the losses experienced by divorced persons due to divorce.

#### **4.3.4.5 Sub-theme: Loss of security**

The study conducted by Hurt (2012:859) found that married couples, especially men, feel secure and happy in the marriage if they consider the marriage a lifelong partnership, comprising secure emotional support, lifelong commitment, enhanced life success, and secure attachment. On average, married couples report higher levels of psychological well-being than divorced individuals (Frech & Williams 2007:149). This means that a marriage serves as security, as it involves certain benefits for the married couples. According to Hurt (2012:859), there are social, economic, physical, and occupational benefits to being involved in a healthy, satisfying marriage. Likewise, Frech and Williams (2007:150) state that marital quality signifies good mental health. With the kind of benefits that a marriage brings to married couples, divorce leads to loss. In other words, divorce results in a loss of marital benefits and ultimately a loss of security.

When asked about the losses he experienced due to his divorce, **Goitseman** said: *“I think the first one would be the security that I have lost. The relationship that I had with my ex-wife was very strong and we never thought that we would get divorced. As a man I always thought so because my wife was always an understanding person. It’s like she was well taught on how to respect her husband, because she was a respecting woman”* [Goitseman 145-149].

In the extract above, Goitseman refers to the strong relationship he had with his ex-wife; a form of security to him. He further narrates how understanding and respectful she was to him and as such, it felt like she gave him a sense of security. As a result of divorce, his sense of security is no longer there. Frech and Williams (2007:150) affirms that the strength of support in a marriage and marital quality lead to mental health gains in the marriage and as such provide a sense of security to married couples. Thus, having a partner who listens to and understands you is crucial in a marriage, as it gives a sense of security. However, that sense of security weakens after divorce. This signifies that marriages can provide married couples with the feeling

of being loved and cared for by someone close. They can also experience warmth, companionship, and sexual fulfilment, and all these amount to a sense of security and safety. This suggests that divorce brings changes in divorced persons' lives and these changes result in a loss of security (Zagorsky 2005:410).

This theme presented divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce. The next theme presents divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce.

#### **4.3.5 Theme 5: Divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce**

Divorce triggers strong emotions and these emotions persist throughout the process and continue after divorce (Frisby et al 2012:720). Generally, the literature on marital transitions finds that psychological distress increases after divorce (Stack & Scourfield 2015:701). According to Sakraida (2008:880), stress refers to a state of emotional arousal that occurs when the situation demands an individual's capacity to adapt. In other words, stress normally occurs when the person is confronted with a situation that has detrimental effects on his/her well-being, such as divorce. Divorce is a significant source of stress and constitutes a major life transition (Scott et al 2013:131). There is a great body of empirical evidence that associates divorce with symptoms of depression, grief, and anger, and these symptoms may be detrimental to a person's well-being (Perrig-Chiello et al 2015:387).

Divorced persons often experience deteriorated physical and psychological conditions for years following divorce, including guilt, depression, distress, and intimacy issues (Frisby et al 2012:716). The emotional conditions suffered by divorced persons after divorce may result in other detrimental factors, such as suicides, injuries, and many others. This relates to the assertion by Nielsen et al (2014:705) that many studies have reported higher mortality rates and higher rates of injuries, suicides, mental disorders, strokes, chronic diseases, and disability among divorced persons.

In this study, divorced persons described the variety of emotions that they experienced after divorce. Their accounts of these emotions are given in five sub-themes and the

emotions ranged from anger to feelings of loneliness and rejection, although one sub-theme presents some positive emotions experienced by the divorced persons.

#### **4.3.5.1 Sub-theme: Anger**

Anger can be viewed as the emotional concomitant of the propensity to aggress (Leary, Twenge & Quinlivan 2006:113). According to Perrig-Chiello et al (2015:387), divorce is associated with the symptom of anger. This means that divorced persons are more likely to suffer from anger and aggression after divorce. Generally, people often become angry, if not aggressive, when they feel that others have rejected them (Leary et al 2006:111).

Many divorced persons mask their underlying feelings with anger and cling to it, because they have never acknowledged their losses or dealt with their underlying feelings of rejection, hurt, and failure, or their wounded self-esteem; instead they continue to battle these feelings years after divorce (Clapp 2000:154). Correspondingly, Leary et al (2006:111) suggest that people become angry and aggressive when they feel that they have been devalued, unaccepted, or rejected. Apart from high levels of anger and despair, divorce has detrimental long-term effects on the general health of divorced persons (Nielsen et al 2014:705).

Participants in this study identified anger as one of the emotions they experienced after divorce. This is what **Derik** said: *“Anger yes, I think one has to handle the situation differently. Anger towards myself and my ex-wife, anger towards the police...”* [**Derik 213-214**].

**Belinda** also shared how she experienced anger: *“Anger. It is that anger which tells you that you need to pack up and go. It also brings sadness and distrust also”* [**Belinda 312-313**].

**Goitsewang** ascribed his behaviour after his divorce to the underlying anger he felt: *“I just felt that maybe is better to be involved in a same sex relationship, but if it was not your thing you would not do it. I just did not find reasons why I should transgender. I just told myself that I will live alone. A woman is just a person that I would see as an object and that was because of anger. I started being this reserved and quiet person.*

*I am one person who likes mingling with people. I told myself that I will just please myself with alcohol and after sometimes I realised that, that anger was hitting me hard financially. I also dated lots of women and even my daughter would tell me that daddy, I think you are drinking too much. I just thought that the best thing for me was to drink, dance, and be with my friends. Sometimes I would just go and pick up a girl, but what I would find while making love to her would be that it is not me. The aggressiveness that I had in bed was very bad. Unfortunately, the ladies would not realise that it was not me making love and that I was only doing it to pay revenge... In a way I am still angry with myself, but the hopes of reconciliation have faded away. One of the hopes that I had with my wife was to go separate ways with the aim of getting back together have faded” [Goitsemanang 161-181].*

Like Derik, Belinda and Goitsemanang, **Innocent** also shared his experience of anger: *“I was forever angry. There were times where I thought of going to her place and burn the house and the car. I was full of anger... The other thing is that divorce made me to be an alcoholic. I was forever drinking alcohol thinking when I am drunk I would be okay forgetting that when I wake up in the morning the problems would still be there. Eventually I accepted that whatever happened has happened, but it was not easy I must tell you” [Innocent 260-268].*

Aggression is any physical or verbal action that is performed with the deliberate intention of hurting another living being (Leary et al 2006:112). Through aggression, people can be hurt in numerous ways, for example by inflicting physical, psychological, social, or financial harm. Participants in this study were fuelled by anger due to divorce and had the intention of inflicting harm. For instance, Belinda wanted to pack up and go; Goitsemanang abused alcohol and involved himself in multiple sexual relationships, which negatively affected him financially; Innocent thought of burning his ex-wife’s house and car, but instead he resorted to abusing alcohol; and Derik became angry towards himself, his ex-wife, and the police. Even though anger was expressed by the participants, none of them acted aggressively towards their ex-spouses. This resonates with the suggestion by Leary et al (2006:112) that people suppress their urges to aggress more frequently than they act on them.

In the next sub-theme, regret is presented as one of the emotions experienced by divorced persons.

#### **4.3.5.2 Sub-theme: Regret**

Regret is one of the emotions experienced by people when they feel in control of the situation and responsible for what has happened, however it can also occur when the person has no control over the situation (Wietzker, Buysse, Loeys & Brondeel 2011:326). In other words, people do not only regret their own actions, but also other people's deeds. Divorce is a stressful life event, which is regrettable in many ways. For example, the study conducted by Saleh and Luppicini (2017:192) reports that divorced persons expressed regret and remorse in the context of feeling that life would have been better if they had not sought divorce. Therefore, divorced persons are more likely to suffer negative feelings when they regret their decision to divorce. According to Wietzker et al (2011:327), the emotions of regret, shame, and guilt are similar, and sometimes they are regarded as one construct. In addition to regret, divorced persons may also experience feelings of guilt, and at the same time a feeling of shame, which is about feeling small, worthless, and incompetent (Wietzker et al 2011:324).

The following quotes were extracted from transcripts of the interviews conducted with Adelaide and Cebisa, who expressed how they experienced regret after divorce.

*“Yes, regrets did happen, but then those regrets were just normal human behaviour... it is still there because you think, I could have this, I could have that. I think it's normal to have those flashbacks, because sometimes I would think that if I had stayed in that marriage, I would be the most spoiled female who had everything” [Adelaide 115-124].*

**Cebisa** explained how his ex-wife tried to get back together and he refused: *“Yes, there were times where I regretted, like I told you, for about two months she was trying [to reconcile]. We were talking and already she had filed divorce papers. She said don't worry about the divorce papers since we can easily cancel them if we agree to get back together and solve things. She tried to convince me. She invited neighbours, pastors and other people, you know my house was full of people, but I refused. That where my regrets would come that maybe I should have considered reconciling with*

*her there. But when I thought of all these other experiences I do not blame myself for the decision I have taken” [Cebisa 377-384].*

The following are characteristics of regret, namely: thinking of a lost opportunity, the desire for a second chance, and a feeling of sinking (Wietzker et al 2011:326). From the above-mentioned extracts it is clear that participants regretted their decision to allow a divorce, considering the lost opportunities, and at the same time they were thinking of getting a second chance in marriage. Furthermore, Wietzker et al (2011:326) state that regret elicits the desire to undo what has been done and make up for what one did wrong.

The next sub-theme involves the presentation on divorced persons’ desire to kill themselves and/or their children.

#### **4.3.5.3 Sub-theme: Wanted to kill self and/or children**

Research that is based on concrete, individual-level data has demonstrated that divorced persons have an elevated risk of suicide (Stack & Scourfield 2015:697). Many studies have reported a higher rate of suicides among divorced persons as compared to married couples (Nielsen et al 2014:705). This affirms Stack and Scourfield’s (2015:697) views that there is a huge link between divorce and suicide. As a stressful life event, divorce can have a serious impact on divorced persons’ levels of depression and risk of suicide (May, Overholser, Ridley & Raymond 2015:262). This depression may further lead to the killing of other family members, such as children. According to Cao, Zhong, Xiang, Ungvari, Lai, Chiu and Caines (2015:297), suicidal thoughts and plans indicate great personal distress and psychological burdens. The above sentiments attest to the fact that divorce places divorced persons (both males and females) at higher risk of suicide, which may involve killing other family members (Stack & Scourfield 2015:700).

In this study, Engenase, Goitseman, and Derik shared their experiences of wanting to kill themselves and/or their children.

This is what **Engenase** stated: *“You see it is so stressful to such an extent that you may end up killing yourself or killing the children. I once drove with the kids in the car*

*and I wanted to kill them in pretence that it was an accident... I drove more than 180 kilometres per hour towards Rustenburg area, but the aim was to collide with the truck head-on and pretend that it was an accident... It was a matter of lifting yourself from the pain, but also to show her that she cannot win the children although she thinks that she is cleverer than anybody else. I said to her, you are divorcing me and after that you want to take my children away from me, you are being cruel. It means that you will now become my enemy. You will be my first enemy, because you have destroyed my life, you have destroyed everything I have planned” [Engenase 238-260].*

**Goitseman** explained that he attempted suicide twice: *“Last year I was admitted at Vista and my psychologist saw me as this dangerous person, because I tried to commit suicide twice... It was because I did not cope with the divorce and parting with my second wife. But mostly it was after she told me that my child is not her child and her child is not mine and that made me so angry. Then I tried to commit suicide, because I felt that my child won’t become her part, but also the things that were said by her mother when she was chasing me out of her place” [Goitseman 221-230].*

**Derik** contemplated suicide: *“You sit in the room alone and do not feel like talking to people, you feel like committing suicide. I had a friend who supported me throughout and later on he committed suicide, because he got divorced.” [Derik 119-121].* He explained further: *“... after my first divorce, I sat with this pistol in the chair and putting it in my mouth. I do believe in angels, I heard my youngest daughter calling me. I don’t know how it happened, but I took the pistol and put it back. I was staying in a very small house with two bedrooms, a kitchen, a lounge and a bathroom. I made myself a coffee. Then my friend came and he said to me, you are going to make a mistake now... He said to me bring me that pistol and I said to him it is good that you take it... due to pressure that comes with divorce. You cannot see your kids, you are fighting to see your kids, you fighting the mother-in-law, and everything is about fighting. The pressure that comes with divorce is so intense (tears running down his cheeks). It was just too much for me. It is almost 8-9 years ago and I still have to figure out, the what, where and to who” [Derik 226-240].*

It is clear from the participants’ excerpts that their suicidal thoughts started after divorce and out of distress. Engenase drove with his children for a long distance with

the aim of killing himself and the children, in order to relieve the pain of divorce. Goitsemanang could not handle the pain from his divorce, and as a result he attempted suicide twice and ended up being admitted to a hospital. Lastly, Derik put a pistol in his mouth with the aim of killing himself. This confirms Stack and Scourfield's (2015:696) statement that there is a higher rate of major depression among divorced persons. On the same note, Malgaroli et al (2017:1-2) reiterate that divorced persons have a higher risk of dying. This suicidal risk is more likely to increase over time, due to the cumulative effect of various strains, such as many false starts in dating relationships that ultimately fail, loss of physical attractiveness, and diminished hopes for finding a new partner (Stack & Scourfield 2015:7701). In other words, diminished hope of finding a perfect replacement for the ex-spouse after divorce may exacerbate distress and ultimately result in suicidal attempts by the divorced persons and/or the divorced persons attempting to kill their children.

Loneliness and rejection are some of the feelings experienced by divorced persons after divorce and they are presented in the next sub-theme.

#### **4.3.5.4 Sub-theme: Feelings of loneliness and rejection**

Loneliness or the longing to feel interconnected with others is generally a fact of life for divorced persons (Clapp 2000:167). There are two types of loneliness suggested by Clapp (2000:168), namely emotional loneliness and social loneliness:

- Emotional loneliness stems from the absence of a close emotional relationship.
- Social loneliness stems from the absence of a social network.

On the other hand, rejection is a state of low relational evaluation in which a person does not regard his/her relationships with another person as valuable or important (Leary et al 2006:112). Divorce involves the termination of a marital relationship and it may result in loneliness and rejection. The feelings of loneliness among divorced persons are also as a result of the loss of a spouse (Kalmijn & Van Groenou 2005:457). At the same time, rejection may be one of the most common precursors to aggression (Leary et al 2006:111). Some of the divorced persons in this study, for example Adelaide, Derik, and Belinda, articulated that they experienced loneliness and rejection after divorce.

**Adelaide** shared her experience of loneliness: *“...it used to be so quiet. I would go home and never used to watch television because I would think a lot. Then I used to be an early sleeper, I would avoid social gatherings. Because you don’t just want to talk about your experiences, every time you would go somewhere, somebody would know something. People would begin to ask you, what really happened or they would tell you that they saw your partner somewhere with someone. And then it would upset you. When you don’t know, your mind is settled, but as soon as you know, you then start wondering, you are thinking. And I would start to be so quiet and withdrawn”* **[Adelaide 176-184]**.

**Derik** articulated how he experienced loneliness: *“You see she (ex-wife) worked six o’clock in the morning until seven o’clock in the evening and I had to make sure that I feed the kids, prepare them for school, so I had to do all that. I had to change nappies for the little one and had to run the household and when we get divorce you feel, numb, you feel hopeless, you struggle to survive all the time and the loneliness...”* **[Derik 113-118]**.

**Derik** further added: *“You cannot describe the pain that comes with it, it is so intense. You are seated there alone and you cannot describe it. I think the loneliness is what made my second marriage, because you are just seated there alone”* **[Derik 127-129]**.

**Belinda** explained how she felt rejected: *“...rejection. And it was not only rejection from him, it was rejection also from friends, religious group, and you feel rejected more than one area. It is not good at all because you keep asking yourself questions like, was it my fault, what did I do wrong, and it took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that it was his decision. It took some time indeed”* **[Belinda 161-165]**. Later she added: *“...it was more difficult to deal with the feelings than the divorce itself, more difficult than dealing with the questions of whether you still love him or not”* **[Belinda 302-304]**.

From the above extracts, it is clear that participants experienced loneliness and rejection after divorce. Adelaide spent a lot of time watching television; Derik stated that he spent most of his time alone, which led to his second marriage; and Belinda

felt rejected by friends and religious groups. Undoubtedly, the feelings of loneliness and rejection were extremely difficult for the participants to handle.

In the next sub-theme, positive emotions that were experienced by some of the divorced persons after divorce are presented.

#### **4.3.5.5 Sub-theme: Positive emotions**

Although divorce is regarded by many as the most stressful life event, for some it may be an emotional and social liberation from a problematic marriage (Terhell et al 2004:721). This means that some people who go through divorce experience positive outcomes. This resonates with the views of Frisby et al (2012:716) that although the effects of divorce seem grave, some individuals who go through divorce experience positive outcomes. These are individuals who appear to be resilient to divorce and consider divorce as a better option for them, rather than remaining in a problematic marriage. There are several potential explanations for the positive outcomes, as outlined by Frisby et al (2012:716):

- Firstly, positivity following divorce may be a result of effective conflict management and feelings of relief. That is, when problems between the divorced partners have been resolved effectively.
- Secondly, some individuals may be more resilient due to other factors, including relationship quality and support they receive from other people.
- Thirdly, strategic face work or the protection of the former spouses' identity and feelings may be related to perceptions of an effective divorce and resilience.

Irrespective of the adverse consequences of divorce, Cebisa, Adelaide, and Jacqueline expressed positive emotions after divorce. **Cebisa** stated that he was not bitter: *"...after divorce it was only a formality. I had already dealt with it. I think mine was not a bitter divorce since there were no fights or contest. I was not bitter, because I wanted her out of my life"* [**Cebisa 330-332**].

**Adelaide** described how she feels at peace: *"...I think the peace that you have is priceless, it's not worth anything in the world"* [**Adelaide 172-173**].

**Jacqueline** highlighted the feeling of relief: *“It was difficult for me just to stand up and go to the court to sign those papers. Once I got it done I almost felt like there is a weight that has been lifted on me realising that he is no longer my partner”* [**Jacqueline 328-331**].

The fact that the above excerpts from the participants portray positive emotions after divorce symbolises that there are divorced persons who consider divorce as a positive outcome. In this case, Cebisa, Adelaide, and Jacqueline expressed that they also experienced some positive outcomes after divorce, and all of them were the initiators of divorce. Although Frisby et al (2012:718-719) suggest that the initiators of divorce also experience difficulties with divorce, some studies reported that the initiators of divorce experience lower disturbance scores of grief. The authors further postulate that the low scores of grief could be based on the assumptions that the initiators may have contemplated divorce for some time, prepared emotionally and mentally, and found positive meaning in terminating the relationship. These views contradict the assertion by Terhell et al (2004:721) that many divorced persons, regardless of who initiated the divorce, experience negative emotions and conflicts for many years after divorce.

In this theme, divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce were presented. The next theme presents divorced persons' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce.

#### **4.3.6 Theme 6: Divorced persons' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce**

Social support is referred to as information leading a person's belief that he/she is cared for and loved, and this information could be conveyed by other people, such as friends, relatives, or colleagues (Gahler 2006:374). According to Antonucci, Lansford and Ajrouch (2007:539), this kind of support can include exchanges between informal providers, which include family and friends, and formal providers, including professionals. Formal and informal support systems are crucial for post-divorce adjustment (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1372). Social support is significant in physiological and psychological functioning, and in coping with stressful events such as divorce

(Gahler 2006:374). This means that the availability and the use of social support can be associated with the positive outcomes and the well-being of divorced persons.

In this study, participants were requested to respond to what support they had sought or received during and after their divorce. Their responses are reflected in two sub-themes, namely informal and formal support, as well as various categories under each sub-theme.

#### **4.3.6.1 Sub-theme: Informal support systems**

Informal social support from partners, friends, colleagues, and family members has been associated with improved psychological and physical health (Mosack & Wendorf 2011:1554). In agreement with this, Weinberg (2017:209) states that informal support involves informal networks such as family, friends, and colleagues. The hierarchy theory of social support suggests that people prefer to receive support from a spouse, children, friends, neighbours, and colleagues first, before seeking formal support (Antonucci et al 2007:539). According to Faw (2016:3), social support is verbal and non-verbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience. This means that social support involves establishing social relationships that will influence the individual's psychological well-being. This view resonates with Antonucci et al (2007:540) in that a lack of high quality relationships is associated with negative physical and psychological consequences, such as depression and loneliness.

This sub-theme presents informal support systems that were sought or received by divorced persons during and after divorce. This is presented in terms of two categories, namely support sought or received from friends and colleagues, and support sought or received from the family.

##### **a) Support from friends and colleagues**

As people's circumstances change, friends can provide support to help them to adjust and this may include validating a new sense of self when different identities are formed and maintained (Rumens 2010:136). On the other hand, it is generally acknowledged among organisational scholars that workplace

relations have potentially important benefits for employees and organisations (Rumens 2010:136). This tells us that friends and colleagues may play a vital role in providing support to distressed individuals, including divorced persons. Divorced persons are generally more likely to seek support from others, especially friends and colleagues (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1372).

Most of the divorced persons in this study articulated that they sought or received support from friends and colleagues during and after divorce, and this is can be confirmed through Derik, Belinda, Jacqueline, Helen, Cebisa, and Innocent's excerpts.

**Derik** spoke of the support he received from his friend who later committed suicide: *"I had a friend who supported me throughout and later on he committed suicide, because he got divorced. We were there for each other, me and him"* **[Derik 119-121]**.

His friend found Derik with a gun when he was thinking of committing suicide. This is how **Derik** described what happened: *"Then my friend came and he said to me, you are going to make a mistake now... He said to me bring me that pistol and I said to him it is good that you take it. I really felt better after talking to him"* **[Derik 231-234]**.

**Belinda** also spoke about the support she received from her friend: *"...there was this other lady, a friend of mine who went through divorce, and she was available and willing to support me through these"* **[Belinda 114-116]**.

Similarly, **Jacqueline** shared along the following lines how her friends who are in the field of psychology supported her: *"I think the horrible thing with people like me is that I studied psychology and some of my friends are in the field and we kind of use that space to off-load and we talk to each other. But I do have friends that I can talk to and it did help me a lot"* **[Jacqueline 269-372]**.

**Helen** spoke of the support she received from her colleagues: *"As for me, I got healed because I talked about it and I realised that it was helping me in a way. I*

would say just to listen to the person helps a lot and it helps for one to talk about it over and over again. As for me I also had support from colleagues at work. I work at the court and therefore everyone knew what I was going through there, because all matters were dealt with by the court. Some times when I look up I would see of my colleagues sitting in the court just to support me... Without me being aware that they would come, they would wait for me after court. They would comfort me especially when things did not turn up the way I had hoped. They would say we shall pray for you and next time things will go your way and so on. At least I had such support from my colleagues of which it helped me to go through it" **[Helen 440-453]**.

**Cebisa** explained that he had dated a social worker who had helped him: "Fortunately, I dated a social worker. That woman was good to me, although we broke up now due to other reasons... I don't think I would be here today had it not for her" **[Cebisa 355-357]**. He explained further: "We started as friends and when my wife was doing all these bad things, she was the one who supported with throughout... So we would talk a lot and eventually we dated... It was not formal. It was friendly, but I believe with social work skills in it. I really felt comfortable with her and I realised that there is life after divorce" **[Cebisa 388-400]**. Cebisa also explained how he had received support from his wife's family: "I think the family support is very important and it was strange for me, because I also got support from her family. Some of her family members would call me and say they have nothing to do with how my wife turned out. They would say they do not support what she has done... Her uncle would say leave this woman, you are working and studying, you will be okay" **[Cebisa 319-326]**.

Just like Helen, **Innocent** also received support from his colleague: "There were times where I thought of going to her place and burn the house and the car. I was full of anger. Fortunately, there was a colleague of mine who supported me throughout and I would tell him that I feel like burning that house. He would say to me, don't do that, and if you feel lonely come and stay with me. He advised me that there is still life after divorce" **[Innocent 260-264]**.

Divorced persons may often be in need of emotional support from other people (Gahler 2006:374). The excerpts provided above from the participants attest to the fact that informal support from friends and colleagues is crucial during and after divorce. Cullington (2008:21) also confirms that divorced persons who are supported by friends find it easier to cope with divorce. Without such support, it would be difficult for divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce. Similar views are shared by Clapp (2000:156), namely that many divorced persons are convinced that they would never have made it without the support of friends, colleagues, and family.

The next category presents the family as another form of informal support sought or received by divorced persons.

**b) Support from the family**

There is a general perception that a family should be readily willing and able to support its members in times of difficulties (Chang, Chang, Martos, Sallay, Lee, Stam, Batterbee & Yu 2017:258). These views resonate with the sentiments expressed by Grobler et al (2013:174) that many believe that a family should provide love, care, and support to its members. The caring, warmth, and reassurance of others, especially family members, seem to serve as a cushion that softens the impact of divorce-related stress (Clapp 2000:156). Family support should also buffer the harmful effects associated with negative variables, such as loneliness and suicide, especially after divorce.

Divorced persons in this study shared their accounts of the support they sought or received from their families. This is what **Goitseman** said: *“In my family, my sisters are so understanding and when my mother says something, it goes”* [**Goitseman** 234-235].

**Engenase** received support from his family, as well as his girlfriend, although he was somewhat ambivalent about the family support: *“I got support from my family, but also from my girlfriend... she supported me throughout from 2012 until now. She has got the similar problem as mine. Her husband works in Mpumalanga and he has got a child there with another woman. He no longer*

*comes home. She only realised when she visited the husband unannounced and the husband confirmed that he has a new wife and that it is over between the two of them... we are supporting one another. Sometimes you may get the support, but not the way you want it. Your family may buy you groceries, but only to find that their comments channel you in a way or the other. They will tell you that you should not accept that person again in your life whereas on the other hand you are thinking of your children. When you try to justify they give up on you and say they cannot assist you anymore, because you are not doing what we want you to do. It is difficult, divorce can make you miserable” [Engenase 459-473].*

Without support from the family, divorced persons would find it more difficult to cope with divorce (Cullington 2008:21). However, family members are more likely to openly voice their opinions, including displeasure about the divorce and both partners' behaviour (Clapp 2000:157). It is clearly reflected in Engenase's extract that family comments steer you in one way or another, for instance they openly told him not to take his wife back, otherwise they would withdraw their financial assistance. Although Goitseman's sisters were understanding, his mother always wanted things to be done her way. This confirms that although family members may provide support to divorced persons, they may also openly voice their displeasure about something relating to the divorce and divorced persons. This implies that in addition to the many benefits families can offer, they are sometimes a source of problems (Clapp 2000:157).

The next sub-theme presents the formal support systems sought and received by divorced persons.

#### **4.3.6.2 Sub-theme: Formal support systems**

Unlike informal social support, formal support to distressed individuals is mainly provided by professionals (Weinberg 2017:209). A growing body of literature has stressed the importance of social support, including formal support, in the reduction of stress and the improvement of well-being (Nahum-Shani, Bamberger & Bacharach 2011:123). Similarly, Faw (2016:3) reiterates that studies based on the stress-buffering hypothesis have shown that heightened levels of support result in many positive outcomes, including lower levels of psychological distress and fewer health

complaints. Therefore, formal support systems play a vital role in enabling divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce. Social support, including formal support systems, acts as a buffer to the negative effects of stress (Faw 2016:1).

A number of divorced persons described various formal support systems they had consulted and they are presented according to six categories, namely: support from a psychologist, children taken to a psychologist/social worker, spiritual support, support via a helpline, a support group, and the employer's wellness programme.

**a) Support from a psychologist**

People turn to those who are most able to provide the specific services they need and these may include a range of professionals, including psychologists (Antonucci et al 2007:539). A trained psychologist has a superior understanding of human behaviour to that of a lay person (Kagee & Breet 2015:402-403). This means that psychologists are best suited to assist divorced persons with their challenges and therefore divorced persons may decide to consult them. There are many losses experienced by divorced persons due to divorce, for instance love, dreams, a shared home, companionship, the status of being married, and children. Therefore, during divorce counselling a helper, such as a psychologist, addresses the issues pertaining to being divorced (Petty 2006:147). According to Sommers-Flanagan and Barr (2005:483), the first rule in working with divorced persons is to provide empathy and validation for their emotional distress. Generally helpers, including psychologists, assist divorced persons to deal with six stations of divorce, namely emotional divorce, the legal divorce, the economic divorce, the co-parental divorce, the community divorce, and psychic divorce (Petty 2006:147-148).

The divorced persons in this study sought and received counselling from a psychologist. **Derik** explained his experience with the psychologist: *"I saw the psychologist and we had about four to five sessions... Only a psychologist. I remember he once advised me not to rush into a second relationship, because it would not be love, rather due to loneliness. You just need to be close to someone"* [Derik 132-137]. He continued: *"Talking about it makes one feel better, but I cannot just talk to anybody. So with the psychologist, you would talk*

*and she would say you should do this and this... she wants you to keep busy, do this and that” [Derik 221-225].*

**Belinda** also shared her experience with the psychologist: *“I was fortunate to be at the crisis centre at the time... I spoke to the forensic psychologist about it. She really guided me a lot on everything that happened. I also sought assistance from the psychologist for my oldest daughter, she was six years old when the divorce happened. I felt that I should speak to someone, so I did seek counselling. The little one was 18 months old and she is now starting to ask questions like why daddy is not staying with us. But otherwise, I will deal with that when it happens, but the counselling has to happen” [Belinda 202-209].*

**Goitseman** explained how he would get agitated with the psychologist: *“I have been going to the psychologist and I am on chronic medication for my medication for my bipolar. Sometimes it gets worse, I do adhere but sometimes it lapse. I think given the background and things that I am getting exposed to, when I get to the psychologists I would look for small things, like whether they are ethical or not, and I will get agitated. Last year I was admitted at Vista and my psychologist saw me as this dangerous person, because I tried to commit suicide twice” [Goitseman 218-224].*

From the above-mentioned extracts it is obvious that participants sought and/or received formal support services from a psychologist. This tells us that they felt it necessary to receive formal support from a professional. As reflected in Derik and Belinda’s excerpts, it was important for them to receive formal and professional counselling and to them the only professional that came to their mind was a psychologist. Psychologists who assist with clients’ psychological and emotional problems are generally referred to as clinical or counselling psychologists (Ambrosino et al 2008:41). In addition, some psychologists use psychometric instruments to help diagnose clients’ problems (Ambrosino et al 2008:41).

Receiving formal support over time leads to viewing oneself as worthy, cared for, and loved (Antonucci et al 2007:541). Goitseman articulated that he would

observe the psychologist during the session with the aim of identifying unprofessional conduct and he would get agitated. According to Sommers-Flanagan and Barr (2005:483), it is crucial for counsellors to always remember that no matter how irrational, annoying, or ingratiating the divorced person's behaviour is, he/she is doing so from a legitimate place of emotional pain. This confirms that divorced persons are more likely to display irrational behaviour during the counselling session due to the emotional state they find themselves in, as in Goitseman's case.

In addition, divorced persons shared that they had taken their children to a psychologist and/or a social worker, and this is presented in the next category.

**b) Children taken to a psychologist/social worker**

Research has shown that children encounter notably negative consequences as a result of their parents' divorce, as they underachieve in school, have more behavioural problems, score lower on psychological and emotional well-being, have lower self-esteems, and display more problems in social relationships (Velderman, Pannebakker, Van Vliet & Reijneveld 2016:1). Likewise, Lansford (2009:142) reiterates that children of divorced parents have higher levels of externalising behaviours and internalising problems, lower academic achievement, and more problems in social relationships. In the immediate aftermath of a parental divorce, most children experience emotional distress and behaviour problems, including anger, resentment, demandingness, non-compliance, anxiety and depression, as they try to cope with the shifts in their life situation (Hetherington 2003:220). The aforementioned emotional distress and behavioural problems suffered by children due to parental divorce is reason enough for them to receive formal support from the professionals. Such support would assist them to adjust to the aftermath of their parents' divorce.

In this study, divorced persons indicated that they had taken their children to see a psychologist and/or a social worker. For example, **Belinda** saw a psychologist herself and also took her daughter: *"It was helpful, especially for my eldest daughter, because after a couple of sessions with the psychologist she understood what was happening. She understood that it was not her fault, it was*

*a decision between two adults and that she did not have to choose. We still have a good relationship in the sense of being the mother and the father of the children, I think we need to communicate that” [Belinda 212-217].*

**Fikile** said that she took her son to a social worker, but she did not indicate whether it was helpful or not: *“As time goes on I realised that my second-born child is becoming more affected because he was full of anger, he did not want to listen when I talked to him. Eventually you get irritable and want to beat the child forgetting that it is the way he feels. He did not want to understand that I am divorced with his father and that makes me think that maybe I should not have divorced him... Eventually I took him to the social workers at the local hospital. At my work place they have a life line and they arrange for you the social workers if you require assistance, so I took him to the social workers. The social workers told me that your child is badly affected by divorce and he was full of anger. Sometimes at school they would call me to let me know that my child is rude in class and he is always fighting with others. I then thought of meeting with his father just to explain to him the effect of divorce on the child. It was a huge damage and I am the one who is supposed to be saving my children” [Fikile 211-224].*

The prevention of problems for children of divorce and helping children adapt to the divorce are major priorities, given the large number of children involved and the notable negative impact of divorce on children (Velderman et al 2016:2). In order to assist children to cope with the aftermath of divorce, they can be taken to professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, to seek professional intervention as the participants in this study did. Taking children to seek professional assistance helps to alleviate the painful feelings and grief that many children experience in response to the end of their parents’ marriage (Hetherington 2003:224). Belinda found it necessary to take her daughter to a psychologist and she found it helpful. Although she did not indicate whether it was helpful or not, Fikile also took her son to a social worker for counselling.

The next category presents spiritual support as one of the support systems sought and received by divorced persons.

**c) Spiritual support**

Spirituality is an important element of supportive care for many people (Jackson, Hanson, Hayes, Green, Peacock & Corbie-Smith 2014:599). According to Roff, Simon, Nelson-Gardell and Pleasants (2009:285), spiritual support assists people to maintain and deepen their faith, as well as apply their religious beliefs in daily life. A person may have access to spiritual support throughout his/her life, because even if some individual supporters become unavailable, there will be others with similar beliefs who can replace them (Roff et al 2009:286). In other words, spiritual support is not only provided by selected individuals. Instead the entire community of the same religious or spiritual denomination may provide this kind of support, including ordinary church members, deacons of the church, church elders, pastors, and related spiritual groups.

Spiritual support may be vital to divorced persons, as it provides supportive care. In this study, divorced persons responded that they sought and/or received spiritual support. **Adelaide** explained that she received spiritual support from her priest: *"I am Catholic, I had a priest who gave me support. You know, he would talk to me and that was a way forward for me, because in our church you can only divorce for that reason, so I did it for that reason. It was not because he was a drinker, you know people would divorce because they cannot tolerate the other person's habits. In my religion, Catholicism, you can only divorce if your partner committed adultery. So the priest was supportive to me, he was nice to me and he was good to my kids. My kids also had a firm standing in church, they never went wayward. They are professional now, all three of them. So it's good to have, support systems, you know"* [**Adelaide 187-196**].

In the same way, **Fikile** shared that she received counselling from pastors: *"I was once given counselling by one of the pastors from my church and he informed me that he is also divorced and that is not the end of the world. He further informed me that he still has communication with his ex-wife, because there are children involved. He told me to let go of anything which is troubling me and that I should not think of committing suicide. I told myself that if I commit suicide it means that my kids will perceive me as a coward. I realised that even if I die*

*today he is not going to lose anything, but he will rush to the GEPF with the death certificate and claim for my pension monies... I was given support by my pastor, he made it practical for me by demonstrating to me that the same thing happened to him” [Fikile 292-303].*

**Jacqueline** explained how she has been looking for more answers from spiritually inclined people: “...I think I am also lucky that lately I am surrounded by people who are spiritually inclined as well. So, within the past two to three months I think I have been looking for more answers within the spiritual setting and that has been helping me a lot. At the beginning I had felt that I had to deal with everything on my own and I was so overwhelmed, but now when something happens I hand it up to God and I say this is all above me. I am lucky that I am surrounded by friends who are counsellors that I can talk to. Even just chatting and the way we interact make me feel like I am getting support” [**Jacqueline 382-390**].

From these extracts, it is clear that participants sought and received spiritual support and they felt much better afterwards. According to Roff et al (2009:286), people who receive spiritual support from members of their congregation are more likely to have used positive coping methods in dealing with a major problem, including divorce. Spiritual support deepens the faith of divorced persons and they are more likely to leave all their burdens in the hands of God. Moreover, religious/spiritual support has been found to contribute to life satisfaction and psychological functioning over and above the effects of general social support (Roff et al 2009:286).

The next category presents a helpline as a type of formal support sought and/or received by divorced persons.

#### **d) Support via a helpline**

Amongst other support systems, Fikile and Jacqueline articulated that they received support via a helpline. A helpline is a special telephone service that people can call to get advice on the challenges they are going through in their lives. As also confirmed by Feo and LeCouteur (2017:133), counsellors assist

callers through a helpline to develop strategies and manage relationship difficulties by offering advice in the form of suggestions rather than directives. Thus, divorced persons who seek this kind of support system may call and be assisted to deal with the aftermath of divorce.

**Fikile** explained how a helpline called Lifeline assisted her: *“The Lifeline people provided counselling for me. I got healed as they were providing counselling to me... I only went to Lifeline as advised by my manager at work. I can say my children are the ones who went for different sessions with the social workers, but still under Lifeline”* [Fikile 308-317]. *“...as I was busy talking to the counsellor I was getting better by the day. I can say my pain went down from 100% to 50%”* [Fikile 304-306].

**Jacqueline** also shared that she had made use of a helpline: *“When he moved out I did some telephonic counselling and I also spoke to some friends, but most of the times it was just me”* [Jacqueline 353-354].

Although the study conducted by Feo and LeCounteur (2017:135) found that helpline counsellors did not fully comprehend and connect with callers' problems, Fikile stated that she got healed through helpline counselling. Moreover, her children also went for different sessions with a social worker working at Lifeline, but she does not indicate whether they were also healed afterwards. Jacqueline also does not indicate whether the telephone counselling she received was helpful to her or whether it was the service provided by the social worker.

The next category analyses and presents support groups as one of the support systems sought and received by divorced persons.

#### e) **Support group**

The primary goal of support groups is to help members cope with stressful life events, and revitalise and enhance members' coping abilities so they can effectively adapt to and cope with future stressful life events (Toseland & Rivas 2009:20). Similarly, Strydom and Strydom (2010:124) postulate that the goal of support groups is to help members cope with stressful life events and to revitalise

and enhance members' coping abilities so that they can function effectively for the rest of their lives. Support groups form part of treatment groups, as explained by Qalinge (2015a:136), and they are formed to satisfy a particular need, such as support. Therefore, support groups can be crucial in helping divorced persons to cope with divorce and other stressful life events.

**Goitseman** was deeply affected by divorce and he joined support groups for assistance: *"...I have hope that I will improve. As a result, I have joined groups, in fact, I have established a group of men where we would talk about things that affect us and do things that would help making a better future for ourselves, our sons and daughters. By so doing I can improve myself and improve other men at the same time"* [Goitseman 238-242].

The above extract from Goitseman reflects that he found the support groups helpful and he later even established a group in order to enable men to share things that affect their lives, divorce included. However, Goitseman does not indicate whether those groups were facilitated by a trained professional, such as a social worker, or whether the other men also found them helpful. In support groups, according to Strydom and Strydom (2010:124), members are helped to overcome feelings of alienation, stigmatisation, and isolation by affirming and normalising their experiences. It is for this reason that support groups must be facilitated by trained professionals such as social workers, as they deal with the emotional aspect of the people. In groups, members enjoy a number of benefits, as they interact and integrate solutions to their problems (Qalinge 2015a:133).

The employer's wellness programme is articulated by divorced persons as one of the support systems sought and/or received by divorced persons.

**f) Employer's wellness programme**

The employer's wellness programme, also known as an employee assistance programme (EAP), is aimed at providing counselling and assistance to employees who have a wider range of work-related problems, such as divorce and family problems (Schultz 2015a:198). Many studies suggest that emotionally based individual and family problems exact a heavy toll on both the individual

and the workplace (Ambrosino et al 2008:502). Social workers are often included in these programmes as part of bigger off-site brokerage companies or as private practitioners (Schultz 2015a:199). Through the employer's wellness programmes, social workers also help employees to balance work and family life in a better way (Ambrosino et al 2008:493). This means that employer's wellness programmes are aimed at assisting employees of a particular company/sector to deal with their personal or family problems in a better way so that they can function effectively in the workplace. Based on the assumption that employees' problems can be costly to the employer, particularly if they are not addressed early, employer's wellness programmes are crucial (Ambrosino et al 2008:502).

In this study, **Fikile** explained about the employer's wellness training she attended: *"At some stage there was wellness training which includes divorce issues, how to use money, and so on organised by my employer. I attended those trainings and I was getting much better because I could not cope all by myself"* **[Fikile 309-312]**.

Although Fikile does not provide a clear indication of whether the wellness training she attended was conducted by a social worker, it is clear that she benefited from the employer's wellness programme. Fikile also does not provide a clear indication of whether she received additional counselling in this regard. According to Ambrosino et al (2012:431), there are three models of service that have been identified for social workers to provide for the employers' wellness programme, namely the employee service model, consumer service model, and corporate social responsibility model:

- The **employee service model** focuses primarily on the micro-level of the systems within which employees and their families function. In this model, social services include counselling employees and their families, providing educational programmes, consulting with management regarding individual employee problems, and training supervisors to recognise and deal appropriately with employee problems.
- The **consumer service model** emphasises intervention at a broader level within the same systems. It includes social workers working with consumers/employees in assessing their needs, developing strategies to

best meet the identified needs, and providing community resources to meet employees' needs.

- The **corporate social responsibility model** intervenes at exo-level and macro-level within the various systems in which employees and their families function.

These models are provided through the employer's wellness programmes and they are aimed at enhancing the well-being of employees.

The above sub-themes and categories reflect the support divorced persons sought and received prior to divorce, as well as during and after divorce. The next theme presents divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received.

#### **4.3.7 Theme 7: Divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received**

There are two major social work services to divorced persons, namely therapeutic services and mediation services, which include the creation of parenting plans (Schultz 2015b:178-179). It is worth noting that therapeutic services to divorced persons are mainly provided in the form of counselling. Counselling can be offered at various stages of peoples' relationships, according to Petty (2006:140), for example premarital counselling, marriage and couple's counselling, and divorce counselling, and also in terms of the level of stress they are experiencing. Counselling is mainly provided through the casework and group work methods of social work intervention. Casework refers to social work intervention at the micro-level, where the social worker intervenes on a one-on-one basis with a single client, including his/her family, who is experiencing some challenges in his/her social functioning (Sekudu 2015a:111). Group counselling has preventative, as well as remedial aims. For example, in group counselling the members may be facing situational crises and temporary conflicts, struggling with personal or interpersonal problems of living, experiencing difficulties with life transitions, or trying to change self-defeating behaviours (Corey 2016:5).

In this study, divorced persons were asked whether they had sought services from social workers and if so, what services had been provided. Most of them did not know about any social work services available specifically for divorced persons. This,

together with the stories of those who did see a social worker, are reflected in the sub-themes below.

#### **4.3.7.1 Sub-theme: Sought social work services**

When asked about whether she had sought services from social workers, **Adelaide** responded: *“I did so because that was the easiest route for me. It was right on the other side of my home and I think the only thing that deterred me from continuing going to a social worker, was that... It’s like they are always too busy for you. I am talking about the departmental social workers. They seem to know what they are doing but just the effort of, for instance, making an appointment with them. It’s like they are always too busy, they always have lots and lots of files in their desks, incomplete files or incomplete cases if you can call them. You then wonder as to who needs them more, is it me who still has a home and who still has a job or is it the underprivileged who wants the food parcel. So, I thought along those lines and I went there like once or twice... The first session was so helpful. I could feel that I am talking to somebody who is neutral, who did not know anything, somebody who is trying to find the place in my heart in order to see how best to move forward. I think it was also time for me to get an appointment with them. It’s hard, I think it’s when... especially via the department, if you going privately, perhaps is fine”* [**Adelaide 138-156**].

**Engenase** sought social work services after his divorce, but could not find any, although he explained about the social work services he and his wife received prior to divorce: *“I was looking for services from social workers, but I could not find them. We once agreed to go for counselling after talking to parents, but she stopped it. That was before the finalisation of divorce. Parents advised us to put divorce at halt and seek counselling from social workers. She refused, because she thinks she knows too much. She said she cannot consult to a person who knows her because she works with those people. They referred us to another social worker and we went there both of us. It was nice we had a nice session and they gave us another date for the second session. When we left there, I could tell that she was resolute about her decision to divorce. I was sure that she will not change her mind. She said to me I cannot go back to be assisted by a child who is not married. She knows nothing about marriage, but she wants to give me counselling”* [**Engenase 353-364**].

**Engenase** shared more about his experience: *“We only had one session also because my wife indicated that she cannot be assisted by somebody who is not married. She alleged that somebody with no experience in a marriage cannot assist her. She has got no regard for social workers and she alleges that 90% of them are divorced or is either they are not married. Therefore no one can give her counselling about marriage if that particular person is not married... It was very much helpful. She was warned several times by the social workers that if she continues with divorce, children will suffer, but she did not listen. They said to her, we are not going to beg you to take care of your own children, because it is your responsibility you like it or not... They said to her we are going to charge you and put you behind bars and we put your children in a place of safety. You must know that once we put your children in a place of safety, you are not going to see them again. After talking to social workers, she would only change for at least two or three weeks and later she will forget and revert to her old ways of doing things. She always wanted to be threatened in order for her to come back to her rightful ways and the social workers did that very well. The problem is that you cannot threaten people every day because they will end up realising that it is nothing but a threat”* [**Engenase 385-404**].

**Helen** found a social worker to provide her with post-divorce counselling: *“There was another lady who is also a social worker in town, she helped us a lot. I think what helped me the most was therapeutic because I did not care after that. I think it was also a proof to women that you can still survive after divorce. We deal with our issues differently, but like I said, what really helped me was the counselling she offered... With the social worker in town we had two sessions and at the family advocate office, we had couple of sessions but it was just interviews, it was not really therapeutic or counselling oriented”* [**Helen 376-412**].

It is apparent that Adelaide, Engenase, and Helen sought social work services. Adelaide went to the departmental social workers, but she was not happy, as the social workers seemed too busy for her. She feels that she was not given the necessary attention she deserves. Engenase and his ex-wife also sought social work services, but his wife never co-operated, as she did not believe that she would get help from the social worker. They were referred to another social worker, but his wife still did not co-operate. This resonates with Petty’s (2006:147) views that some people may postpone

or refuse counselling until all that can be achieved is to help them end their relationship. Although Engenase's ex-wife refused to see social workers, he never continued with the sessions himself and he did not provide a reason for this. Some people may attempt counselling as a last bid to save their marriage (Petty 2006:147). Even though Engenase and his ex-wife did not continue with counselling, the fact that Engenase initially sought social work services for both of them could mean that he wanted to rescue his marriage through counselling. Helen attended two sessions with the social worker and she indicates that she found the sessions helpful. Apart from the two sessions she attended with the social worker, she also attended other sessions with a social worker based at the office of the family advocate regarding parenting plans.

Consequently, it is apparent that the participants sought social work services, mainly counselling, as they were unable to cope with the aftermath of divorce. According to Jackson (2015:86), people who present psychological concerns reach out to a variety of sources for assistance, including social workers. Sharing similar thoughts on the matter, Graumann (2009:2) states that people seek counselling when they experience a difficulty or problems in life that they have never been able to solve. As a counsellor, the social worker provides guidance to individuals, including divorced persons, and assists them in reaching a stage of psychological competence (Qalinge 2015b:17).

#### **4.3.7.2 Sub-theme: Social work services for divorced persons not known or not readily available**

Although some of the divorced persons sought and/or received social work services as presented in the previous sub-theme, most of them in this study articulated that they did not seek social work services, as they were not aware that social workers provide services to divorced persons, or because social work services were not readily available. For example, when asked whether he knew of social work services for divorced persons, **Engenase** stated: *"Truly speaking I know nothing about those services. I have never heard of such services"* [**Engenase 407-408**].

**Helen** tried to find social work services for herself and her children, but struggled: *"We actually went to the social workers at CMR for assistance, but no one seemed interested to assist me. I also reported this to the social worker who was handling my*

case at the office of the family advocate and she included that in my case file. They referred us there because they needed me and the children to be assisted with after divorce counselling... I never received such services. They kept sending me from pillar to post and I never received them... I have contacted them so many times and thereafter I contacted the social worker at the office of the family advocate that doors are slammed on our faces. She is a social worker, but she was not responsible for providing counselling after divorce..." [Helen 356-370]

**Belinda** also shared her experience regarding social work services to divorced persons: "...I have not been to social workers, because the social workers that are mostly available in the area are social workers in private practice. The social workers that work at CMR mostly focus on children and not on therapy. So, the services that are mostly available in the area, especially from the social workers, are not therapy based. So the services are not available really" [Belinda 240-244].

When asked whether she had heard of social work services for divorced persons, **Fikile** replied: "I have never heard about it" [Fikile 351].

**Goitsemanang** had a similar response: "No, mostly I only hear about issues pertaining to children, issues pertaining to grants and supporting families that are destitute. Mostly those are the social work services I am aware of and I have never heard of social work services to divorced persons" [Goitsemanang 273-276].

According to **Adelaide**, social work services are not well advertised: "You know what, most often a divorced person would never think of going to a social worker... Your neighbour, you talk to your neighbour. Is not always every time that your neighbour would give you sound advice, and professional advice, you understand? You look at the easy way out, so social services are not so nicely advertised these days. You understand? So, if I have to tell my neighbour who is a housewife, if I just have to mention the social work term, her idea of a social worker would be social grant, child support, lost identity document, lost birth certificate, it is not so nicely put forward that they can also help within these areas, you understand?" [Adelaide 203-215].

The above quotations portray that participants hold different views regarding social work services to divorced persons. Engenase, Fikile, Goitseman, and Adelaide's extracts show that they are not aware of social work services to divorced persons. In fact, they thought that social work services are meant for the poor, children, and social grants. According to Helen and Belinda, social work services are not readily available. Helen struggled to receive social work services and she was referred to different social workers a number of times, with no success. Belinda did not seek social work services, because she believes that the social work services in the area are mainly for children and not therapy. Generally, most of the participants in this study are not aware of social work services for divorced persons or seem to believe that such services are not readily available. This contradicts the views of Ambrosino et al (2012:28) that social workers help individuals, including divorced persons, to identify solutions to their personal problems or other problems related to difficulties with social functioning.

Apart from being a counsellor, one of the social worker's roles is to function as an outreach worker. As outreach workers, social workers disseminate information to communities aiming at increasing knowledge regarding social service interventions and service delivery (Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:118). In so doing, communities are made aware of the social work services available to them. The fact that most of the participants in this study did not seek social work services after divorce could mean that not much is done to inform the communities about these services. Moreover, a social worker may mobilise a community to create awareness about divorce and the effect it has on their lives (Qalinge 2015b:17).

In this theme, divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received were presented. The next theme presents divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons.

#### **4.3.8 Theme 8: Divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons**

In this theme, divorced persons were requested to recommend whether social work services should be available to divorced persons and how they could be improved. Their responses were varied and ranged from the opinion that specialised services should be available, to statements that psychologists are needed more.

#### **4.3.8.1 Sub-theme: Specialised services**

A clear trend within social work is to divide the personal social services into specialised units and functions (Blom 2004:24). These are services within social work rendered by a qualified social worker who possesses special knowledge or expertise in a particular field or subject. When requested to recommend whether social work services should be available to divorced persons and how they could be improved, **Adelaide** responded: *“I think if social services would have specific marriage counsellors that can help with that”* [Adelaide 202-203].

Although Adelaide recommended specific counsellors to assist with divorce, the vast majority of textbooks and curricula, particularly for Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programmes, emphasise generalist practice (Blom 2004:24). In other words, social work training is structured in such a way that it empowers social workers to become generalist practitioners who apply generalist social work practice in order to address the multiple and complex challenges that people encounter, including divorce. Generalist social work practitioners utilise a variety of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities, to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being (Segal et al 2013:149).

According to Zastrow (2014:43), social workers require training and expertise in a wide range of areas, in order to effectively handle the challenges faced by individuals, groups, families, organisations, and the larger community. General practice means that individual social workers in integrated organisations work with all sorts of problems and types of social work cases (Blom 2004:27). In contrast to generic practice, Adelaide is of the view that if social work services to divorced persons could be specialised, it would help them to adjust better and contribute towards their well-being.

The next sub-theme is about the availability of counselling services to divorced persons.

#### **4.3.8.2 Sub-theme: Counselling services should be available**

When asked for her recommendation, **Belinda** responded in terms of the need for social workers to provide counselling services to divorced persons: *“Definitely counselling, therapy wise. The truth is that there is a lot of psychologist but they are expensive, especially if you are going through divorce. The first thing that gets to you is the issue of finances, because you do not have R800 or R900 to pay someone for those services”* [Belinda 283-286].

**Belinda** added that social work services are particularly necessary if children are involved: *“I think if there is children involved, the process of the visitation rights must begin immediately. The process regarding the person who should stay with the children, how does the visitation work, get it in writing in terms of who takes the child, where, when and so on. The legal aspect as well, because we have got lots of cases now whereby the parents are divorced and suddenly the father comes and takes the children and he refuses to return them to their mother. I think guidance with regards to mediation or just facilitating visitation plan or just a temporal order in place for visitation and who the primary caregiver of the children. There is a big lack on that”* [Belinda 273-281].

**Derik** felt counselling was necessary, but referred to social workers only being involved when there are problems regarding the children: *“Divorce is painful and stressful and of course divorced persons need to seek services from the social workers. People get healed in different ways, with some just to speak heals. It is good to see professionals... I know social work services in social work, but not to divorced persons. I only know that if one partner is angry with the other partner regarding the children they can use the social work services who will then advise them that if you do not do this we shall take the children away. That is the only area that I know from social workers that if you do not take care of the kids they would take the kids away. It would be a matter of saying that I know that you are divorced, but we need to get some things right especially with the children”* [Derik 304-316].

From the above excerpts, it is evident that participants feel strongly that social work counselling services to divorced persons should be made readily available. According to Sekudu (2015a:122), counselling entails a process that is facilitated by a social

worker to empower the client to develop skills and knowledge that will enhance his/her well-being. It is worth noting that social workers can provide counselling to divorced persons on an individual basis (casework) and/or in the form of a group (group work). Divorce counselling is supportive and involves helping the person to set goals for himself/herself in order to enable him/her to reclaim the status and well-being of a single, autonomous person again (Petty 2006:149-150). Additionally, Corey et al (2014:9) state that counselling groups focus on interpersonal processes and problem-solving strategies that stress conscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. In other words, divorced persons may be referred to community self-help groups or therapeutic groups to provide them with a wider support system to sustain them during this lonely phase (Petty 2006:150). A number of studies about effective social work counselling suggest that social workers must establish a relationship of commitment, caring, genuineness, empathy and acceptance, and further employ explicit procedures (Blom 2004:29).

#### **4.3.8.3 Sub-theme: Social work services should be provided on a long-term basis**

Based on her own experiences, **Belinda** recommended that social work services should be provided on a long-term basis: *“I think the counselling goes through stages, you do not just take counselling for six month and you stop thinking that all is sorted. I can feel now that maybe I need to go and talk to someone again after everything, because I think I did a lot of things while still busy, but now everything has stopped and I feel I need to speak to someone again now that I sat here and listened to myself... more in the sense of counselling, not friends. I think friends will tell you what you want to hear. I think as time goes on you need to tell yourself that you need to talk to someone about it, because if I sit challenges will start coming out. The person that I am seeing now is like we are getting into a serious relationship and I can start seeing things that might distract the relationship, it’s like I do not trust easily. I need to speak to someone about trust issues, because going into the next relationship will lead into challenges that I do not want to take with into a new relationship”* [Belinda 220-234].

**Engenase** echoed the need for social work services to be available long after divorce: *“I think they should be involved more after divorce. They should not indicate that their responsibilities have limits, in fact it should go beyond those limits. They should not*

*indicate that their responsibility lies on the safety of the children and the fact that couples are divorcing has got nothing to do with them. They should not say that their responsibility is not to force people to love one another if they have decided to part ways, maybe they should try to intervene with the aim of reconciliation” [Engenase 412-418].*

**Engenase** continued: *“...social workers should continue to check on the divorced persons on how they are coping, but also to check on children if they are okay, especially if children were involved. A parent can say my children cannot be raised by another man while I am still alive or another say I have been given the custody of children and therefore I will take my kids wherever I want. So it might cause some conflicts that is why there should be social work services even after divorce” [Engenase 425-431].*

**Innocent** admitted he knew nothing about social work, but recommended services on a long-term basis: *“To tell you the truth I know nothing about social work. The only thing I know about social workers is that they assist people who are poor with food. I also know that they assist children with proper care. I think social workers should guide people who are going through divorce by giving them direction in life. I am saying this because all the time when I fight with my wife, I compare her with my ex-wife and it causes lots of tension. In fact, I was once advised to go to the local social workers, because I was constantly fighting with my current wife due to the things that happened in my previous marriage. I did not know that social workers could assist with divorce... I consulted with the social worker because I am always short-tempered. I get angry easily and when I am angry and get tempted to assault and at the same time comparing my wife with my ex-wife. I then realised that this will take me nowhere and I really need to get assistance as soon as possible. It was really affecting my marriage and I think even now, it is still affecting it... We only had two sessions, but it was not so intense. She just told me that she is available should I require further services. I should just contact her so that she refers me to the psychologist” [Innocent 309-329].*

**Innocent** continued: *“I think just to listen to them as they talk it might help. I think listening would assist, because most of the time I am short tempered, I get angry so easily, I get irritated so easily and these tell me that there is something which is holding*

*me back. Social workers should help me to have a better future with my wife, because I do not want her to feel small when she is with me. I don't want to compare her with my ex-wife anymore. It also means that the fact that I am still doing it, it means that I never had an opportunity to talk about it to my satisfaction. If I can have few minutes to cough out my divorce experience, surely I will heal and it would be something good for me... In fact, I would not prefer that social workers should not only assist us during the divorce process, but they should also assist even after divorce. I would not mind to see the social worker fortnightly... I think as time goes on, I will be able to see and tell that I no longer have the load that I previously had. Therefore I cannot exactly predict that after two years or two months, because sessions can last long but only to find that they are meaningless or not helpful at all. I think only time will tell that I am healed, and then I would notify the social worker about it so that we terminate, but she should be available every time I need assistance" [Innocent 363-382].*

**Goitseman** also stressed the need for long-term social work services: *"For me counselling is the most important thing, but that counselling should not just be for a shorter period. I also think that the changes brought by divorce in peoples' lives are unbearable and therefore there should be a long-term services even after divorce to ensure that people are reconstructed and coping with the challenges of divorce. Divorce is bad, very bad" [Goitseman 282-287].*

Based on their own experiences, participants are of the view that social work services should be provided on a long-term basis. As opposed to short-term services, long-term services are services with an unlimited lifespan. This relates to Grabowski's (2008:59) assertion that long-term care embodies a set of services delivered over a sustainable period of time to people who lack some degree of functional capacity. Equally, Ambrosino et al (2008:34) postulate that social workers are committed to the process of planned change and this change may not happen overnight. This suggests that it may take a long time before changes can be seen in the lives of the clients. As a result, social workers should ensure that social work services are sustainable over a longer period of time.

The fact that participants in this study have recommended long-term social work services to divorced persons relates to Grabowski's (2008:59) suggestion that

individuals who are affected by divorce need long-term services. However, it should be noted that the social work service rendering process comes to an end at some stage. Although social work services should end at some stage, unplanned termination amounts to social workers' irresponsible behaviour or lack of commitment and accountability (Sekudu 2015b:91).

The next sub-theme focuses of the need for support groups, as recommended by divorced persons.

#### **4.3.8.4 Sub-theme: Support groups are needed**

Support groups provide an opportunity for members to share their collective experiences in coping with stressful events (Toseland & Rivas 2009:20). On the same note, Strydom and Strydom (2010:124) suggest that support groups help members to overcome feelings of alienation, stigmatisation, and isolation by affirming and normalising their experiences. Strong emotional bonds often develop quickly in support groups, because of members' shared experiences (Toseland & Rivas 2009:23). Thus, support groups provide an opportunity for members to support one another in their shared experiences and enable them to cope with stressful life events, including divorce.

In this study, Belinda mentioned that she would have found it valuable if there were support groups for divorced persons: *"I have not been to any support group, but I think if I knew of any support group in the area, it would have made things much easier. Actually, if I look at all the friends that stood up, there were more like a mini-support group for me. They gave me a better advice in the sense that they said to me, you need to get a lawyer to help you out, do not do this yourself rather have someone to communicate with him, don't get into a stupid argument. Definitely if there was support group I would have benefited from it because you feel alone"* [Belinda 288-296].

**Belinda** added: *"Definitely, especially if they can meet other people in the same situation and hear where they found their strength from. You will hear someone saying that I dealt with divorce in that way and you would say let me also try it. Learning other skills and how to deal with the divorce"* [Belinda 320-323].

From the above quotations, Belinda is adamant that support groups are crucial in helping divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce. Similar views are shared by Mohapi (2010:9), in that the aim of support groups is to assist members to deal with stressful life events. According to Toseland and Rivas (2009:23), support group members find comfort and power in their association with each other. By associating with other members who share similar experiences, for example divorced persons, group members find comfort and cope better.

Another recommendation articulated by divorced persons is that information is needed and this is presented in the next sub-theme.

#### **4.3.8.5 Sub-theme: Information is needed**

At times clients may call for assistance from social workers, because they are unaware of services/resources that are available or the steps to take to generate new services (Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:116). Therefore, as an educator, a social worker provides such knowledge and information to clients, in this case divorced persons (Qalinge 2015b:17).

When asked for her recommendation, **Jacqueline** highlighted that divorced persons need information, as well as counselling and emotional support: *“They need information. When I started with the divorce procedure I did not know what was available for me and I think lots of people might end up spending lots of money that they don’t even have trying to sort things out, whereas there is a simple way. So information is very important, but not only about the divorce procedures but also about whether the person knows what is available out there in terms of counselling and in terms of support structures. That would be nice. The family court, I think it was interesting that I never saw anyone from the divorce court making follow-up or offering any support to me. I was all by myself and it felt lonely even worse there are children involved. I think there need to be more support structures from social workers, but also support emotionally and even financially because suddenly you have to rush to the maintenance court, it does not help. For me what is important is to have emotional support also for the children, but also financially and also knowledge in terms of knowing what is available, and what you can do. I was about to get myself into a huge debt trying to get divorce, so how many others are stuck in marriages they no longer*

*want because they do not know what to do. I was lucky, I spoke to a friend who has just recently divorced and she told me what to do. So information is very important”* [Jacqueline 419-436].

Although she strongly recommends emotional and financial support, Jaqueline feels that there should be professionals, such as social workers, readily available to provide information about divorce, because most divorced persons make mistakes due to lack of information. Furthermore, Jaqueline believes that most divorced persons spend a lot of money during the divorce process, while there is an easier and cheaper way to do it. According to Qalinge (2015b:17), one of the key roles and functions of the social worker is to link clients to needed systems, programmes, and resources. In other words, by linking divorced persons to relevant systems, programmes, and resources, they become aware of the different options they have and they are able to make informed decisions regarding the way forward. These decisions would be informed by insights they received from the social workers into the possible consequences of different options or decisions (Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:116). For that reason, information relating to divorce is crucial for divorced persons.

The next sub-theme presents the need for psychologists, as articulated by one of the participants.

#### **4.3.8.6 Sub-theme: Psychologists are needed more**

Psychologists are counted among the professionals whose formal role is to help people manage the distressing problems of life (Graumann 2009:2). Psychologists also often work with social workers in assisting clients (Ambrosino et al 2008:40). The core competencies of psychologists, as defined by the Professional Board for Psychology of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), are psychological assessment, psychological intervention, and expertise in referral (Abel & Louw 2009:99). This means that psychologists are also well placed to assist divorced persons to adjust to the aftermath of divorce.

In this study, **Cebisa** recommended services for divorced persons, but felt that psychologists were needed more: *“...divorce requires a lot. Social workers and psychologists alone are not enough in dealing with divorce. Divorce is massive, is bad and you need all forms of support. You need support from families, from pastors and from different people. The future looks so uncertain to divorced persons and you need people who assist you to perceive future in a positive way... Yes, social workers do have a role to play, but I think it is psychologist more”* [Cebisa 430-449].

From the above extract it is apparent that Cebisa recognises the support provided by other systems to divorced persons, including the family, pastors, and other people, but he strongly feels that psychologists are needed more, although he does not state the reason for this. While he further acknowledges that social workers do have a role to play in assisting divorced persons, he is adamant that there should be more psychologists to assist in this regard. According to Ambrosino et al (2008:40-41), psychologists who assist with clients' psychological and emotional problems are generally referred to as counselling psychologists. Counselling psychology has historically had a broad and inclusive definition of itself, including multicultural counselling and social justice, along with career, health, prevention, and positive psychologies. Consequently, counselling is referred to as an activity that takes place when someone who is troubled invites and allows another to enter into a particular kind of relationship with them (Graumann 2009:2). This means that a psychologist can also provide counselling to divorced persons with the aim of enhancing their capability to deal with the adverse consequences of divorce.

This theme presented divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons. The next theme presents divorced persons' advice to other couples.

#### **4.3.9 Theme 9: Divorced persons' advice to other couples**

The participants were asked what advice they would give to other couples. Their responses are reflected in three sub-themes, namely find out about the available resources, do not rush into a new relationship, and do not rush into divorce.

#### **4.3.9.1 Sub-theme: Find out about the available resources**

**Adelaide's** advice focused on finding out about the available resources: "*There are so many resources available out there, there is social services. We just do not know it. We just too lazy to make such an enquiry as to where can I go, who can I speak to, what do I do next, you know. You just need to attach yourself to the right resources*" [Adelaide 291-294].

Based on the above excerpt, Adelaide is adamant that there are resources available to divorced persons, therefore divorced persons need to take the initiative to go and seek out those resources from the relevant people, including social workers. Linking divorced persons with the relevant resources they need is one of the social worker's roles and functions. This resonates with Qalinge's (2015b:17) assertion that one of the key roles and functions of the social worker is to link clients to needed systems, programmes, and resources. In so doing, the social worker provides divorced persons with the relevant information and support they need. Social support is defined as resources provided by other persons, according to Weinberg (2017:209), and includes both informal and formal sources. Amongst others, one of the resources available to divorced persons is divorce counselling, whereby divorced persons are assisted professionally to deal with the aftermath of divorce. Through divorce counselling, divorced persons are helped to deal with the six stations of divorce, namely the emotional divorce, the legal divorce, the economic divorce, the co-parental divorce, the community divorce, and the psychic divorce (Petty 2006:147-148). In other words, divorce counselling may also assist divorced persons to become aware of other resources available to them.

The sub-theme that follows addresses the next piece of advice given by divorced persons to other couples, which is about refraining from rushing into new relationships after divorce.

#### **4.3.9.2 Sub-theme: Do not rush into a new relationship**

**Belinda** advised divorced persons to take some time before entering into a new relationship: "*Just a feeling to say I can still be loved and divorce was a mistake... just to have someone again. So what was important for me was to take time and sort out all my emotions. Although I felt emotional today during this interview, it was a matter*

*of me hearing myself and reflecting about it again. I would say you need to sort yourself out before getting into a new relationship. You know what, men can see that you are emotionally weak and they would like to take advantage of that. Some women just fall into that, but fortunately for me I was busy with the children and studying” [Belinda 367-374].*

Belinda is of the view that rushing into a new relationship immediately after divorce has some negative consequences, as the divorced person would still be emotionally weak. There is a possibility that the loss of a relationship due to divorce leads to negative consequences and results in many divorced persons remarrying in the first few years after divorce (Terhell et al 2004:723). Likewise, Drew et al (2004:381-382) suggest that relationship loss leads to negative consequences, including emotional, social, and economic distress. This means that divorced persons are more likely to enter into a new relationship immediately after divorce in order to adjust to the negative consequences of divorce. When parents enter into a new relationship or remarry right after divorce, it increases the risk of behavioural, emotional, social, and academic problems among children (Amato & Kane 2011:1074). And so, it is advisable for divorced persons to avoid rushing into new relationships and marriages so that children can also be well prepared and supported. In other words, rushing into a new relationship immediately after divorce may have some negative consequences for both divorced persons and their children.

#### **4.3.9.3 Sub-theme: Do not rush into divorce**

**Cebisa** advised couples not to rush into divorce: *“I think I should say that people should not rush into divorce. The reason why I am saying this is because as time goes you happen to see things differently. Like I told you that sometimes I think I should have reconciled with my wife in the two months that she needed reconciliation. This tells me that it is not advisable to rush to divorce. People can separate while thinking or sorting out their own issues, but not to rush into divorce. When you rush into divorce, it becomes difficult to change your mind and re-marry again. It discourages to go back anyway if you have already signed the divorce papers... people should not divorce out of anger, they should apply their mind and think first. That is what happened to my ex-*

wife, I hear a lot of rumours that she did not want to divorce me, but she ended up divorcing anyway. It could be that she was overwhelmed the time she filed for divorce. I also tell a lot of people who have challenges and want to divorce. I tell them to delay the process. Even if you are not talking or perhaps you have been influenced by your friends, that process helps you to realise that you have been misled by your friends. You get to introspect yourself, who knows, perhaps you may get back together and say this is what has happened and these are the reasons, let's not do it" [Cebisa 452-473].

**Fikile** emphasised the need for couples to communicate: "For me, divorce is very bad and it kills children. I think married partners should reduce the high rate of divorce by communicating and if there is something one partner is complaining about, it should be sorted through communication hence I am emphasising the issue of communication. Couples should stop sharing their family matters with friends and family members, because the family members will develop hatred to my husband. If we tell family members they will develop hatred to both parties, because the families will be having wrong information about the other party. There should also be trust amongst the married partners. Truly speaking divorce is not something good and it should be reduced by all means. Divorce destroys children, it does destroy them" [Fikile 386-396].

In conclusion, **Goitsemanang** had similar advice to that of Fikile: "For me I would say divorce is not a solution, but if all avenues have been exhausted and there are no other options, as an individual you always come first. We always have to take care of our being. We just have to understand as human beings that our happiness, our understanding and our self-acceptance in a partnership has to be the responsibility of two people. We should not give up before we can try and see this relationship, basics and whole-heartedness of the relationship of two people. People have to love one another whole-heartedly and people have to understand what they mean by saying they love someone whole heartedly. What are they talking about? For instance, if I love this cardboard and my partner does not love it, she has to respect the fact that I love it... they have to firstly talk about it. I think if there can be so many services that can help people to rescue their marriages, then we will have a better society" [Goitsemanang 290-304].

The above quotations from the participants advise married couples not to rush into divorce. According to Cebisa, married couples should rather separate instead of rushing into divorce, as this would provide them with an opportunity to solve their problems. Fikile and Goitsemanang are of the view that married couples should rather communicate and seek solutions to their problems instead of divorcing, as divorce also affects children. The participants' advice is based on their personal experiences and opinions that they should have sought other ways of resolving their marital problems, including counselling, instead of divorcing. In counselling, divorced persons and the counsellor enter into a counselling relationship with the aim of enhancing the divorced persons' capability to deal with their situation. Similarly, Graumann (2009:2) suggests that counselling refers to an activity that takes place when someone who is troubled invites and allows another to enter into a particular kind of relationship with them. According to Petty (2006:146), couples counselling is a process that aims to assist couples to improve their responses to each other through increasing their knowledge about themselves and their partners. This process enables couples to decide on the kind of life they want to build together, the kind of partners they want to be, and the attitudes and behaviours that are necessary to achieve this. With the advice given by participants to couples of not rushing into divorce, participants are of the view that marriage counselling can assist in resolving a couple's marital disputes and ultimately enable them to avoid divorce.

This theme presented divorced persons' advice to other couples. The summary of the chapter will be presented in the next section.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter presented the research findings that emerged from the data collected and analysed from the first group of participants, namely divorced persons. The findings of this study represent nine themes, together with the accompanying sub-themes and categories that were applicable. The themes, sub-themes, categories, and complementing storylines from the transcripts were subjected to literature verification.

The researcher first provided the demographic data of the divorced persons who participated in the study.

The **first theme** in this chapter was divorced persons' accounts of their marital life experiences prior to divorce and why they divorced. Two sub-themes were introduced under this theme, namely the nature of the relationship and the reasons for divorce. The divorced persons' accounts of the nature of their relationship prior to divorce include good relationship initially, good and bad relationship initially, and no communication. These were presented as categories under the first sub-theme. The divorced persons' accounts of the reasons for divorce were presented in the form of the following categories: spouse had extramarital affairs, abuse, alcohol/drug abuse, spouse resigned from job, child's disability grant, and cultural differences.

The **second theme** that was presented in this chapter, as identified during data analysis, was divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce. The divorced persons' views were presented according to two sub-themes, namely positive aspects and negative aspects. The negative aspects of divorced persons' lives after divorce were presented according to the following categories: difficulty dealing with the divorce and loneliness.

The **third theme** elaborates on divorced persons' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce. This theme involves the presentation of the following sub-themes: stigma, children, financial, and no support from the church.

The **fourth theme** relates to divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce. This theme comprises the following sub-themes: financial losses, loss of companionship, loss of self-esteem, loss of trust in the opposite sex, and loss of security.

The **fifth theme** which emerged in this study relates to divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce. The divorced persons' accounts of their emotions after divorce were presented as sub-themes and include: anger, regret, wanted to kill self and/or children, feelings of loneliness and rejection, and positive emotions.

The **sixth theme** focused on divorced persons' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce. The divorced persons sought and received support from both informal support systems and formal support systems, and they were presented as sub-themes. The presentation of the informal support systems includes the following categories: friends and colleagues, as well as the family. Whereas the formal support systems include: a psychologist, children taken to a psychologist/social worker, spiritual support, a helpline, a support group, and the employer's wellness programme.

The **seventh theme** presented the divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received. This presentation was based on the following themes: sought social work services, and social work services not known or not readily available.

The **eighth theme** relates to divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons. The divorced persons recommended the following: that social work services to divorced person should be specialised services, counselling services should be available, social work services should be provided on a long-term basis, support groups are needed, information is needed, and that psychologists are needed. These recommendations were presented according to sub-themes.

Lastly, the **ninth theme** focussed on divorced persons' advice to other couples. The following advice was presented according to sub-themes: find out about the available resources, do not rush into a new relationship, and do not rush into divorce.

The next chapter presents the research findings that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with the second group of participants, namely social workers.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS: SOCIAL WORKERS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter Four of this research report, the findings that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with the first group of participants (divorced persons) was presented and discussed. In this chapter, the researcher will present and discuss the research findings that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with the second group of participants (social workers). Thus, the themes and literature emanating from the interviews with the social workers form a separate chapter. The researcher will first present and discuss the demographic data of the research participants, followed by an overview of the themes, sub-themes, and categories. However, it is worth noting that not all participants necessarily responded to a sub-theme or category, and therefore not all responses can be reflected per theme. As mentioned in Chapter Four of this research report, there was a consensus discussion on the research findings that took place between the researcher, the independent coder, and the supervisor/promoter.

### **5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

In the following table, the biographical particulars of the 10 social workers who participated in the research study are presented.

**Table 5.1: Demographic particulars of the participants (social workers)**

Participant - pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Race	Organisation	Occupation	Work experience	Level of education
Kim	35	Female	Black African	Electricity Supply Commission (ESKOM)	Occupational social worker	11 years	Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) – Currently enrolled for the Masters' degree in Social work (MSW).
Linda	42	Female	Black African	Hartbeespoort Parent & Child Counselling Centre (HPCCC)	Social worker	15 years	BSW
Mashego	38	Male	Black African	Department of Justice – Office of the Family Advocate	Family counsellor	14 years	BSW
Nomsa	50	Female	Coloured	City of Tshwane	Social worker	27 years	BSW – [enrolled for MSW once, but did not complete]
Petunia	45	Female	Black African	Catholic Women's League	Social worker	9 years	BSW
Reneilwe	48	Female	Black African	Private practice	Social worker	22 years	BSW
Simpson	50	Male	White	South African Police Services (SAPS)	Occupational social worker	25 years	BSW
Tsholofelo	31	Female	Black African	Christelike Maatskaplike Raad (CMR)	Social worker	4 years	BSW
Wilson	44	Male	Black African	Department of Social Development (DSD)	Social worker	6 years	BSW
Zodwa	34	Female	Black African	Families South Africa (FAMSA)	Social worker	10 years	BSW

The above table reflects the demographic particulars of the participants as categorised in terms of age, gender, race, organisation, occupation, work experience, and level of education.

### 5.2.1 Age

Participants were between the ages of 31 and 50. Upon closer scrutiny, four (40%) of the participants were between the ages of 31 and 38, and six (60%) of them were between the ages of 42 and 50. It is estimated that 65% of social workers in South Africa are below the age of 40 years, with the majority of these falling into the 25-29

and 30-34 age groups (Earle 2008:30). It should be noted that the age of the participants in this study does not necessarily translate into participants' work experience.

### **5.2.2 Gender**

Out of the 10 participants, seven were females (70%) and three were males (30%). This relates to Earle's (2008:28) suggestion that the majority of social workers in South Africa are female at approximately 85.3%, as opposed to 14.7% male social workers.

### **5.2.3 Race**

Eight (80%) of the participants were Black Africans, one (10%) was a Coloured and the other one (10%) was White. It is estimated by Earle (2008:28) that about 73% of social workers in South Africa are Black Africans, 11.3% Coloured, 12.3% White, and 2.6% Indian/Asian. The figures above reflect that the majority of social workers in South Africa are Black Africans, with the smallest number being Indian/Asian. Therefore, it was difficult to locate an Indian/Asian participant for this study. However, the focus was on social workers employed at various organisations in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, and not social workers from various race groups.

### **5.2.4 Organisation**

The participants represent 10 different organisations, including governmental organisations, NGOs, and private practice, namely the Electricity Supply Commission (ESKOM), Hartbeespoort Parent and Child Counselling Centre (HPCCC), Office of the Family Advocate, City of Tshwane, Catholic Women's League, South African Police Service (SAPS), Christelike Maatskaplike Raad (CMR), DSD, and Families South Africa (FAMSA). According to Schultz (2015a:195-206), social workers are employed in different settings including, amongst others, the business and private sector, private practice, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and government departments. Ambrosino et al (2012:29) also verify that social workers are employed in a variety of settings. Thus, it was necessary for the researcher to include as many different settings (organisations) as possible in order to explore different views pertaining to the topic under investigation. However, due to time constraints not all social workers employed in different settings were involved in this study.

### **5.2.5 Work experience**

Participants' work experience range from the minimum of four years to the maximum of 27 years. It was crucial for the researcher to focus on work experience, as this would inform the basis of this study, especially in exploring and describing social workers' experiences regarding the nature of social workers' services to divorced persons. Experience is vital in the social work profession, as social workers assist clients with a wide variety of unmet needs (Ambrosino et al 2012:29).

### **5.2.6 Level of education**

All participants are in possession of a BSW degree and only one of them has enrolled for a Master's degree in Social Work. However, one other participant had enrolled for a Master's degree in Social Work in the past, but she dropped out prior to completion. Many social workers prefer to practice at the BSW level throughout their careers, according to Ambrosino et al (2012:31), because helping clients is rewarding for them. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has registered the BSW as the current qualification for training social workers in South Africa. However, qualifying social workers may enrol for post-graduate degrees in social work, namely Master of Social Work and Doctor of Social Work (Rautenbach & Chiba 2010:22). Consequently, it was important for the researcher to ascertain the participants' levels of education for the purpose of this study.

The data collected from these participants were analysed and a comprehensive discussion of these findings takes place in the next section.

## **5.3 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES**

In this section, various themes, sub-themes, and categories are described as they emerged from the analysis of the data collected. The findings were sub-divided into 11 themes, namely:

1. Social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations.
2. Social workers' descriptions of the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients.

3. Social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons.
4. Social workers' accounts of the kind of social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons.
5. Social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons.
6. Social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons.
7. Social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons.
8. Social workers' opinions on whether they should provide social work services to divorced persons.
9. Social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons.
10. Social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons.
11. Social workers' suggestions for improvements to the social work services provided to divorced persons.

An exposition of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the information provided by the social workers is provided in the table below (Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2: An overview of the themes, sub-themes and categories (social workers)**

<b>Theme 1: Social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations</b>	
<b>SUB-THEMES</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>
1. Casework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intake</li> <li>▪ Counselling</li> <li>▪ Relationship and marital problems</li> <li>▪ Child neglect and abuse</li> <li>▪ Foster care services</li> <li>▪ Mediation and parenting plans</li> <li>▪ Poverty alleviation and financial issues</li> <li>▪ Drug abuse</li> </ul>
2. Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No group work</li> <li>▪ Prevention groups</li> <li>▪ Parenting groups</li> <li>▪ Groups for school children</li> </ul>
3. Community work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No community work</li> <li>▪ Projects for the unemployed</li> <li>▪ Substance abuse programmes</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community awareness on child protection</li> <li>▪ Information</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2: Social workers' descriptions of the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No clear theoretical approach</li> <li>2. Person-centred approach plus other approaches</li> <li>3. A variety of approaches</li> <li>4. Solution-focused therapy</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 3: Social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not often</li> <li>2. Do deal with divorced persons</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 4: Social workers' accounts of the kind of social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do not request services related to personal issues</li> <li>2. Assistance regarding children</li> <li>3. Assistance with financial situation</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 5: Social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not satisfactory</li> <li>2. Could be more helpful</li> <li>3. Helpful</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 6: Social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No theoretical framework used</li> <li>2. Helpful, but could be improved</li> <li>3. Helpful</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 7: Social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refer to a psychologist</li> <li>2. Refer to a social worker in private practice</li> <li>3. Refer to the Department of Social Development and/or NGOs</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 8: Social workers' opinions on whether they should provide social work services to divorced persons</b>	
There were no sub-themes for this theme.	
<b>Theme 9: Social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not specialists and no specialised training</li> <li>2. Lack of resources</li> <li>3. Divorced persons do not co-operate</li> <li>4. Emotionally draining</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 10: Social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Counselling</li> <li>2. Emotional support</li> <li>3. Financial assistance</li> </ol>	
<b>Theme 11: Social workers' suggestions for improvements to the social work services provided to divorced persons</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a speciality in social work</li> <li>2. Design a programme for divorced persons</li> <li>3. Raise awareness of social work services for divorced persons</li> <li>4. Must go back to the basics of social work</li> <li>5. Must remain objective</li> </ol>	

In the next section of this discussion, each one of the main themes and accompanying sub-themes and categories (where applicable) will be presented and confirmed or endorsed by direct quotes from the transcripts of the interviews. A literature control will be undertaken by comparing and contrasting the identified themes and sub-themes, with their supporting storylines from the transcripts, with the body of knowledge available.

### **5.3.1 Theme 1: Social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations**

Social work practice is largely built on service delivery (Traube, Begun, Okpych & Choy-Brown 2017:137). Generally, the provision of social work services is based the following levels of practice: micro- (working with an individual on a one-on-one basis), meso- (working with families and other small groups), and macro- (working with organisations and communities or seeking changes in statutes and social policies) level (Zastrow 2012:50). Social work practice also involves the utilisation of skills, techniques, and knowledge, mainly when providing services to clients (Arora 2013:2). This resonates with Koubel's (2013:14) assertion that social work training equips social workers to demonstrate a practical application of skills and knowledge, and their ability to solve problems and provide hope for people relying on their support. Through the utilisation of their accumulated knowledge and skills, social workers are able to be innovative in social work practice.

There are different fields of practice in social work that represent the type of services social workers provide (Van Dyk 2000:68). According to Schultz (2015b:168-193), the different types of social work services are divided into various categories, namely health care, child care, addiction, trauma, and bereavement support:

- Health care services involve social work services to people suffering from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), mental health challenges, and disabilities.
- Child care services include social work services to abused children, children living on the streets, child-headed households, foster care, and adoption.
- Family care services involve domestic violence, marriage counselling/ couple's counselling, divorce, and services to the elderly.

- Addiction mainly involves social work services to people addicted to substances, as well as other addictions, such as food and drinks, medication, gambling, sex, and pornography.
- Trauma includes social work services to people exposed to traumatic incidences.
- Bereavement counselling is another form of social work services to people who are grieving due to loss.

Similarly, Ambrosino et al (2012:139-140) suggest that there are different fields of social work practice, including services to address poverty, mental health issues, substance abuse, disabilities, health care, the needs of children, youth and families, older persons, youth and adults in conflict with the law or the criminal justice system, social work in rural settings, and social work in the workplace. Social work services are grouped within numerous fields of practice, as they relate to addressing specific social problems, meeting the needs of client population groups, or reflecting particular settings (Van Dyk 2000:68). From this viewpoint, it can be deduced that there are different social work services provided by social workers and these services are aimed at addressing specific social problems and meeting the needs of a particular population group.

Social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations emerged as a theme in this study and it was deduced from the information provided by the participants when the researcher asked: "What kind of cases do you mainly deal with at your organisation?" Most of the social workers responded in terms of the type of services they provide, rather than the kind of cases. The responses are given in three sub-themes, namely casework, group work and community work, along with the relevant categories.

#### **5.3.1.1 Sub-theme: Casework**

When asked about the kind of cases they mainly deal with at their organisations, participants responded that they mainly focus on the casework method. The responses below confirm this.

*“I only do casework, but I have been thinking about group work because I have heard of somebody who is doing it somewhere in East Rand. What I do is couple therapy once a month” [Reneilwe 106-108].*

*“As far as casework is concern, we deal with the cases of cohabitation and during separation they mostly fight over the house or a shack and mostly the person who is forced out is the one who come to us for consultation. In most instances, the owners of the shack or the house are men and you find that they chase the wives and the kids. You will find children stranded and not knowing where to go” [Petunia 105-110].*

*“My designated area is Eersterust, which is a Coloured community, but mostly Eersterust people do not come here, but I do my programmes that side. In terms of casework they can just come in and we assist them” [Nomsa 44-46].*

The casework method (also known as social casework) is aimed at helping individuals on a one-on-one basis to meet personal and social needs (Zastrow 2012:50). According to Arora (2013:40), social casework is when the social worker is involved individually with a client who has a problem, and it involves interaction between the social worker and the client or a family unit. In most instances, problems related to social inadequacy, emotional conflict, interpersonal loss, social stress, or lack of familiarity with resources produce dysfunction in individuals (Ambrosino et al 2012:28). Moreover, Zastrow (2012:50) suggests that casework may be geared towards helping the client adjust to his/her environment, or to changing certain social and economic pressures that adversely affect him/her. In other words, the goal of casework is in line with the aims of social work, namely to enhance and maintain the psychological functioning of individuals and/or families. Thus, casework helps individuals or families to identify solutions to problems related to difficulty with social functioning.

Under this sub-theme, eight categories are given, namely intake, counselling, relationship and marital problems, child neglect and abuse, foster care services, mediation and parenting plans, poverty alleviation and financial issues, and drug abuse.

### a) Intake

Intake is a process of assessing a potential client's needs and eligibility for service (Wright 2007:98). Consequently, an intake interview is primarily an assessment tool, although the task of establishing a therapeutic alliance is an integral element (Shoai 2014:26). Most every professional counselling relationship between a counsellor and a client begins with an intake interview (Freeburg & Van Winkle 2011:1). According to Freeburg and Van Winkle (2011:1), effective initial intake interviews are considered a balance between gathering information and developing a therapeutic working alliance. In general, an intake is an interview conducted by the social worker prior to/ during the commencement of the counselling sessions, with the aim of gathering and assessing the client's information and problems.

When asked about the kind of cases he mostly deals with at his organisation, Wilson responded: *"...Here I do intake and intake is when you attend to any form of case which is being presented to you. It could be cases relating to children in need of care and protection, family related problems, substance abuse problems, parental responsibilities and rights, marital problems, foster care cases, child related cases, and everything. They have now just added the responsibility of supervising foster care cases, which are children placed under foster care and require supervision. We normally take them to court for them to be declared children in need of care and support"* [Wilson 29-36].

From the above extract, it is clear that the participant's understanding of intake is when a social worker deals with different kinds of cases presented to him/her by clients. The participant's understanding of intake contradicts Shoai's (2014:26) assertion that the intake components include identifying and assessing the client, taking personal history and information, and reviewing current functioning. However, the participant's description of intake relates to Popple and Leighninger's (2008:115) notion of generalist social work practice, which is seen as the ability of the social worker to work with all levels of social work clients, namely individuals, couples, families, groups, organisations, neighbourhoods, and communities. Additionally, Segal et al (2013:149) state that generalist social work practitioners utilise a variety of prevention and intervention methods when

providing services to individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being. Another way to describe generalist social work practice is that it entails direct work, such as counselling and referral work, with client systems of all sizes, as well as indirect work, such as advocacy and policy making, on behalf client systems (Popple & Leighninger 2008:115). Thus, by attending to different kinds of cases presented to him by different clients, it is clear that the participant is practicing generalist social work and not intake.

The next category presents counselling as one of the services social workers provide to clients at their organisations.

#### **b) Counselling**

Counselling helps the client to diffuse and manage their acute problem situation and further helps them to develop basic problem-solving skills through engaging them in the helping process as partners (Egan 2014:12). In the same way, Sekudu (2015a:123) asserts that counselling helps the client to develop a new perspective that enables him/her to use his/her newly developed knowledge and skills to deal effectively with his/her current and future challenges. According to Corey (2017:18), counselling is an intimate form of learning and it demands a practitioner who is willing to be an authentic person in the relationship in order to allow clients to grow. This means that counselling is one of the key functions in social work practice, as social workers mainly deal with people who are experiencing social problems.

Social workers in this study articulated that they provide counselling services at their organisations and this can be confirmed through Kim, Simpson, and Zodwa's extracts.

When asked about the kind of cases she mainly deals with at her organisation, **Kim** responded: *"In terms of cases with the employees, it is the stress management. It could be anything that arises in life, like divorce, financial issues and people changing schools, mental health condition, being diagnosed with depression, dealing with bipolar, the full inspection of the mental health*

*conditions and stresses that people are going through and we capacitate people through that” [Kim 50-55].*

**Simpson**, a social worker in the SAPS, confirmed that casework is undertaken at the SAPS and explained the type of cases encountered: *“What we do is normal casework, which includes counselling, family problems and also divorce issues, financial problems that members are having, and substance and alcohol abuse, there is not much substance abuse, but it is more substance abuse, and there is anger issues, anger and trauma management, basically is the counselling of the members. We are actually occupational social workers and we do not do generic social work so we do not write the report processes and get involved with the court. If I come across the child neglect case, I do not go and remove the child and go through the court processes. I would rather get the Department of Social Development or the NGO to do that. My job is to provide counselling to the police members as well as their families” [Simpson 87-97].*

**Zodwa**, who works at an NGO, explained the counselling she provides at her employing organisation: *“From 2015 I have been doing mediation, and any kind of counselling like trauma counselling, as well as trauma debriefing and counselling, I do parenting plans and that is what I am more involved with” [Zodwa 50-52].*

From the above quotations, it is apparent that participants provide different kinds of counselling to their clients. Kim and Simpson are occupational social workers and therefore they mainly provide support in the form of counselling to employees who are experiencing, amongst other challenges, stress related to family/ marital problems, financial problems, divorce, anger issues, trauma, and alcohol and substance abuse problems. Likewise, Zodwa provides many forms of counselling, including trauma counselling and trauma debriefing. Counselling is beneficial to clients in that it helps them to develop new skills that will assist them in understanding themselves better and interacting more effectively with their environments (Sekudu 2015a:123). Therefore, practitioners (and in this case, social workers) should acquire a broad base of counselling techniques that are suitable for individual clients, rather than forcing clients to fit one approach to

counselling (Corey 2017:5). In other words, as professional counsellors, social workers must be able to apply their knowledge and skills when providing counselling to clients. Thus, counselling skills that are used to communicate and build relationships are central to social work and require practice and training opportunities to be effective (Seden 2008:164). Furthermore, Sekudu (2015a:123) reiterates that it is through counselling that the client comes to recognise some of the aspects of his/her life that might have led to the problem situation he/she is facing.

The next category presents relationship and marital problems as some of the cases social workers deal with at their organisations.

**c) Relationship and marital problems**

Although intimate and marital relationships provide many individuals with a sense of intimacy and well-being, for others these relationships involve physical violence, verbal and emotional abuse, sexual abuse and/or neglect (Mooney et al 2011:159). This suggests that intimate and marital relationships may serve as a source of joy and happiness to the people involved, but this does not mean that they are not immune to problems and challenges. Problems and challenges occur when one or both of the partners no longer meet the marriage or relationship expectations (Walker 2008:378). There are different kinds of situations that lead to relationship and marital problems, including infidelity, abuse, and partner violence. According to Walker (2008:378), adulterous relationships are more likely to threaten the stability and durability of marriage, since tolerance of such behaviour has substantially diminished. On the other hand, abuse in relationships can take many forms, including emotional and psychological abuse, physical violence, and sexual abuse (Mooney et al 2011:159). With regards to intimate partner violence, Mooney et al (2011:159) define it as actual or threatened violent crimes committed against persons by their current or former intimate partners. Nonetheless, couples facing relationship or marital problems are more likely to seek support or services from professionals, including social workers, irrespective of the cause of such problems.

In this study, social workers expressed that they mostly deal with cases related to relationship and marital problems when asked about the kind of cases they deal with at their organisations.

This is what **Nomsa** said: *“We mostly deal with relationship problems and I call it relationship problems because it could be marital problems, but it could also be family relationship problems. Like I said, we also have housing problems and this is where the extended family comes in, but is mostly relationship problems for an example, it could be between the husband and wife or it could be about a brother coming to complain about his siblings who are disrespectful to him maybe because they are staying together in the same house, but I think it is a lot of marital problems”* [Nomsa 34-41]. **Nomsa** added: *“In terms of casework they can just come in and we assist them”* [Nomsa 46].

**Zodwa** also described her services as mainly dealing with relationship problems: *“Usually it has to do with relationship problems, a neighbour who is causing havoc in the community, and marriage problems, but mainly it has to do with relationship problems”* [Zodwa 63-65].

**Reneilwe** also shared: *“Mostly I deal with stress related cases experienced by the couples and individuals. For the individuals is a lot of unresolved issues, some from the childhood and some from the relationships as they grow. Mostly for couples is about infidelity”* [Reneilwe 24-29].

**Tsholofelo** also explained that she often deals with marital problems: *“We also get a lot of couples who always fight continually and we have to intervene”* [Tsholofelo 62-63]. However, she stated that these are generally resolved: *“Usually one partner would come and complain and we then invite both parties to the office and we try to listen to both sides of the stories to see how we can help or facilitate the process of change. Usually the problems are resolved within the meetings and I never had a case where the problems eventually led to divorce, it is usually resolved”* [Tsholofelo 92-96].

One of the key responsibilities of social workers regarding relationship and marital problems is to provide marriage or couple's counselling. It should be noted that this kind of counselling includes couples (including same-sex couples) who are in a relationship in the traditional sense of the word, as well as two unmarried people living together (or cohabitation), for any period of time (Schultz 2015b:178). Strengthening couples or marriages is a worthy goal according to Mooney et al (2011:184), because strong marriages offer many benefits to individuals and their children. It is evident from the participants' extracts that they mostly provide marital and/or couple's counselling to individuals or couples experiencing relationship or marital problems. Marital or couple's counselling is a specialised process that renders therapeutic assistance to couples in ongoing relationships (Petty 2006:145). This definition is supported by Schultz (2015b:179), who states that marriage or couple's counselling addresses relationship issues, including all matters of discomfort or tension identified by the couple, attitudes towards each other, problems in communication, expectations, disappointments, hurtful interactions, and differences of opinion. The aim of marriage or couple's counselling is to assist the couples to acquire a better understanding of themselves and their partners in order to interact more constructively.

Child neglect and abuse cases are some of the cases frequently dealt with by social workers at their organisations and this is presented as the next category.

**d) Child neglect and abuse**

Child neglect and abuse is a worldwide problem (Karadag, Sonmez & Dereobali 2015:874). According to Mooney et al (2011:162), child neglect is a form of abuse involving the failure to provide adequate attention, supervision, nutrition, hygiene, health care, or a safe and clean living environment for a minor child. Child abuse refers to the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18 by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare (Mooney et al 2011:162). It should be borne in mind that child abuse can take various forms, but it is usually the result of problems in the family (Schultz 2015b:175). Similar sentiments are shared by Mikaeili, Barahmanda

and Abdi (2013:976) that child abuse takes different forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

When asked about the kind of cases they mostly deal with at their organisations, Linda and Tsholofelo mentioned that they mainly deal with child abuse and neglect cases. The excerpts below confirm this.

*“We have different problems that are reported to us, for instance, we have child abuse and child neglect cases that we get” [Tsholofelo 28-29].*

**Linda** also explained it as follows: *“Because of the nature of the area we operate in and as a counselling centre the cases that we mainly deal with are child abuse, child neglect due to the fact that most parents work in the farms and they abandon the children, they do not take them to school and most of them are foreign nationals and they do not have the necessary documents like the identity document and birth certificates... Apart from that there is a high number of alcohol abuse cases in this area, because there are no recreational facilities for children or elderly people or anything which can keep them busy perhaps” [Linda 55-65].*

The above quotations from the participants reaffirm that they mainly deal with child abuse and child neglect cases. Linda further stated the following as reasons for the abuse and neglect of children: abandoning children due to work commitments on farms, lack of recreational facilities, and alcohol abuse. There is no doubt that social workers' intervention in child abuse and neglect cases is vital given the impact it has on children. These views resonate with the assertion by Karadag et al (2015:873) that child abuse and neglect have a potentially deleterious impact on children's physical, social, and psychological development. In addition, Mooney et al (2011:163) suggest that child abuse is associated with depression, low academic achievement, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, obesity, teenage pregnancy, STDs, sexual promiscuity, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, juvenile delinquency, adult criminality, suicide, and experiencing abuse victimisation as an adult.

Therefore, the role of the social worker in these situations is to consider what is in the best interest of the child and implement statutory actions when it is warranted, and this may include moving the child or children to a place of safety, either in a children's home or with a foster parent (Schultz 2015b:174).

The next category presents foster care as one of the services provided by social workers at their organisations.

**e) Foster care services**

Foster care services are based on the principle of providing an alternative family that offers a stable period of care for children who cannot remain with their birth parents or relatives, because of parental problems, the risk of abuse or neglect, or other conditions such as family rejection (Maluccio & Ainsworth 2006:20). Children who are abused by their family members may be removed from their homes and placed in government-supervised foster care, and this kind of placement includes other family members, certified foster parents, group homes, and other institutional facilities (Mooney et al 2011:168). In some instances, children who are placed in foster care by means of a court order have been abused by their biological parents and, as a result, the child was removed as a safety measure (Schwartz 2008:609). According to Schultz (2015b:175), children may be placed in foster care at the order of the Children's Court and foster care has to be provided by an adult or adults whose circumstances and sustainability to take on this responsibility have been investigated by a social worker.

The South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006a: section 181) stipulates the following as the purposes of foster care:

- To protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support.
- To promote the goals of permanency planning, first towards family reunification, or by connecting children to other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime.
- To respect the individual and family by demonstrating a respect for cultural, ethnic, and community diversity.

In addition, foster parents in South Africa receive the Foster Care Grant to enable them to provide for the child, and when the child reaches 18 years of age, the foster care order and Foster Care Grant ends, unless the child needs more time to complete his/her school education. In such instances, the social worker applies through the court for an extension of the Foster Care Grant.

In this study **Petunia**, who works at an NGO, explained the type of social work services that are provided at her employing organisation as follows: *“It is generic social work but mainly we deal with foster care”* [**Petunia 56**]. She expanded on this as follows: *“Again when children turn 18 years they begin to confront foster parents that they are wasting their money and so on, but also the foster parents do not want to stay with the child who has turned 18 years because the Foster Care Grant would have been terminated. We are therefore compelled to conduct joint interviews and remind them about the commitment they have made in court of taking full responsibility on the child regardless of whether the child has turned 18 years or not. The problem is that some foster parents do not want to save money for the children regardless of our plea and therefore when the grant terminates at 18 years they won’t be having any money for the child and that is why they do not want the child anymore”* [**Petunia 108-129**].

**Tsholofelo**, who is also employed at an NGO, similarly deals mainly with foster care services: *“I do foster care supervision and I have about 80 cases of foster care supervision and I also do prevention which entails day to day intakes that we attend to, but most of my cases are foster care supervision cases... I do the extension of foster care placements through the Children’s Court. I monitor school programmes for the learners, we do home visits.”* [**Tsholofelo 26-35**].

The fact that the participants in this study articulated that they mainly deal with foster care cases resonates with Schwartz’s (2008:609) assertions that social workers should be intimately involved with foster care services. In so doing, social workers usually monitor foster care placements in order to ensure that the child has adjusted to the foster family and that the family is managing with the child (Schultz 2015b:175). Amongst their other key responsibilities in foster care, social workers conduct home visits and these visits mostly include talking to the

foster parents and foster children, checking out the home environment, asking about school attendance and medical care, and investigating the foster child's relationship with any biological children in the family (Schwartz 2008:614). It should be noted that the study conducted by Schwartz (2008:614) reveals that social workers are overloaded with foster care cases. As a result, they spend most of their time involved in foster care services and the participants' extracts in this study confirm this.

The social workers in this study expressed that they are also involved in mediation and parenting plans at their organisations, and this is presented as the next category.

**f) Mediation and parenting plans**

**Mashego**, who works at the Office of the Family Advocate, explained that he is involved in mediation with divorcing couples prior to divorce: *"...we deal with cases referred to us by the court. They are referred to us by the regional court and the Children's Court, but the system has been made to accommodate the community as well, because parents are allowed to approach the Office of the Family Advocate and make the application there. So it is some sort of a shortcut doing this way, because then their matter has to be mediated... it entails awareness of the role of the family advocate, because in most of the times parties like to paint each other as people who are incompetent to take care of the child or children. They would come up with scandals of the other person, but I think the main purpose of mediation is to make people aware of the services of the Office of the Family Advocate and to ensure that whatever they are deliberating on is about the best interest of the child and not about the disputes in their relationships. We also assist them to come up with the best plan and more practical plan regarding contact with the child"* [Mashego 44-59].

It is clear from Mashego's citation that he mostly deals with divorcing couples who require assistance with mediation and parenting plans, and this is his focal point as he is employed at the Office of the Family Advocate. Moreover, the participant categorically states that he does not handle the disputes in the divorcing couple's relationship; instead he focuses on the best interest of the child. This statement by Mashego resonates with Schultz's (2015b:180)

assertion that the aim of mediation and parenting plans is to assist parents in developing a meaningful environment for their children when they as parents are no longer living together, while considering the relationship between the parents and the relationship they each have with the children. In divorce mediation, divorcing couples meet with a neutral third party – a mediator – who helps them resolve issues of property division, child support, child custody, and spousal support, in a way that minimises conflict and encourages co-operation (Mooney et al 2011:177).

Additionally, Schultz (2015b:180) reiterates that in the course of divorce provision is made for mediation, which is a voluntary process in which parents, with the assistance of a trained and impartial third party, discuss their differences and disputes with the aim of coming to some form of agreement. It should be noted that the role of mediator can be fulfilled by a professional social worker, as reported by the participant in this study, and that the mediation involves parenting plans. Parenting plans are agreements between parents in which they agree on how they will contribute to the care and well-being of their children (Schultz 2015b:180). In other words, a parenting plan is a design for the way divorcing parents will raise their children after they are divorced (McWilliams 2011:3). However, researchers frequently found in practice that parenting plans are built around the wishes and needs of the parents and not those of the children (Robinson et al 2011:223). This is problematic, as it means that children's wishes and needs are rarely considered during the process. When the social worker and divorced parents fail to consider the wishes and needs of the children during the formulation of a parenting plan, they do not have the children's best interests at heart and the intended purpose of the parenting plan is lost.

An increasing number of jurisdictions and states, including South Africa, have mandatory child custody mediation programmes, whereby parents in a custody or visitation dispute must attempt to resolve their dispute through mediation before a court will hear the case (Mooney et al 2011:177). This can also be affirmed by the participant's statement that most of the mediation cases he deals with at the Office of the Family Advocate are referrals from the Regional and Children's Courts, in order for divorcing parents to try and resolve their disputes

through mediation before the court hearing date. However, if mediation does not work, the divorcing parents can still go to court to resolve their case.

Poverty alleviation and financial issues are some of the cases handled by social workers in this study, as presented in the next category.

**g) Poverty alleviation and financial issues**

Poverty is defined as a lack of money and other resources, leading to a person's inability to function in a productive and efficient manner in a given society (Popple & Leighninger 2008:226). According to Mooney et al (2011:201), poverty is associated with health problems and hunger, increased vulnerability from natural disasters, problems in education, problems in families and parenting, and lack of housing. Another definition, provided by Ewruhjakpor (2008:520), is that poverty means to be persistently and unchangeably lacking in the necessities of life, such as food, shelter, clean water, clothing, medicine, education, and electricity. The World Bank sets a "poverty threshold" of \$1.25 per day for the least developed countries, and \$2 per day for middle-income countries (Mooney et al 2011:190). This means that people who live on less than \$1.25 a day in the least developed countries and \$2 per day in middle-income countries are considered to be living under extreme or absolute poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the lack of resources necessary for well-being; most importantly food and water, but also housing, sanitation, education, and health care (Mooney et al 2011:189).

It should be borne in mind that every country has a responsibility within the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to contribute positively towards the reduction of poverty (Ewruhjakpor 2008:520). For example, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides that all citizens have the right to social security, including appropriate social assistance from the Government, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents (Twine, Collinson, Polzer & Kahn 2007:118). In this study, poverty alleviation and finance related issues are some of the cases that are dealt with by the social workers and the excerpts below confirm this.

This is what **Nomsa** said: *“Mostly from Eersterust they would come for poverty alleviation and food parcels. They come to SASSA and apply for the Child Support Grant and the indigenous programme”* [**Nomsa 46-49**].

**Nomsa** further explained: *“Mostly we deal with financial problems and housing”* [**Nomsa 31-32**].

**Reneilwe** also stated that the second largest concern she deals with at her organisation relates to financial issues: *“Secondly, I deal with a lot of finance related cases... mostly caused by this group of young generation who pay what we call a black tax. Black tax is when you have to support your mother at home, your cousins, your brothers, and try to reach the status or the level at which your friends are, so as a result they end up getting deep into debts. The reason for them to get into debts is mainly to copy the lifestyle of friends. Our children do not understand that this gradually, they expect to earn R50 000 once they are employed because he or she has got qualifications”* [**Reneilwe 25-38**].

Social work, more than any other profession, maintains a strong commitment to fighting poverty at all levels (Ambrosino et al 2012:167). From Nomsa and Reneilwe’s citations, it is obvious that poverty alleviation and financial issues are some of the main cases they deal with at their organisations. Nomsa’s clients mostly require assistance related to poverty alleviation and food parcels, and they apply for the Child Support Grant and indigenous programmes at the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). On the other hand, Reneilwe deals with clients who are employed, but find themselves experiencing some financial constraints due to insufficient salaries earned to cater for the basic needs of the family. According to Reneilwe, poverty and financial problems among their working clients are mostly caused by the extra responsibility of having to cater for the needs of the extended family (also known as black tax). However, for some of them it is caused by living beyond their financial means due to peer pressure, especially among young adults.

Government programmes that are designed to alleviate poverty include various types of welfare and public assistance, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and

policies and proposals that involve increasing wages (Mooney et al 2011:211). In South Africa, various social security benefits are delivered as monetary grants, contributing to a range of measures implemented by the government to address poverty and create economic security in the country (Twine et al 2007:118). Therefore, social service practitioners, including social workers, are instrumental in implementing a vast number of social security benefits, hence the participants in this study reported that they mostly dealt with such cases.

In the next category, drug abuse is presented as one of the types of cases dealt with by social workers in this study.

#### **h) Drug abuse**

Drug abuse is referred to as a pattern of drug use that results in recurrent and significant adverse consequences associated with the frequent use of drugs (Dulmus & Sowers 2012:121). Commonly, drug abuse is the violation of social standards of acceptable drug use, resulting in adverse physiological, psychological, and/or social consequences (Mooney et al 2011:77). According to Galvani (2008:71-72), drugs are often grouped by the biological impact they have on the body's central nervous system and these groups are:

- Drugs that depress the central nervous system, for example alcohol, tranquillisers, solvents, and gases.
- Drugs that stimulate the central nervous system, for example speed, cocaine, crack-cocaine, ecstasy, caffeine, and tobacco.
- Drugs that alter perceptual function (hallucinogens), for example LSD/Acid, magic mushrooms, and cannabis.
- Drugs that reduce pain, for example heroin, opium, methadone, and codeine.

The most commonly abused drugs include caffeine, nicotine, dextromethorphan, antihistamines, and sympathomimetic (Conca & Worthen 2012:15-19). However, it should be noted that in South Africa there is a common drug used mainly by young people called Nyaope. Nyaope is a popular drug in South African townships and it consists of a mixture of either heroin or dagga and other harmful substances (Ngwana & Mgidi 2012:16). Some of the reasons people start or continue using drugs include: to experience something new, to take a risk, to feel

better, to escape emotional or psychological pain, to rebel, to fit in, or to forget home/ work problems, for medical purposes, to celebrate or commiserate, to conform with cultural norms, or to have fun (Galvani 2008:72). This indicates that there are different reasons for people to start or continue using drugs and these reasons differ from one individual to the other.

In this study, **Petunia** cited that lately she deals with a lot drug abuse cases, specifically Nyaope: *“Recently there are a lot of Nyaope cases reported to us. It is prevalent in Hamanskraal area, it is just that we do not see this because we only service two areas and the other areas belong to the Department of Social Development, but when we go to the meetings we hear that Nyaope is prevalent in the area. We also see a lot of people who abuse this Nyaope substance when we get to the train station and so on. Just to give an example, they have constructed a bridge in Hamanskraal to allow people to cross over to the other side, but people do not use that bridge because of these Nyaope addicts who resides there all the time”* [Petunia 149-157].

Nyaope is becoming the drug of choice among thousands of youth across South Africa (Ngwana & Mgidi 2012:16). According to Galvani (2008:74), people who have problems with drugs usually have a negative impact on other people in the family, and often the entire community. The participant’s extract confirms this, since she attends to many cases related to Nyaope and they are mostly reported by a concerned family or community member. The role of the social worker in these instances is to first make a proper assessment of the addiction and the impact on the family, including the number of times the substance abuser has been for treatment before and his/her willingness to cooperate in his/her recovery (Schultz 2015b:187). However, the social work approach looks at more than just the person’s substance problem; it also recognises that the person may have a number of problems and that he/she should be prepared to work through these problems too (Galvani 2008:75). This suggests that the social worker applies a holistic approach in his/her assessment, instead of focusing solely on the substance or drug abuse problem. Based on the assessment the social worker and the family, including the person involved in drug abuse, decide together which option is more appropriate and facilitates the solution (Schultz 2015b:187).

In this sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of the services they provide and/or the cases they mainly deal with at their organisations were presented. These are services and/or cases related to the casework method of social work practice. In the next sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of the type of services and/or cases related to the group work method of social work practice are presented.

### **5.3.1.2 Sub-theme: Group work**

Working with groups is a fact of life for most social workers (Yanca & Johnson 2009:3). In other words, group work is one of the three primary methods of social work practice, along with administration and research. Group work can be understood as a series of activities carried out by the social worker during the life of a group (Toseland & Rivas 2009:3). According to Ambrosino et al (2012:114), a group is a form of social organisation, whose members identify and interact with one another on a personal basis and also have a shared sense of the group as a social entity.

There are two categories of groups as suggested by Toseland and Rivas (2009:20), namely treatment groups, which include support, education, growth, therapy, socialisation, and self-help, and task groups, which are commonly used in most agencies and organisations to find solutions to organisational problems, to generate new ideas, and to make decisions. However, it should be noted that different groups have different objectives, such as socialisation, information exchange, curbing delinquency, recreation, changing socially unacceptable values, and helping achieve better relations between cultural and racial groups (Zastrow 2012:51). Therefore, different groups serve different purposes for the group members.

Under this sub-theme, four categories are presented, namely no group work, prevention groups, parenting groups, and groups for school children.

#### **a) No group work**

Group work is considered one of the key modalities in social work practice (Kimmell & Gockel 2017:1). According to Rasool and Ross (2017:206), group work is one of the social work interventions that can potentially not only bring about social change and transformation, but also promote development, problem

solving, and empowerment of group members. These sentiments reaffirm the significance of group work in social work practice.

However, there are social workers in this study who articulated that they do not undertake any group work at their organisations. Nomsa and Wilson's statements confirm this.

*"No, we do not do group work, but mostly case and community work" [Nomsa 61-62].*

**Wilson** said that neither community work nor group work is undertaken: *"We do casework, but group work is not active at all. Community work is also not active. They also require us to do group work in the performance, but it is not something we are actively involved with" [Wilson 44-46].*

Although the participants did not state the reasons, it is clear from their excerpts that they do not undertake group work at their organisations. Nomsa stated that she mainly undertakes casework and community work. However, Wilson who works at the DSD, expressed that he is only involved in the casework method. This contradicts Zastrow's (2012:1) suggestion that social work with groups is practiced in different agencies, including adoption agencies, correctional settings, halfway houses, substance abuse treatment centres, physical rehabilitation centres, family service agencies, private psychotherapy clinics, mental hospitals, nursing homes, community centres, public schools, and many other social service settings. According to Rasool and Ross (2017:206), social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. This social change takes place at the level of the person, family, small group, community, and the broader society. Thus, failing to undertake group work is more likely to affect the social change process and development of the people.

The next category presents prevention groups as one of the services provided by social workers.

## b) Prevention groups

Prevention groups were highlighted by Kim and Simpson who both work in an occupational setting.

**Kim** explained it as follows: “...*the other part is the preventative presentations, for instance if people are aware of stress and how to manage stress, burnout and all of these things, they would be in a better position to manage those things in a more proactive and better ways. Equipping people with coping skills even if before things happen*” [Kim 55-59].

**Simpson** also shared that he undertakes a lot of preventative work at his organisation: “*Actually huge part of our job is the preventive work, which is the workshops, because the counselling is the reactive work. So we present workshops to the members on stress, trauma, substance abuse, communication, and all kinds of different workshops to empower members with knowledge so that they can solve the problems on their own if they have problems because they would be having the knowledge. But members are not always attending the workshops*” [Simpson 102-108].

Based on Kim and Simpson’s extracts, there is no doubt that they do undertake preventative work in the form of groups. As occupational social workers, they often arrange the employees at their organisation in the form of groups and give presentations and further engage them on different topics including, amongst others, substance abuse, stress, trauma, and burnout. According to Yanca and Johnson (2009:8), prevention groups tend to use the same or similar activities as growth and counselling groups, but prevention groups generally limit their membership to an identified “at risk” population. This view relates to Corey’s (2016:5) affirmation that group counselling has preventive as well as remedial aims. On the other hand, growth groups provide a supportive atmosphere in which individuals can gain insights, experiment with new behaviours, get feedback, and grow as human beings (Toseland & Rivas 2009:25). The purpose of prevention groups is to help members develop and function at an optimal level, and help them to prepare for events that are likely to occur (Toseland & Rivas

2009:20). Through prevention groups, members are prepared in advance, and knowledge and skills are imparted to them about a particular subject with the aim of preventing them from getting involved in detrimental activities.

Apart from prevention groups, parenting groups were mentioned by social workers as some of the services they provide at their organisations, and this is presented in the next category.

### c) **Parenting groups**

Ineffective parenting is a major risk factor for adverse child outcomes and therefore parenting groups target this factor through systematic instruction, modelling, and support to increase positive parent-child interactions and decrease aversive interactions (Dumas, Moreland, Gitter, Pearl & Nordstrom 2008:619). Parenting groups reflect good ways to break isolation and build new networks among parents (Lefevre, Lundqvist, Drevenhorn & Hallstrom 2016:52). Through parenting groups, members are afforded an opportunity to learn new information and skills and support one another.

In this study, parenting groups is one form of group work offered by Linda, Tsholofela, and Zodwa at their organisations. The excerpts below confirm this.

*“What we do, for instance, is that we see the children and if we find that there are problems in that family therefore we provide the support to parents, but if we feel that the parent should be part of the group activities we ensure that, that particular parent joins the group of parents who are experiencing similar problems” [Linda 84-88].*

*“We have a foster care parenting groups that we do once a year. We just give parents tips and advices on how to deal with teenagers, especially those who have teenagers we give them tips on how to deal with them, we just give them a general parenting guidance” [Tsholofelo 35-40].*

*“We did a lot of group work the time we were still focused on foster care. We would identify the need within the foster parents and with that need we are able to form a group and discuss their needs” [Zodwa 58-60].*

According to Linda, she mainly conducts support groups with parents who are experiencing challenges in their families. However, Tsholofelo and Zodwa undertake groups with foster parents based on the challenges they are faced with regarding the upbringing of foster children. In so doing, they provide parental guidance to foster parents. The participants in this study provide parenting groups in the form of support and educational groups. The purpose of the support groups is to provide support for their members (Yanca & Johnson 2009:7). On the other hand, educational groups are aimed at increasing members' skills or providing them with information (Toseland & Rivas 2009:24). The study conducted by Lefevre et al (2016:46) reveals that parental groups serve as important social support to parents, apart from getting information about parenting. Consequently, there is no doubt that parenting groups benefit the group members.

Social workers in this study also mentioned that they provide groups for school children and this is presented in the next category.

**d) Groups for school children**

There are different kinds of groups for school children undertaken by social workers, including group counselling and educational groups. In schools, group counselling is often suggested for children who display behaviours or attributes such as excessive fighting, an inability to get along with their peers, violent outbursts, poor skills, and lack of supervision at home (Corey 2016:7). It is affirmed by Toseland and Rivas (2009:23) that educational groups are mainly used in schools.

**Petunia** described the group work with school children: *“We often go to Hamanskraal weekly and our offices are based at the school, therefore we mainly focus on group work. We work with school kids, but we do not consider the area they come from because normally we work in terms of the area jurisdiction but*

*as long as they are based at that particular school we help them” [Petunia 55-60].*

**Petunia** explained further: *“Mostly they would pick their youth and we just go there and assist them... We mainly focus on teenage pregnancy, adolescent stage, and peer pressure, that is what we mainly work on. At school is the group of children who have failed and parents who do not come regardless of the letters they have been sent to them. Mostly there are lots of children who fail, but the Department of Education compels us to push them to the next grade. We are well aware that it is going to be a challenge for them going forward and we therefore motivate them so that they should overcome all the obstacles which make them not to read their books especially the issue of peer pressure. We are located at the primary school, but already we have dealt with three cases of pregnant learners, the other one was doing grade 6 and the other one grade 7, hence we tell them about teenage pregnancy. Sometimes it’s a challenge, because these children do not come for these important groups and even parents they do not always come to attend, but what we do is that we write them call in letters and eventually they come after realising that they are being invited by the social worker” [Petunia 69-89].*

From the participant’s account, it is clear that her primary purpose of undertaking groups for school children is to provide information, skills, and group counselling on various social ills, including teenage pregnancy, adolescence, and peer pressure, and this relates to group counselling and educational groups. This resonates with the statement by Corey et al (2014:23) that group counselling is popular in school settings because of the realistic time constraints and because a brief format can be incorporated into educational and therapeutic programmes. If children can receive psychological assistance at an early age, they stand a better chance of coping effectively with the developmental tasks they must face later in life (Corey 2016:7).

As far as educational groups are concerned, Toseland and Rivas (2009:23) postulate that the primary purpose of educational groups is to help members learn new information and skills. Educational groups are skill-building groups that

are mostly implemented within classroom or small group settings in the school environment, and they can provide opportunities to experience positive peer reinforcement, engage in mutual problem solving, and modify attitudes and behaviours toward other children (Letendre & Davis 2004:369). Educational groups usually have a classroom atmosphere, involving considerable group interaction and discussions, and a professional person with expertise in the area, often a social worker, assumes the role of teacher (Zastrow 2012:4). Without a doubt, groups for school children serve a pivotal role in their educational and emotional well-being.

In this sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of the services related to the group work method of social work practice were presented. In the next sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of the type of services related to the community work method of social work practice are presented.

### **5.3.1.3 Sub-theme: Community work**

Community work is the method of social work practice that consists of various processes and helping acts by the social worker that are targeted at the community system, with the purpose of bringing about the required social change with the help of especially community development, social planning, community education, social marketing, and social action as practice models (Weyers 2011:28). It is important to take note of the fact that social workers who practice at community level use a number of approaches to improve the well-being of community members (Ambrosino et al 2012:125). Community is a space, interaction, and identification that people share with others in place-specific and non-specific locations (Ambrosino et al 2012:124). According to Hatton (2015:58), communities can be characterised in the following way:

- Communities of interest which reflect the common material concerns or characteristics of members and/or the common issues around which they group.
- Imagined communities are formed not on the basis of a common interest, but on the basis of community identities. The basis of social bonds is likeness or similarity.
- Communities of place are particular types of imagined community, which are territorially based and can be mobilised to defend local interests.

Similarly, Ambrosino et al (2012:124) postulate that the communities in which social work professionals are more likely to be involved are classified as geographical or territorial communities, communities of identification and interest, traditional communities, and communities of diversity:

- Geographical or territorial communities include neighbourhoods, cities, towns, villages, and boroughs that have clearly defined geopolitical boundaries.
- Communities of identification and interest are formed around shared concerns and deeply held beliefs and values that often bring community members into conflict with other communities.
- Traditional communities exist side by side with communities that are heterogeneous. For the most part, these community members attempt to maintain their separateness, uniqueness, cultural integrity, and historical identity.
- Communities of diversity constitute a subset of modern communities whose community members often engage in a struggle to navigate a hostile world.

Through the community work method, social workers work with different communities and they use their knowledge and skills to bring about necessary changes. These views resonate with Weyers' (2011:31) assertions that the purpose of community work entails social change on three levels, namely:

- To enhance people's problem-solving, coping, and developmental capacities in order to enable them to prevent and eliminate social problems and needs, and to utilise their full potential.
- To create and maintain the opportunities, resources, and services that people need to enrich their lives, prevent or deal with dysfunction, and develop their full potential.
- To link people with the systems that provide them with the required resources, services, and opportunities.

Five categories are presented under this sub-theme, namely no community work, projects for the unemployed, substance abuse programmes, community awareness on child protection, and information.

**a) No community work**

As one of the primary methods of social work practice, community work focuses on the psychological sphere of community life (Weyers 2011:47). Thus, the domain of the community work method relates to the primary purpose of the social work profession, which is to improve people's social functioning. According to Sesoko (2015a:153), the majority of social workers employed in both governmental organisations and NGOs provide services to communities as part of the service delivery method. However, some participants in this study explained that they do not undertake community work. This is confirmed by Zodwa and Wilson in their articulations.

**Zodwa** clearly stated: "*We do not necessarily do community work*" [**Zodwa 56**].

**Wilson** also shared: "*Community work is also not active*" [**Wilson 43**].

The fact that there are participants in this study who expressed that they do not undertake community work relates to the study conducted by Pawar (2014:2), which reveals that many social workers generally neglect the community work method of practice. In other words, the community work method of social work practice seems to have lost momentum amongst social workers. According to Schenck, Nel and Louw (2010:6), community practitioners (social workers included) working for government/ state departments, NGOs, or non-profit organisations (NPOs), are usually charged to render services in specific geographic areas or to specific groups of people, also referred to as communities. In the same way, Weyers (2011:46) postulates that generalist community development workers are professionals, including social workers, employed by government departments, but also NGOs and businesses, for the sole purpose of rendering a developmental service to communities. By failing to undertake community work or rendering services to communities, social workers are depriving people in the community of the opportunity to improve their circumstances. This is because the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people (Pawar 2014:1). For that reason, the community work method is still relevant and significant in social work practice.

The next category presents projects for the unemployed.

**b) Projects for the unemployed**

Unemployment brings with it a complexity that is further complicated by social class position, gender, and cultural context (Ali, Fall & Hoffman 2013:121). There are a number of risk factors associated with unemployment, for instance homelessness, substance abuse, and crime, as some unemployed individuals turn to illegitimate, criminal sources of income, such as theft, drug dealing, and prostitution (Mooney et al 2011:238). Without a doubt, there are many negative consequences associated with being unemployed. The fact that unemployment leads to poverty makes poverty reduction a priority for many. This suggests that poverty reduction is a common mission for humankind (Shuai, Li & Sun 2011:329). Through the community work method of social work practice, social workers involve communities in the facilitation process of community projects aiming at eradicating poverty.

In this study, **Linda** explained the available projects for the unemployed: *“Apart from the group work programmes there are projects that we run with the community, because you may find that some of the problems are caused by poverty and all that. Again the kind of life lived here is based on cohabitation and they change partners a lot. Like I said that most of the people who live in this area are foreign nationals and when they leave, they hardly come back and create crises in the family due to unemployment. We therefore ensure that we put them in the projects so that they would be able to do something on their own while we support them with food parcels. They do not stay forever in the programmes, they only stay for six months because our programmes are meant to empower the community and our role is merely to facilitate the process... We believe that after six months we would have assisted the person to resolve his problems, for an example, if the person does not have the necessarily documents to apply for grants with SASSA. I am talking about South Africans, we try to assist the person to apply for grants by writing the letters and while we are busy with the application we give him the food parcels while he is in the programme. Mostly after six months the problem would have been sorted, the person can’t just decide to remain in the projects due to unemployment” [Linda 88-107].*

From the participant's extract, it is clear that she runs projects for the unemployed with the aim of eradicating poverty. The participant also provides project members with food parcels for a period of six months, after which they are expected to stand on their own feet. A study conducted by Tower (2016:126) reports that the perception of poverty by many people seems to be centred on the provision of money, food, or shelter to alleviate distress. These sentiments contradict Sesoko's (2015a:163) views that the community work method allows communities to drive their own development. This means that the community work method empowers communities to do things for themselves, instead of relying on others to do things for them. Weyers (2011:119-121) suggest that empowerment projects are aimed at teaching members of the community how to function effectively in the economic sphere of life and the themes covered include: coping with unemployment, how the financial system works, how to look for job and keep it, and career planning and management.

Income generating projects are the most common projects run by social workers with the unemployed and they are aimed at eradicating poverty. According to Weyers (2011:203), the high rate of unemployment in the southern region of Africa often compels task groups to view income-generating projects as a priority. Income generating projects are a strategy that can be employed by social workers working with communities to assist the people in creating wealth (Louw 2002:73). Therefore, community work projects that are aimed at bringing positive changes in the lives of the unemployed are necessary.

The next category presents substance abuse programmes as one of the programmes run by participants.

**c) Substance abuse programmes**

Substance abuse is a pattern of substance use that results in recurrent and significant adverse consequences associated with the frequent use of substances (Dulmus & Sowers 2012:121). Substance abuse problems can be related to, among others, developmental disabilities, child and family issues, poverty, criminal activities, and challenges in the workplace (Ambrosino et al

2008:223). Undoubtedly, substance abuse affects society in multiple domains, including public health, social cohesion, and employment (Nhunzvi, Galvaan & Peters 2017:1). Given the adverse consequences of substance abuse, it is crucial for social workers to embark on numerous substance abuse programmes aimed at assisting the addicts and communities at large. According to Dulmus and Sowers (2012:113), social workers have empathetically worked with substance abuse addicts, including alcoholics, since the beginning of the profession's history.

In this study, **Nomsa** explains about the substance abuse programmes she undertakes at her organisation: *“We do more of community development and therefore we do programmes and for the past two years I am much more involved in the substance abuse programme”* [**Nomsa 28-30**].

*“Although I said we do community development, but it is mostly a top-down thing. The politicians decide, for instance, with the substance abuse programme, the politicians would say this is how we would want to do things or we would want to give money to the NPOs so that is top-down approach. They have the money in front like last year, the money is there, but I do know if you have heard about the elders before? ...It is the local drug action committees and they would tell us that you have to form community committees in order to tackle drug problems. They would start in the committees and from there they would do programmes. So in as far as community work is concern we fit in somewhere and that is what is frustrating the most. With the local drug action committees, they tell us the means of combating substance abuse, is like them telling us that you do this”* [**Nomsa 65-77**].

The above extract reveals that the participant is involved in substance abuse programmes as part of community development and this is due to the high number of people who abuse substances within her area of operations. Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, illegal drugs, and some prescription drugs, such as benzodiazepines and opioid analgesics (Li & Caltabiano 2017:1). Generally, substance abuse programmes offered by social workers are aimed at assisting

those who abuse substances to recover and live a normal life. However, recovery from substance abuse involves a process of initiating and committing to abstinence from substances and making both intrapersonal and interpersonal changes to achieve sobriety (Nhunzvi et al 2017:1).

Although there are social workers who provide educational and prevention programmes, while other social workers work in and with communities to form drug action committees and other community groups to fight substance abuse, they all have a common goal and that is to combat substance abuse (Schultz 2015b:189). From the excerpt above it is clear that the participant is not happy with the fact that she is not involved in the decision-making process regarding the kind substance abuse programmes on offer. Instead she indicates that her organisation implements the top-down approach. According to Sesoko (2015a:160), the top-down approach to community development takes place when the government or authorities, or any other organisation besides the community or the target beneficiary, initiates the development activity. In this approach, the communities, the target beneficiaries, or the people involved do not participate in the decision-making process. Instead, they become passive. From the participant's excerpt, it is clear that she does not have professional control over the substance abuse programmes she runs with the community, since she alleges the programmes are imposed on her and the beneficiaries in a top-down manner and therefore she does not see the effectiveness of such programmes.

In the next category, community awareness on child protection is presented.

**d) Community awareness on child protection**

Child protection risks include dropping out of school, child labour linked to financial exploitation and abuse, poor physical health, poor mental health, sexual and psychological abuse, exposure to conflict and violence, problematic use of alcohol and drugs, and lack of social space and recreational activities for children (O'Leary, Hutchinson & Squire 2015:720). According to Molnar, Beatriz and Beardslee (2016:387), the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that nearly a quarter of adults globally have experienced child physical abuse,

emotional abuse, neglect, and childhood sexual abuse when they themselves were children. This points to the significance of community awareness on child protection aimed at combating child maltreatment. The child welfare system, including the social work profession, is charged with the protection and well-being of children who are abused or neglected or whose parents are otherwise unable to care for them (Webb & Harden 2003:49). Apart from the remedial action, the prevention of child maltreatment by social workers through community awareness on child protection is necessary.

**Tsholofelo** explained that she is involved in child protection campaigns at least four times in a year: *“We also do the awareness campaigns on child protection where we go to schools to do those campaigns... We do them four times in a year, because we do child protection. We also do the career guidance at schools, we also go to crèches, but that is a separate project where we provide the school bags to grade R learners who are going to Grade 1, so we also give them stationeries”* [Tsholofelo 44-50].

The participant's extract reflects that she conducts awareness campaigns at schools and crèches. Furthermore, her organisation provides stationery for other projects. The reasons for the awareness campaigns on child protection is to make the community aware of issues relating to child maltreatment and how to protect children from maltreatment. According to Molnar et al (2016:387), experiences of child maltreatment can have lifelong consequences on physical, mental, emotional, and sexual health. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that studies tracking the development of children who have been maltreated often find that they experienced pervasive problems in adjusting during childhood (Webb & Harden 2003:50). It is for this reason that social workers embark on raising community awareness of child protection in order to combat child maltreatment.

Awareness development is usually a progressive process that takes place on different levels, namely individual awareness, group awareness, and global awareness (Louw 2007:111-112).

- Individual awareness refers to the awareness of the self and one's position, and the ability to achieve change.
- Group awareness refers to the power of individuals, organisations, and governments over resources, opportunities, and decisions that affect their situation.
- Global awareness refers to awareness about people, the problem, and the potential to change.

The above-mentioned levels of awareness are necessary and they apply to community awareness of child protection. One of the challenges community-level prevention programmes face is gathering and maintaining support across the sectors where children are involved (Molnar et al 2016:392). Therefore, social workers have to gain trust and support from the community and other stakeholders. This means that in order for community awareness to be successful, social workers have to involve communities and other stakeholders in the process to avoid the top-down approach.

The next category presents the importance of information as articulated by social workers.

#### e) **Information**

**Mashego**, who is based at the Office of the Family Advocate, referred to information sessions for other government departments about his office's services.

*“As far as community work is concerned, we usually have invites from other departments to share information regarding the services rendered by our office. It is only on few occasions that we are invited when the departments are conducting campaigns and that is especially on family day. I think the reason behind us not invited often by government departments is because the services in the Office of the Family Advocate are not yet known to the people, but the courts and the Department of Social Development and other NGOs like FAMSA know about our services” [Mashego 69-76].*

From the participant's excerpt it is clear that he often meets with communities when invited by other departments and/or NGOs during their campaigns. The participant is often invited to share information regarding the kind of services he renders at his organisation. Although he did not mention anything about the campaigns organised and run at his organisation, the participant expressed that his organisation is only invited on a few occasions, especially during family days. However, he is adamant that people are not yet aware of the services offered at his organisation. According to Ambrosino et al (2012:117), social workers at the community level might serve in the educator role by providing information to facilitate change. Similarly, Black-Hughes and Strunk (2010:117) reiterate that, as an educator, the social worker informs the client of ways to access services, possible consequences of specific behaviours, opportunities for change and advancement, and information-processing techniques.

Another role assumed by the social worker is that of being a broker. A broker links individuals and groups who need help and do not know where to find it to community services (Zastrow 2012:39). In the broker role, the social worker helps clients navigate the maze of agencies to locate resources that are most appropriate to problem resolution (Ambrosino et al 2012:125). Through his/her role as a broker and educator, the social worker provides key information to the people in the community and this information includes, amongst others, access to services, resources, and agencies. As a result, providing information to people in the community is of vital importance for the social workers.

In this theme, social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations were presented. In the next theme, social workers' descriptions of the theoretical approach used in dealing with clients at their employing organisations will be presented. This will be presented in terms of sub-themes and categories where applicable.

### **5.3.2 Theme 2: Social workers' descriptions of the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients**

Theories assist social workers in understanding, explaining, or making sense of situations or behaviours and provide insight into what might have occurred in the past

or might occur in the future (Teater 2010:4). In other words, theories assist social workers in understanding various situations, difficulties, behaviours, and experiences. In general, theories are essential ingredients in practice that guide the way in which social workers view and approach individuals, groups, communities, and society (Teater 2010:1). Therefore, it is imperative for social workers to use theories at their employing organisations when dealing with clients.

There are different types of theories used by social workers (Payne 2014:5). Amongst others, some of these theories include the ecological/systems approach, ego psychology, the problem-solving approach, behaviour modification, reality therapy, the task-centred approach, the client-centred/person-centred approach, feminist therapy, and the solution-focused approach. In addition, Sekudu (2015b:93-106) suggests that the following theories are used in social work: the developmental approach, the strengths perspective, the empowerment approach, psychosocial theory, and crises-intervention. And so, the usefulness of theory in practice can be summarised into four main points, namely: theory helps us understand and contest ideas; it offers explanation and understanding; it offers a practical framework; and, finally, it helps us to be accountable, self-disciplined professionals (Payne 2014:11).

In this study, social workers were asked to explain the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients. The responses were at times not very clear or definite, and appeared to be mostly the approach followed by the individual social worker rather than that of the organisation. However, the responses are given in four sub-themes, namely no clear theoretical approach, PCA plus other approaches, a variety of theoretical approaches, and solution-focused therapy.

### **5.3.2.1 Sub-theme: No clear theoretical approach**

Over the years, social workers have adopted a number of theoretical approaches in their work with individuals, families, groups, and communities (Ambrosino et al 2012:109). Theories are plausible or scientifically acceptable general principles or bodies of knowledge offered to explain phenomena (Sheldon & Macdonald 2009:36). Without a clear theoretical knowledge, there would be no distinctive bank of knowledge on which social workers could draw to come up with plans to help the clients. The

reason for this is that knowledge of theories leads to evidence-based practice (Beckett & Horner 2016:12).

When asked about the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations, some of the social workers in this study mentioned that there is no clear stipulated theoretical approach used at their organisations. This is affirmed by Nomsa, Wilson, and Simpson's excerpts.

**Nomsa's** response to this question was: *"Not at the City of Tshwane"* [Nomsa 64].

**Wilson** confirmed Nomsa's statement: *"I would be lying if I can tell you that we use any of the theoretical frameworks. There is nothing like specific theoretical framework, but it is the departmental policy that we are working from the developmental perspective. Maybe the bigger programmes that we are implementing talk to that but for us on the ground I would be lying because there is no such... Maybe is one of the interesting concepts that we should begin to engage on internally with my supervisor as to which theories are we supposed to be implementing here"* [Wilson 81-88].

Simpson responded: *"We use our training as social workers that we received during our training as social workers. We also use the SOP which stands for the standard operation procedures, but it is not more of the content that you must do but more of a framework in terms of what forms to be completed and things like that. So I would say there is some form of framework, but it is not related to the content of what you must do. So when I do counselling I use my experience and what I have learnt during my training as a social worker... I am not someone for theories, but as a Christian social worker I use the Bible and that is my theory but it will never appear in a scientific research, because the Bible is not considered as something scientific. Much of my counselling is Christian based. What I like is the rational behaviour therapy, because I believe in changing the mind and behaviour of the person so if there was a theory it would be rational behaviour therapy. That I can focus on because my focus is changing the thinking of a person so basically that is my theoretical framework"* [Simpson 154-171].

The participants' excerpts reaffirm that they do not follow a specific theoretical approach at their employing organisations. Instead, they use their experience and knowledge gained during their training as student social workers. For that reason, Wilson is of the view that he needs to engage his supervisor and ask him/her about the kind of theoretical approach they are supposed to be using at his organisation. Apart from that, Simpson mentioned that his counselling is mainly Christian based, as he is a Christian himself. Simpson further stated that he would rather prefer to use rational behaviour therapy if he was to use a theoretical framework, because his focus is on changing the mind and the behaviour of the person.

According to Teater (2010:1), every social worker practices from a theoretical framework, whether they recognise it or not. In other words, social workers use theories in practice even if they may not be aware of the fact. This also applies to the participants in this study who articulated that they do not use any theoretical approach at their employing organisations. Teater (2010:1) reiterates that some social workers may not necessarily acknowledge or understand their theoretical framework, but rather practice from assumptions and beliefs that are guided by their personal or professional experiences and not necessarily from established and researched theories. In such situations, the social worker could be putting clients at risk of harm by practising from assumptions and the social worker's own values, versus established theories and the values set by the social work profession. Therefore, theoretical knowledge and its competent use are central features of professional social work (Forte 2014:1). Without a theoretical framework, it is impossible for the social worker to facilitate change in the client's life (Sekudu 2015b:83). It should further be noted that theoretical knowledge helps to build a competent social worker (Forte 2014:2).

In this sub-theme, the presentation was based on social workers' articulations that no clear theoretical approach is being used at their employing organisations. In the next sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of the use of the PCA and other approaches at their employing organisations will be presented.

### **5.3.2.2 Sub-theme: Person-centred approach plus other approaches**

Some participants in this study articulated that they mainly use the PCA at their employing organisations. Although they use other theories, the PCA is the main

approach used at their organisations. According to Corey (2017:7), the PCA was founded by Carl Rogers and it was developed during the 1940s as a non-directive reaction against psychoanalysis. The goal of the PCA is to help clients discover their true self, a self that has been hidden from the client's awareness (Teater 2010:192). The PCA is further based on a subjective view of human experiences and it places faith in and gives responsibility to the client in dealing with problems and concerns (Corey 2017:7).

**Petunia** was clear that her organisation follows the PCA: *"Mostly we use the person-centred approach, because our supervisor also studied at UNISA. The person-centred approach helps us to focus on the people's needs without necessarily forcing people to do something against their will. You will find that foster children who are uncontrollable go steal in other houses, especially those who abuse substances, we therefore encourage the foster parents not to pay for the damages incurred due to the child misconduct, but it also depends on the parent because we conduct meetings every Wednesdays where we are able to debrief on the options that we give them. That is when the supervisor would come on board and say we must not forget that we are using the person-centred approach and therefore we should be able to respect whatever the decisions made by the people, because it is up to them to ensure that they do what pleases them. They do not like the problem solving approach in our organisation"* [Petunia 182-194].

**Kim** also referred to the PCA, but added that she uses others as well: *"...I use client-centred therapy with short-term clients and I use the methodology of strength-based therapy. Basically, those are the main methodologies that we use, client centred approach, solution-based approach, to try and get to the speediest solution quite quickly for that person. We use those underlined approaches like your strength-based approach very strongly, because your people need to be empowered to solve their own problems and they are capable and able to do that so that they can manage their changes"* [Kim 87-95].

**Tsholofelo** referred to the PCA and the family systems approach: *"We use the person-centred approach and the family systems approach, it is mainly two theories"* [Tsholofela 98-99].

**Zodwa** also shared her preference: *“We do have theoretical framework that we use like the person-centred approach and that is the main theory that we follow, but for me I like the systems theory. I like it because when you see one person, you have to go deeper and you may find that other family members are equally affected by the situation. You need to look for an individual as a whole by looking at the functioning of the system”* [Zodwa 68-73].

Although the participants use other theories in dealing with clients, it is clear that they mainly use the PCA. The PCA seeks to provide an accepting emotional climate in which clients can work out their own solutions with support and reflection from the social worker (Ambrosino et al 2012:113). According to Grobler et al (2013:4), the PCA deals with the self or identity of a person and further looks at the experiences that a client cannot allow into his/her conscious mind, because the experiences threaten the client’s perception of who he/she is. Apart from the PCA, Kim articulated that she uses solution-based and strengths-based approaches at her employing organisation. The solution-based and strengths-based approaches emphasise personal development through shared experiences as a source of individual empowerment (Payne 2014:33). In other words, the solution-based and strengths-based approaches do not focus on the problems, but instead they focus on the solution and the strength of the client.

Besides the PCA, Tsholofelo referred to the family systems approach as one of the theories used at her organisation. The family systems approach is based on the assumption that the key to changing the individual is understanding and working with the family (Corey 2017:7). The insight of family systems is that many human situations are better understood in terms of the interactions between individuals, rather than in terms of individuals in isolation (Beckett & Horner 2016:195). In addition to the PCA, Zodwa expressed that she uses the systems theory at her organisation. A system is defined by Ambrosino et al (2012:50) as a set of units with relationships among them or an entity composed of separate but interacting and interdependent parts. On the same note, Payne (2014:33) suggests that systems theory integrates the interpersonal work with individuals with interventions with families, communities, and social agencies. Therefore, systems theory is used in social work because it assists social workers in understanding their clients’ systems in totality (Sekudu 2015b:96).

The next sub-theme presents articulations by social workers who use a variety of theoretical approaches at their employing organisations.

### **5.3.2.3 Sub-theme: A variety of theoretical approaches**

Mashego and Linda articulated that they use a variety of theoretical approaches at their organisations. This is what **Mashego** said: *“We use developmental theories, Erikson, psycho-analysis, and currently I am trained to employ African-indigenous theories by one author from Cameroon. I think it is good, because it also includes the spiritual aspect. Think it is good for us because we work with children from different background and environment, therefore it gives us options in terms of which theory to apply given a particular situation, hence I am saying we have variety of developmental theories, but we also use a book by Louw and Louw written on child development. I like this book because they have incorporated an African perspective on child development. The other theory which I use is the ecological perspective and it helps us to evaluate the environment with the child. I also like the systems theory especially when we enquire about the family background and so on. We also make use of the strength-based theory especially when we look at the strength of the parties of working together in order to better the chances of the child. Strength-based also assists us when we look at the stability and the resilience of the child to divorce. We also use the crises intervention and task-based theories, because we often handle cases of people who are in crisis, especially with children. I find these theories helpful...”* [**Mashego 136-153**].

**Linda** responded as follows: *“We mostly use family preservation in our organisation, because we do not do statutory work here at the counselling centre because we believe that families should stay together. We do not believe that you have to split or remove families if there are problems. We try to identify and use the strength in the families”* [**Linda 72-77**]. Later Linda added: *“Apart from family preservation we use the person-centred approach and we also use the psycho-analytical approach”* [**Linda 184-185**].

It is clear from the participants’ excerpts that they use different theoretical approaches in dealing with clients at their organisations. Amongst other theories, Mashego

mentioned that he uses the developmental, Ericson, psycho-analysis, African-indigenous, ecological, strengths-based, crises intervention, and task-based theories. On the other hand, Linda expressed that she uses the family preservation, person-centred, and psycho-analytical approaches. The use of a variety of theoretical approaches, also known as an eclectic approach, is common in social work practice. This resonates with the assertion by Miley, O'Meila and DuBois (2013:26) that social workers draw upon diverse theoretical perspectives to construct an eclectic approach. In Sheldon and Macdonald's (2009:46) opinion, social work is and should remain an eclectic discipline, as its field of operation means that it depends on concepts and findings drawn from a wide variety of sources/theories for theoretical sustenance. Many social workers use an eclectic approach whereby they integrate elements of different theories as a framework for understanding human behaviour and for practice (Ambrosino et al 2012:109). The following table portrays the main groups of practice theories in social work and their contribution to practice, as suggested by Payne (2014:33).

**Table 5.3: Main groups of practice and their contribution to practice**

Theory	Contribution to practice
1. Psycho-dynamic	- Emphasises the importance of people's internal feelings and conflicts in generating behaviour and in resolving the problems that they face.
2. Crises and task centred	- Focuses on brief, highly structured models of intervention with clearly definable problems that will respond to active efforts to resolve them.
3. Cognitive behavioural	- Emphasises the importance of the rational management of behaviour in understanding the source of people's problems and managing them.
4. Systems/ecological	- Integrates the interpersonal work with individuals and interventions with families, communities, and social agencies.
5. Macro practice/ social development/ social pedagogy	- Gives priority to the social and educational, engaging people with shared interests and concerns to work jointly to overcome them.
6. Strengths/solution/narrative	- Recasts clients and families' apparent problems, seeking strengths that enable them to build positively for the future.
7. Humanistic/existential/spiritual	- Emphasises personal development through shared experience as a source of individual and group empowerment.
8. Empowerment/advocacy	- Creates experience and alliances that empower people to achieve a greater understanding of their lives and the changes in them.
9. Critical	- Offers critiques to the present social order that analyse and deal with social factors that underlie problems or social barriers.
10. Feminist	- Explains and responds to the oppressed position of women in most societies through collaborative dialogue and group work to achieve consciousness of the issues affecting women's social relations.

11. Anti-discriminatory/ multicultural sensitivity	- Develops an understanding of cultural and ethnic barriers, conflicts, and differences, as well as practices that respect people's individual and social identities.
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The above table reflects some of the theories used by social workers from an eclectic point of view. According to Beckett and Horner (2016:18), social workers use an eclectic approach since there is certainly no single global theory that provides a blueprint for understanding and dealing with every aspect of every situation. The use of diverse theoretical approaches (an eclectic approach) enables social workers to understand their clients from a wide range of theories and perspectives.

The next sub-theme presents solution-focused therapy as one of the theoretical frameworks used by social workers.

#### **5.3.2.4 Sub-theme: Solution-focused therapy**

**Reneilwe**, who is a social worker in private practice, referred to solution-focused therapy as the only therapy she uses with her clients: *“Presently I am using solution-focused therapy, because we would be focusing more on solutions”* [Reneilwe 41-42].

It is clear from Reneilwe's extract that she prefers using solution-focused therapy/ approach, because she focuses more on solutions than anything else. Solution-focused practice is a short-term model of practice that seeks to amplify what clients are already doing well and help clients to realise a future where the problem is no longer a problem (Teater 2010:162). Similar views are shared by Ambrosino et al (2012:113) that solution-focused therapy often consist of a few sessions, during which the therapist guides the client through a series of questions such as “when does this problem you are talking about not occur?” and “if you could wave a magic wand and make this problem go away during the night, when you wake in the morning, how will things be different?”. Therefore, social workers who use solution-focused therapy assist clients through a series of structured questions in order to seek solutions to their problems. The focus is not on the problems faced by the clients, but rather on their strengths with the aim of seeking solutions to their problems. Solution-focused therapists state that trouble-focused stories worsen clients' troubles when they are treated as master narratives that define the most important aspects of clients' lives

and selves (Teater 2010:163). This means that the role of the social worker using solution-focused therapy is to help divorced persons identify solutions to their problems, as they are experts in discovering such solutions (Van Hook 2014:160).

In this theme, social workers' descriptions of the theoretical approach used in dealing with clients at their employing organisations were presented. The next theme presents social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons.

### **5.3.3 Theme 3: Social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons**

The social workers were asked to describe how often they deal with divorced persons. Most responded that they do not often deal with divorced persons, or rarely deal with them. However, two participants dealt with them more frequently. The responses are given in two sub-themes.

#### **5.3.3.1 Sub-theme: Not often**

**Kim** reported that she rarely deals with divorced persons: *“Not very often. I think the crisis is during divorce and they talk about what they have been through after divorce from the position of already coping, because they come to us when they are not coping. So we often see them when they are about to divorce, the deterioration in the relationship, the two or three year process of getting divorce, so it is very rare to see people who are divorced and are already coping. Unless there is something new that happens like if they have started a new relationship, then they might come for counselling”* [Kim 110-117].

**Linda** also shared that she did not often deal with them: *“We do handle cases of divorced persons, but they are not so many. If I was to put it in social work terms I would say it is separation cases, because they were never legally married and this is because of the nature or the lifestyle of the people around this area. It is very rare that you would find two people staying together being legally married, but they give birth to children together and that is why I said it is separation... Yes, we deal with cohabitation cases the most, but if they split it remains separation and it affect the children and the partners who are separated. They are very few divorced cases that we once dealt with.*

*People who mostly come for our services are Blacks, but the few Whites who come would be seeking assistance with regards to divorce. They would come to us because our services are for free and maybe they do not afford private social workers” [Linda 122-136].*

**Mashego**, who works at the Office of the Family Advocate, explained that he does not deal with divorced persons often: *“Remember, after divorce they get an order which has been issued by the court we do not necessarily see them again. However, some parties may come to report that the other party has relocated and therefore it is not in the best interest of the child and as a result they make an application, either to the High Court or the Regional Court, depending on the court that would have made a ruling then... That is where those organisations that I mentioned earlier come handy, because sometimes it may not be that the child does not want to visit the father or the mother, but it may be the relationship which is broken, therefore those organisations would be able to work on the relationship between the child and the mother or the father. This will enable to enhance the relationship between the child and that particular parent, for instance, it is difficult for the father to maintain a good relationship with the child especially if the parents divorced when the child is only a month old, but also the visitation rights would be structured in a way that it would suit the age of the child” [Mashego 221-238].*

**Nomsa** also does not often deal with divorced persons: *“I think most of the times you would mainly have the father and the mother who are already divorced, but the main issue would be about the maintenance money for the child because they would be fighting. Already the divorce would have been finalised and therefore the issue would be about the support of the child, access rights and all that. We try to deal with the relationship problems between the two divorced parents, but to be honest with you we don't get much of those cases because you would find that these are the people who are already divorced five years ago. In some cases, but only a few, we would deal more with cases of divorce, for instance, we would start with divorce but the request would be from the Master of High Court to write the report and then you do the divorce mediation and later the custody of the child, but here it does not happen because we do not do the statutory work and those involve the statutory work” [Nomsa 92-104].*

**Petunia** explained how they see people who say they are divorced when they are not legally divorced: *“You will find that we deal with at least two or three cases in a month, but mostly the cases that are reported are for separation, meaning that they are the cases of people who are divorced themselves, but the divorce has not yet been finalised in the court of law. You will mostly find that they couple are legally married, but no one of them want to go and initiate divorce. They would come and report to us that they have been divorced for almost three years, but when you get deeper into it, you find that they haven’t yet divorced legally but it is only separation”* [**Petunia 197-204**].

**Reneilwe** explained that she does “not really” see divorced persons: *“Not really. Mostly are people who are going through the divorce... I use bereavement counselling or grief counselling, because most of them are angry and they would be blaming other party for divorce. I try by all means to manage and contain the emotions of the loss of the relationship or the marriage... Going back to the question you have asked about the divorced persons, I remember now that it is mostly about them bringing the children who are nor coping as a result of divorce... That is where I do parenting guidance, but to tell you the truth, divorced persons do not come. They would only bring children under the age of 12, or 8 years old. Divorce is a challenge to children, especially those who were very young during the time of divorce, because they would often hear the older children talking about the nice times they enjoyed while staying with both parents and the young one would begin to wonder as to why the parents get back together and it stress them a lot because they never experienced it”* [**Reneilwe 78-95**].

**Simpson** described it as follows: *“No, I don’t actually get those who would say they are divorced, but you would only know that when they come for consultation and they have financial problems, then they are already divorced. Or the woman would come and say the husband does not want to pay for the maintenance. Those are the issues after divorce, but they won’t come and say they are divorced. Is only later that you realise that the person is divorced, so they come with the challenges and not actually the divorce itself, but it is because of the divorce that they have challenges”* [**Simpson 192-199**].

**Tsholofelo** explained that he has only dealt with one couple: *“To be honest with you since I started working here, I only dealt with one case of a couple who came to the office with the divorce decree and they were not in agreement with what was written there, especially, regarding the issue of supporting the kids financially. So we had to go through the divorce decree and their parenting plan was vague and not specific”* [Tsholofela 101-105].

It is clear that the majority of the participants in this study rarely deal with divorced persons, regardless of the high number of divorces worldwide, including South Africa, and the adverse consequences it brings. According to Nielsen et al (2014:705), a considerable proportion of all marriages in the Western world ends in divorce. On the same note, Preller (2013:73) postulates that approximately one third of all marriages in South Africa end in divorce. Divorced persons are commonly overwhelmed with emotions, including hurt, pain, anger, fear, sadness, jealousy, and grief (Emery 2012:4). Expanding on the adverse effects of divorce, Bowen and Jensen (2017:1364) postulate that divorced persons report increased levels of unhappiness, greater physical and psychological distress, more substance abuse problems, less dense and supportive social support systems, and lower levels of life satisfaction.

Based on the aforementioned extracts from the participants in this study, Kim, Mashego, and Reneilwe articulated that they mostly deal with cases of divorce during the process, and not after the divorce has been finalised. Kim is of the view that divorced persons rarely seek social work services, because they are already coping with divorce or they have found new partners. As for Linda and Petunia, they often deal with cases related to separation, as most of the people who seek social work services are not legally married, but are only cohabitating. Moreover, Nomsa, Simpson, and Tsholofelo expressed that they rarely deal with divorced persons and those who sought social work services are mainly those who need financial assistance for themselves and the upbringing of their children. This means that the majority of divorced persons rarely receive social work services. Instead they find a way of dealing with the aftermath of divorce by themselves. This resonates with the findings of the study conducted by Ntimo-Makara (2009:120) in Lesotho, which reveals that the majority of divorced persons are literally left on their own to either sink or swim. Although some divorced persons eventually recover from divorce-related stress, the

speed of their recovery depends on their ability to access resources, including social work services (Amato 2014:11).

The next sub-theme presents social workers' accounts of dealing with divorced persons.

### **5.3.3.2 Sub-theme: Do deal with divorced persons**

Two of the participants in this study articulated that they dealt with divorced persons more frequently. Wilson and Zodwa's excerpts affirm this.

**Wilson** explained that he does not often deal with divorced persons at his place of employment, but that they do come to his private practice: *"Let me put it this way, I would say I deal with most of those cases not here at social development, but on my private work as I have told you that I also practice as a social worker in private practice. The only time that I deal with cases of divorce, but I would not entirely say is divorce but more about parental rights and responsibilities to the child after divorce. I would say divorce is mostly dealt with by the courts and through the social workers at the Office of Family Advocate, they don't normally come to us. Yes, they come especially on matters relating to relationship problems and all that, but on my private capacity they do come. When I say on my private capacity I am referring to me maybe as a pastor, as I have told you that I am also a pastor; not as a social worker here in the Department of Social Development"* [Wilson 90-100].

**Zodwa** stated that she deals with divorced persons fairly frequently: *"It is a lot of cases and some would be in the process of divorce and others would have already divorced. As I have mentioned earlier that I do a lot of parenting plans most of the times so definitely most of them would have already divorced, so we do parenting plan about the kids"* [Zodwa 80 -83]. When asked about the issues mainly raised by divorced persons, **Zodwa** responded that they generally only revolved around access to children: *"Usually it has got something to do with the care and conduct... Remember maybe they would have divorced already and maybe the wife would have taken the kids then the ex-husband does not have contact with the kids and they want to be part of the upbringing of the children and therefore they would come to be assisted with the parenting plans"* [Zodwa 93-100].

From the participants' excerpts it is clear that they mainly provide parenting plans and mediation services to divorced persons, and not therapeutic services. Although Wilson expressed that he does not deal with divorced persons at his employing organisation, he deals with them frequently as a social worker in private practice. However, both Wilson and Zodwa focus more on the care of children after divorce, including the parental rights and responsibilities. According to McWilliams (2011:3), a parenting plan is a design for the way parents will raise their children after they are divorced. Similarly, Emery (2012:103) suggests that a parenting plan is a carefully specified agreement about children's schedules and parents' decision-making. Furthermore, Douglas (2006:15) postulates that parenting plans usually require that parents develop a plan or schedule of parent-child contact and other responsibilities. Therefore, the role of the social worker during the formulation of the parenting plan is to facilitate the process where both parents will participate and decide on the upbringing of their children after divorce, including their parental rights and responsibilities as stipulated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South African 2006a: Section 18).

Apart from parenting plans, the participants provide mediation services to divorced persons. Mediation is a conflict-resolution technique that is offered to and used by parents who are divorced and have continuing post-divorce conflict (Douglas 2006:15). The goals of mediation involve helping parents to negotiate more cooperatively, make their own decisions about what is best for their children, contain conflicts, and to truly protect the children's best interest (Emery 2012:3). According to Douglas (2012:19), mediators have variety of backgrounds and social work is one of them. As far as divorce mediation is concerned, divorce mediators encourage a civil, cooperative, compromising relationship, while moving the couple toward an agreement on the division of property, custody, and child support (Knox & Schacht 2010:511).

In this theme, social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons were presented. The next theme presents social workers' accounts of the social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons.

#### **5.3.4 Theme 4: Social workers' accounts of the kind of social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons**

Social work services to divorced persons is currently not a specialised field in South Africa, and therefore many social workers practice as generalist practitioners. Generalist social work practitioners utilise a variety of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families and groups, to promote physical, emotional, and social well-being (Segal et al 2013:149). In other words, generalist social work practice is aimed at promoting the well-being of the client system, including that of divorced persons. This means that a generalist social work practitioner operates within the parameters of the different fields of social work services. According to Ambrosino et al (2012:139-140), the fields of social work practice include services to address poverty, mental health issues, substance abuse, disabilities, health care, the needs of children, youth and families, older persons, youth and adults in conflict with the law or criminal justice system, social work in rural settings, and social work in the workplace.

In most instances, social work services to divorced persons are provided under the children, youth and family field of services. There is a range of social work services appropriate for taking care of the needs and wishes of divorced persons and this includes therapeutic and support services (Thoburn 2008:211). This resonates with the assertions by Schultz (2015b:180) that the role of a social worker in divorce matters is always therapeutic, but does not exclude mediation and parenting plan services. It is worth noting that therapeutic interventions are mainly executed through the casework and group work methods of social work practice. Through therapeutic services, a social worker is able to intervene on a one-on-one basis with divorced persons individually, or with affected family member/s (through the casework method), or as a group (through the group work method) to provide therapy or counselling.

Casework is when a social worker is involved individually with a client, including divorced persons who have problems, and it mostly includes problem solving (Arora 2013:41). On the other hand, group work is one of the social work interventions that not only potentially bring about social change and transformation, but also promote the development, problem solving, and empowerment of group members (Rasool & Ross 2017:206). Apart from the therapeutic services provided through the casework

and group work methods of social work practice, social workers provide mediation and parenting plan services to divorced persons. Divorce mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution in which a neutral person (an expert third party), helps parents to negotiate custody and perhaps financial arrangements as cooperatively as possible (Emery 2012:2). Conversely, a parenting plan can be created at any stage of a divorce, including after the divorce or legal separation (McWilliams 2011:8-9).

In this study, social workers were asked to describe the types of social work services sought by divorced persons and what services are provided to divorced persons.

#### **5.3.4.1 Sub-theme: Do not request services related to personal issues**

A number of participants described divorced persons as not seeking social work services for their own personal issues, and this is highlighted by Wilson, Reneilwe, and Zodwa's statements below.

According to **Wilson**, divorced persons do not require social work services, because they consider social workers as the last resort: *"In my studies what I have found out is that social workers, psychologists, and other helping professionals we are considered as the last resort, especially amongst Black people. People think that social workers are the last resort and that you can only go to them when things are falling apart. I think another reason is that people have perception of social workers as people who mostly deal with children related issues, they do not see social workers as people who can assist on a personal level as well. The third reason centres around relationships because as Black people we tend to think that issues of family should only be discussed within the family. This also includes the marital issues as well that you cannot discuss marital issues anywhere else, because if you do so you would be considered as somebody who is taking family matters outside the family or you would be seen as someone who is discussing family secrets with a stranger. This means that you would always be seen as someone who is involving outside people to family related matters, but the biggest one is that social workers are seen by the community as people who deal with grants issues, drug abuse issues, especially here at social development, social workers were not sold to people as counsellors, but as people who deal with grants and child related matters. As a matter of fact, people who have*

*medical aids would rather prefer psychologists as counsellors than social workers” [Wilson 104-124].*

**Reneilwe** also referred to divorced persons rather seeking help from psychologists: *“I think they are not coping, but they have given up. The other challenge is that our people prefer to go to psychologist than social workers, especially the Black people. I think they have a perception that we only help with the marital problems not beyond that. That is what I have observed that after divorce, they would rather go and see a clinical psychologist” [Reneilwe 99-103].*

**Zodwa** had another explanation of why divorced persons do not seek social work services for themselves: *“I think is the fear of being judged, because you were once married and that relationship ended just like that. I think most of them are still in denial, therefore they will not require counselling or any help. I also think that it has got something to do with the societal judgment or stigma” [Zodwa 118-121].*

This sub-theme and the participants’ stories reaffirm that divorced persons do not seek social work services related to their personal experiences. Wilson stated three reasons why divorced persons do not seek social work services, namely:

- People consider social work services as a last resort; they would rather try to handle their issues by themselves.
- People view social workers as people who deal with cases related to children.
- Black people believe that family issues should be discussed within the family and not with somebody from outside the family.

Reneilwe maintains that people, especially Black people, prefer psychologists to social workers, because they hold the perception that social workers cannot help beyond problems within marriage. Moreover, Zodwa thinks that divorced persons do not seek social work services because they are scared of being judged and the stigma attached to divorce.

Based on the above excerpts, it is apparent that participants do not have absolute reasons as to why divorced persons do not seek social work services. Instead they presented their opinions. However, they seem to share the same sentiments that

society does not perceive social workers as people who can assist with divorce-related matters, other than assisting with matters regarding the children of divorcing/divorced couples. The study conducted by Ntimo-Makara (2009:121) revealed that divorced persons needed some kind of counselling, as they were not getting this kind of service from the legal representatives handling their cases. This raises the question as to whether divorced persons are aware of the fact that they can also seek and receive counselling services from social workers and if not, it means that social work services to divorced persons are not well promoted. It is the social workers' responsibility to inform people who need help about the services available to them (Zastrow 2012:39). Social workers should assist clients in locating and accessing services within NGOs and government agencies (Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:116). In so doing, social workers can make divorced persons aware of the kind of social work services available to them through different platforms, for example community awareness campaigns, the media, and public service organisations. Social workers who have public speaking skills are better able to explain their services to groups of potential clients (Zastrow 2012:41). It is therefore imperative for the social workers to promote their services to divorced persons.

The next sub-theme presents social workers' accounts of the social work services sought by divorced persons for their children.

#### **5.3.4.2 Sub-theme: Assistance regarding children**

It is estimated that over a million children experience the divorce of their parents annually (Knox & Schacht 2010:504). Divorce is known to have significant and largely negative effects on children (Douglas 2006:1). Similarly, Harvey and Fine (2010:6) suggest that divorce causes a great deal of stress for children. Most research has documented that children of divorce are more likely to have academic problems, to display anger and aggression toward peers and family members, to develop problems with depression and anxiety, and to feel torn between their parents (Douglas 2006:1). Likewise, Harvey and Fine (2010:5) state that children of divorced parents are more likely to have internalising behaviours, such as anxiety and depression, as well as externalising problems, such as behaviour problems, health problems, and poor school performance, particularly dropping out of school. This suggests that children are just as affected by divorce as their parents are. In fact, Whiteman (2007:1)

suggests that children often suffer more from divorce than their parents, as they are flooded with emotions they do not understand.

In this study, social workers articulated that divorced persons usually only seek assistance regarding their children when they seek social work services. This is reflected by Wilson and Zodwa's excerpts.

When asked about the issues mainly raised by divorced persons, **Wilson** responded that the issues generally concerned the children: *"Mostly it would be about children and not about the emotional aspects in terms of how they are feeling after divorce, but you will end up touching on it in a form of giving the general consequences of divorce and how it may affect children and how they should deal with it. You just provide a general background, but mostly when they come to us it would be mostly about children"* [Wilson 164-169].

**Wilson** also referred to information about the post-divorce situation: *"Well, they would seek advices on what would happen after divorce. We just give general information about it without necessarily getting deeper into it, but we also give them information on how to protect the best interest of the child. I always urge man to fight for the access of their children... I am more passionate about men taking their roles on their children and this is something I would advocate for, because we grew up in times where our fathers were not there for us. I would encourage men to take responsibility and fight for the access of their children"* [Wilson 172-181].

**Zodwa** responded as follows: *"You won't believe that I still have clients, a couple whom the divorce was finalised in 2015 and still today I am still seeing them. They bring different problems every time... The problems relate to children, not about themselves"* [Zodwa 151-155].

Although participants did not mention the kind of social work services they provide to divorced persons' children, it is clear from their excerpts that divorced persons prefer to seek social work services for issues regarding their children instead of for themselves. This resonates with Clapp's (2000:138) assertion that many parents take their children to counselling sessions to ensure that they have appropriate coping skills

and are on track handling the divorce. Wilson mentioned that he normally provides divorced persons with information regarding the best interests of children and also how divorce affects the children. Moreover, to some extent he provides divorced persons with information about the consequences of divorce without getting deeper into it, although the divorced persons did not ask for such information. Zodwa stated that divorced persons bring different problems to her every time and these problems relate to their children. According to Whiteman (2007:4), the divorced persons' needs cannot effectively be addressed without helping them with their children. Successfully renegotiating the relationship between divorced persons who are parents is typically the key to resolving psychological and legal conflicts in divorce and ultimately to the children's well-being (Emery 2012:78). This means that divorced persons are concerned about the well-being of their children because of the fact that they would rather seek social work services regarding their children.

Participants in this study did not specify the kind of social work services they provide to divorced person's children. Instead, they mentioned that divorced persons mostly seek social work services regarding their children. To reaffirm this assertion, Wilson mentioned that he provides information to divorced persons related to the best interests of the children, but he did not specify the kind of social work services he provides directly to the divorced persons' children. This relates to Emery's (2012:2) sentiments that social workers and divorced parents can work together to ensure that the effects of divorce are not as severe for their children. Many people mistakenly think of children as miniature adults, but the truth is that the way children think and act is very different from adults (Whiteman 2007:15). Therefore, social workers who provide social work services to children of divorced persons should take into account this fact and apply the appropriate knowledge and skills when working with children. This relates to Clapp's (2000:138) assertion that working with young children involves the use of play therapy.

The next sub-theme presents social workers' accounts of social work services sought by divorced persons regarding assistance with their financial situation.

### **5.3.4.3 Sub-theme: Assistance with financial situation**

Simpson, Kim, and Petunia pointed out the fact that divorced persons often seek assistance with their financial situation. The following storylines confirm this.

**Simpson** referred to divorced persons seeking social work services regarding their financial situation: *“...you would only know that when they come for consultation and they have financial problems, then they are already divorced. Or the woman would come and say the husband does not want to pay for the maintenance. Those are the issues after divorce, but they won’t come and say they are divorced. Is only later that you realise that the person is divorced, so they come with the challenges and not actually the divorce itself, but it is because of the divorce that they have challenges... Is mostly the financial challenges when there is a fight because of the maintenance. Is either the member is not supporting or he has taken the children out of the medical aid... They want to punish the other person, but also the financial state because the other person has moved on and they have married someone else. They would want to put the other children on the medical aid and the medical aid is becoming too heavy now. They would prefer to cut the children off the medical aid and put the new children, because they are not actually connected to the old marriages”* [Simpson 193-210].

**Kim** also referred to the financial issues of divorced persons and added issues about their social adjustment: *“After divorce is about maintaining the financial well-being and that is the main issue. They are worried about losing their job and income during divorce, but after divorce is about how do I get back where I was and in terms of finances, some people can never get back to where they were previously during marriage. I can say after divorce they complain about financial and social adjustment. The whole idea of how do I see myself now, but that is much later. Most of the cases that I have seen straight after divorce were about how will my financial situation going to look like, how am I going to cope. I had a client who felt like her ability to cope was linked to her ability to gain financially freedom. It was more important for her to gain financial freedom than regaining from the emotional mess of being divorced. I have seen whole lot of such cases and looks like there is a score to settle, for instance, if I can keep my house and if I can keep my car then I have divorced successfully, because I do not want people to think that this person has left me worse off. That is not what I wanted to assist people with, they are more concerned about not being left*

worse off socially rather than emotionally and more of what people think and what people see” [Kim 130-146].

**Petunia** also described the financial situation leading to divorced persons seeking social work services: *“You will find that the father is unemployed and the court mandated him to pay for the maintenance of the children, the wife would still insist that the money is not enough regardless of the fact that the new partner would be earning enough money to take care of the wife and children. Then the wife would come to us alleging that the money is not enough and that the maintenance court is taking sides with the father of the children. Sometimes court sends them to us especially to complete the form about the needs of children... We also have cases where a woman would deliberately change the child from one school to another especially if the man has found himself a new lover, this would be purely to punish him by paying more for transport so that the money he used to spend for children would increase. Therefore, when she returns back to the maintenance court she is told that maintenance is not about the father paying, you should also make means as the mother to look for employment so that you may also assist the father. You also find that she becomes reprimanded for removing children from one school to another purely for the sake of increasing his expenditure. You will find her not providing enough reasons to remove children...”* [Petunia 266-285].

The above extracts from the participants point to the fact that divorced persons mostly seek assistance with their financial situations. According to Emery (2012:125), divorced persons suffer financially as a result of divorce. From Simpson and Petunia’s extracts, it is clear that divorced persons often seek assistance with maintenance payments for the children from their ex-spouses. However, both Simpson and Petunia articulate that sometimes this is done to punish the former spouse who has moved on with his/her life. Kim stated that the divorced persons she saw were mostly worried about the decline in their financial situations. This resonates with Knox and Schacht’s (2010:501) sentiments that getting divorced affects divorced persons’ finances, as they often experience a drop in their income. This is also supported by Emery (2012:125), who suggests that the standard of living of divorced persons declines as a result of divorce. The decline in the divorced persons’ standard of living may lead to a number of changes. For instance, Simonic (2014:206) postulates that the change

in the financial status of divorced persons can reflect in other forms of material loss, such as moving into less expensive housing, selling property, and leaving the community. Thus, divorce involves the loss of cherished possessions, savings, and financial plans.

In this theme, social workers' accounts of the social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons were presented. The next theme presents social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons.

### **5.3.5 Theme 5: Social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons**

The social workers were asked whether they were satisfied with the services provided to divorced persons and if they thought they were helpful. Their responses are given in three sub-themes, ranging from not satisfactory to helpful.

#### **5.3.5.1 Sub-theme: Not satisfactory**

**Zodwa** expressed that she was not entirely satisfied with the kind of services she provides to divorced persons: *"I don't think that I am entirely satisfied as I said earlier that for me most of the divorced persons that I see, I am assisting them to do parenting plan. Not entirely counselling, since most them are not coming for counselling anyway, but if they were coming then I would know how to help them as well. So I don't think we are doing a lot with divorced persons"* [Zodwa 126-130].

Clearly, the participant's dissatisfaction with the kind of services she provides to divorced persons is based on the fact that she only assists them with the drafting of parenting plans and not counselling. In other words, she would be more satisfied if she also provided counselling services to divorced persons. According to Preller (2013:40), a parenting plan is essentially a road map directing how children will be raised after a divorce. A parenting plan is a design for the way in which divorced parents will raise their children after divorce (McWilliams 2011:3). Unlike counselling, a parenting plan focuses strictly on the upbringing of children after divorce. Therefore, during the drafting of the parenting plan, the social worker strictly explores all aspects of family life, focusing on what is in the best interest of the child. As parents proceed through

the painful experience of divorce, they need to maintain awareness of what is in the best interest of their children (Sommers-Flanagan & Barr 2005:485).

The participant in this study articulated that she would be more satisfied if she were also providing counselling services to divorced persons. Counselling entails a process that is facilitated by the social worker to empower the client to develop skills and knowledge that will enhance his/her well-being (Sekudu 2015a:122). During divorce counselling, the social worker assists divorced persons to deal with the loss of their relationship, as well as the loss of love, dreams, a shared home, companionship, the status of being married, children, and many more (Petty 2006:147). Consequently, counselling empowers divorced persons. According to Miley et al (2013:84), the process of empowerment represents the ways in which client systems gain control over their situations. Therefore, divorce counselling addresses issues that pertain to being divorced and helps divorced persons to deal with future challenges.

The next sub-theme presents social workers' articulations that the services they provide to divorced persons could be more helpful.

#### **5.3.5.2 Sub-theme: Could be more helpful**

**Nomsa** explained how social workers could be more helpful and take more time with divorced persons: *"I think I may be right to I say I am not happy with the services, because you would find that we listen to the first person, for instance, the husband and you do not spend much time with the next person. In terms of theory, I am not sure if I should say we have forgotten the theory learned at the university or maybe we do not know how to apply it. Maybe it is the nature of divorce which makes it difficult to apply the theory, because divorce is so traumatic. Most of the times you would find divorced persons sitting far away from each other. I do not think we are doing enough in terms of counselling here in the municipality, I think we can do more. We can do more by spending enough time with the divorced person, because we are very quick involve the entire family... We spend little time, but let me give you an example with one case because we do not have a lot of divorced persons' cases. There was this man who once came to complaint about his wife and there is an adult daughter and the adult son. The daughter stays inside the house and the son stays in the backyard room, so his complaint was that (his) daughter and the mother side against him and*

*that was the presenting problem. As I was listening I realised that there is more to it, but in a long run it came out that he has marital problems with the wife. He then took me 20 years back when the wife had an affair and I was just thinking that we would have stayed with the presenting problem because we do not have enough time with our clients. We would have said that if it's about the wife and the daughter just bring them in and we will sort it out. But because I stayed with him longer and applied PCA that is why it ended up where it ended and it was easy for me to judge him, because he was saying I swore at her and chased her out, using nasty words and swearing. I think the problem started when she was having an affair and that hurt him a lot... I never called the wife in and he never came back... If we focus on the presenting problems and do not want to explore more..." [Nomsa 143-188].*

**Tsholofelo** was of the opinion that social workers could do more for divorced persons: *"I think as social workers we can do more maybe we tend to think that when people are divorced they live separate lives, especially if there are kids involved, there is still going to be a family. I think we need to have some post-divorce support provided by social workers" [Tsholofela 183-186].*

**Petunia** expressed her satisfaction with the counselling services, but she added that group work and community awareness are lacking: *"I think I am happy when it comes to individual counselling. The only challenge is group work and community awareness, because when we conduct the awareness divorced persons do not attend in most instances, especially on weekends because this is the only time when people do their shopping. Mostly we target those people who attend constantly visit our offices during the year, but they do not attend the campaigns. In short, we are still lagging behind in terms of group work and community work, but counselling is helpful. But sometimes they violate the court order due to the negative messages they send each other and eventually they refuse the other partner to have access to the kids regardless of what the court order says. Sometimes the parent who stays with the kids influences the kids to refuse contact with the other parent. At times you may find them having intentions to apply for the protection order, but as social workers we try by all means to sit them down and inform them that what they are doing is wrong because they cannot influence the kids to apply for protection order due to the challenges they are facing, rather they should not involve children in their business" [Petunia 363-378].*

The above excerpts reflect that the participants feel they could be more helpful in providing services to divorced persons. Nomsa thinks that it would be better if she could spend more time with divorced persons instead of involving other people prematurely. She further stated that her intervention has slightly deviated from the theory. In other words, she is implying that her intervention is not entirely guided by theory. This is in contrast to Payne's (2014:5) assertion that theory tells the social worker what to do and how to do it. According to Sekudu (2015b:92), theories are used in social work practice to assist the social worker in understanding the client systems better, so as to pave the way for appropriate intervention. Without a theoretical framework as a guiding principle, social work intervention would hardly be able to serve its intended professional purpose.

In addition, Tsholofelo suggested that there should be post-divorce support services provided by social workers to divorced persons. The post-divorce support services are essential in coping with the detrimental emotional and psychological consequences that divorced persons experience (Frisby et al 2012:716). On the same note, Clapp (2000:138) suggests that counsellors are good resources for divorced persons and their children to answer questions, offer practical suggestions, and to be on call if problems arise in the future. For that reason, post-divorce social work support services are crucial for divorced persons.

On the other hand, Petunia suggests that social workers should not only provide counselling services to divorced persons, but they should also start thinking of involving group work and community work methods, as little is done with those two methods regarding services to divorced persons. This means that Petunia is of the view that counselling is helpful for divorced persons, however she thinks that it would be more helpful if the group work and community work methods of social work practice could be involved in providing social work services to divorced persons. According to Rasool and Ross (2017:206), group work is one of the methods of social work intervention that can potentially bring about social change and transformation, and can also promote development, problem solving, and the empowerment of group members. On the other hand, community work is the method of social work practice that consists of various processes and helping acts of the social worker, that is

targeted at the community system with the purpose of bringing about the required social change with the help of especially community development, social planning, community education, social marketing, and social action as practice models (Weyers 2011:28). Through group and community work methods, social workers work with different groups and communities and use their knowledge and skills to bring about the necessary changes.

The next sub-theme presents social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the social work services they provide to divorced persons.

### **5.3.5.3 Sub-theme: Helpful**

**Kim** and **Tsholofelo** were of the opinion that the social work services to divorced persons were helpful. The excerpts below support this.

*“Yes, they are helpful” [Kim 179]. Kim said the divorced persons come back to her and state they are happy with the services and added: “I think divorce is emotional and it wreaks havoc on your sense of life and it creates loss. You just don’t want to talk about it over and over again, but if the therapy was beneficial, people process information every now and then” [Kim 182-185].*

**Tsholofela** also described social work counselling as helpful: “Yes, I think it is helpful to them” [Tsholofela 190]. She added: *“...divorce does not only affect the divorced persons, it also affects the children and the entire family as a system. I am saying that because as social workers we work with the kids and we work with the entire family as a system. I think we should be working with divorced persons’ cases” [Tsholofela 201-205].*

The above-mentioned excerpts reflect that the participants regard counselling services as helpful and beneficial to divorced persons. This resonates with Sekudu’s (2015a:123) suggestion that counselling is beneficial to clients in that it helps them to develop new skills that will assist them in understanding themselves better, and in interacting more effectively with their environments. Similarly, Logren, Ruusuvuori and Laitinen (2017:424) postulate that counselling aims to support people in their life challenges. With counselling, clients are helped to develop new perspectives that

enable them to use their newly developed knowledge and skills to deal effectively with their current and future challenges (Sekudu 2015a:123). Consequently, counselling is helpful and beneficial to divorced persons as it enables them to deal effectively with their current and future challenges related to divorce.

Social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons were presented in this theme. The next theme presents social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons.

### **5.3.6 Theme 6: Social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons**

After describing their satisfaction with and the helpfulness of the services they provide to divorced persons, social workers were asked whether the theoretical approach they applied was helpful for divorced persons. Their responses are given in three sub-themes, namely: no theoretical framework used; helpful, but could be improved; and helpful.

#### **5.3.6.1 Sub-theme: No theoretical framework used**

**Wilson** stated that he did not use any theoretical approach when working with divorced persons: "*No, I cannot remember of any theoretical framework that I use when working with divorced persons*" [Wilson 205-206].

The participant's assertion is supported by Teater's (2010:1) views that some social workers may not necessarily acknowledge or understand their theoretical framework, but rather practice from assumptions and beliefs that are guided by their personal or professional experiences and not necessarily from established and researched theories. This is expanded on by Gray and Webb's (2013:6) observations that some social workers believe that doing social work is more important than thinking about it. Every social work practitioner is the bearer of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts (Gray & Webb 2013:1).

The next sub-theme presents social workers' descriptions of the improvements that could be made in providing social work services to divorced persons.

### **5.3.6.2 Sub-theme: Helpful, but could be improved**

**Kim** was of the opinion that although helpful, her theoretical approach could be improved: *“It is helpful, but it could be improved. I find that because I have a lot of psychology experience, it is not pure social work, therefore I understand the presence of pathology, I understand the presence of mood disorder which gives me an advantage to know that the person is going through depression. For instance, when they do not want to wake up in the morning, when they do not want to come to work, they do not eat, they do not take care of themselves and children, they do not sleep, and I get to know that these are the symptoms of depression and I am able to say that go to see a doctor or a psychiatrist, because you need to be taking some treatment. If you only have to look at pure social work methodology, it is not enough. Even to trigger me to get closer to the person, I need to know what all the psychological aspects are, before I could go and look for a diagnosis or something, of course from a psychologist because I do not diagnose, I just pinpoint the symptoms that are visible and I can see if the person is deteriorating” [Kim 202-214].*

From the participant’s extract, it is apparent that she believes that improving her theoretical framework could also help improve service delivery to divorced persons. The participant further believes that the current social work methodology is not enough. This view relates to the suggestion by Ambrosino et al (2012:48) that since social work draws its knowledge base from many disciplines, many theories are applicable to social work. Similar views are shared by Miley et al (2013:23) that because of the multisystem and interdisciplinary nature of social work, practitioners draw from many diverse theoretical perspectives. These theoretical perspectives help practitioners understand the dynamics of human behaviour and the impact of the socio-political and economic environments. Eventually, knowledge of theories leads to evidence-based practice (Beckett & Horner 2016:12).

The next sub-theme presents social workers’ descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied in working with divorced persons.

### 5.3.6.3 *Sub-theme: Helpful*

**Petunia**, who had stated she uses the PCA, described her chosen approach as helpful: *“I find helpful because we remain impartial and do not take sides. Yes it is helpful, because I have never seen a person coming out of the counselling room angry about how the session was conducted. It is true that they might be having their differences, but I can say that nobody comes out of the counselling room angry to us. Even when you invite them next time they do co-operate, because they would be feeling respected and not being judged”* [Petunia 385-390].

**Simpson** also expresses that his theoretical approach is helpful in assisting divorced persons: *“Yes it is so helpful for me. I do the rational behaviour therapy as part of my workshops as well. It actually explains how the mind affects the rest of behaviour and when people realise this then I get very good response. They begin to learn that it is their thinking which is destroying them and not other people. By this realisation it becomes clear to me that the light is coming on. They begin to realise that they must begin to work on themselves and stop blaming other people and circumstances and society and so forth. They begin to take responsibility”* [Simpson 384-391].

The participants in this study expressed that the theoretical approaches they apply in working with divorced persons are helpful to them. Petunia mentioned that she uses the PCA and it is helpful to her. On the other hand, Simpson expressed that he uses rational behaviour therapy with divorced persons and he finds it helpful. According to Payne (2014:5), social work theory helps social workers to do or understand social work. Knowledge about how change occurs in individual systems, including divorced persons, influences the ways that social workers approach practice (Miley et al 2013:25). In this regard, the helpfulness of theory in practice can be summarised into four main points, namely theory helps us understand and contest ideas, it offers explanations and understanding, it offers a practical framework and, finally, it helps us to be accountable, self-disciplined professionals (Payne 2014:11). And so, participants in this study find the theoretical framework they use when assisting divorced persons helpful in meeting the afore-mentioned points.

In this theme, social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons were presented. The next theme presents social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons.

### **5.3.7 Theme 7: Social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons**

The social workers were asked to describe when and to whom they refer divorced persons to other resources. Their responses are given in three sub-themes, namely that they refer to psychologists, a social worker in private practice, or to the DSD and/or NGOs.

#### **5.3.7.1 Sub-theme: Refer to a psychologist**

**Kim** explained how divorced persons may be referred to a psychologist for long-term therapy: *"I do counselling or work-based interventions. We do counselling and it is a short-term counselling and we refer employees for long-term therapy. For any psychological counselling we have our own internal psychologist, but we also pay for employees to get therapy outside"* [Kim 16-19]. **Kim** explained further: *"For me the biggest one is to mitigate the psychological symptoms, the depression, is to try and do something about that, because once people are into that, they don't come to work at all. They don't wake up in the morning, they have got risk of suicide, they have got risk of so many psychological factors, basically complete dysfunctioning. I mainly refer because of that... I also do follow up and I do see them in between. If they go and see a psychologist they do come back, because I am working on a plan which clearly stipulates that we are dealing with the symptoms here, we are dealing with your interaction with your in-laws, basically we try to map out your whole life. Then we are able to say, in terms of dealing with your symptoms of depression, this is where you are, when it comes to your maintenance arrangements, your visiting arrangements, this is how you are handling it. Just to formulate a map in that person's life. So they come back, because I am monitoring all of that, different spheres of their lives basically"* [Kim 223-239].

**Petunia** also spoke of referring divorced persons to psychologists: *"We sometimes refer to the psychologists that are based at the hospital, especially for anger management, because as social workers we are not so fully equipped in that regard..."*

*We mostly refer those who are extremely fighting and full of anger and those who use the kids to achieve their own agenda... The psychologist helps a lot with the children after divorce in order to enable them to cope with the post-divorce experiences. But for those who fight about maintenance issues after divorce we are able to assist them by explaining to them that maintenance of children is the responsibility of both parents”* [Petunia 393-407].

**Reneilwe** mentioned referring to a psychologist, as well as referring some clients for play therapy: *“I think I have referred few cases to an educational psychologist. I also refer the cases of sexual abuse or sexual assault for play therapy. I can say that I mostly refer to the clinical psychologists and the educational psychologists. I can only refer to a psychiatrist if I feel that a person needs to be admitted”* [Reneilwe 202-206].

Just like Kim, Petunia, and Reneilwe, **Wilson** also mentioned that he refers to psychologists: *“So I can say that sometimes we refer such cases to the psychologists... where we realise that a person is struggling to cope emotionally and we would do that because as social workers we are not specialising in counselling, because we have got other work related commitments. That is why we refer such cases to someone who can assist them to cope with their situation and in this case I am referring to a psychologist”* [Wilson 209-223].

Participants in this study report that they refer divorced persons to psychologists for further intervention. For instance, Kim mentioned that she usually refers divorced persons to psychologists for long-term psychological counselling. Petunia refers divorced persons to psychologists for anger management and assistance with the children of divorced persons who are unable to cope. On the other hand, Reneilwe referred a few cases of sexual abuse or sexual assault to the psychologists. Wilson refers persons who are struggling to cope emotionally to psychologists. This relates to the assertion by Ambrosino et al (2012:38) that to serve clients effectively, social workers rely heavily on other professionals from other disciplines, including psychologists. Psychologists are counted among those whose formal role is to help people manage the distressing problems of life (Graumann 2009:2). The psychologists who assist with a client’s psychological and emotional problems are generally referred to as clinical or counselling psychologists (Ambrosino et al 2012:36). Additionally, the

core competencies of psychologists as defined by the Professional Board for Psychology of the HPCSA are psychological assessment, psychological intervention, and expertise in referral (Abel & Louw 2009:99).

In the next sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of referrals to social workers in private practice will be presented.

#### **5.3.7.2 Sub-theme: Refer to a social worker in private practice**

**Petunia** mentioned that some divorced persons are referred to a social worker in private practice: *“Sometimes we refer the matters to one of the private social worker in town, but we check with the clients first if it is fine with them. We explain to them that they will be liable to pay at the private social worker and they will not be given limited services. It is true that some go to the private social worker, but they do not pay at the psychologist”* [Petunia 395-399].

Social workers in private practice provide clinical services such as psychotherapy, couple's counselling, and family therapy (Rosenberg 2009:173). Apart from counselling, social workers in private practice are involved in child care matters, for example working with mediation and parenting plans, while others provide full-time training sessions at companies, addressing staff development and skills training for personal development, and presenting conflict and anger management courses (Schultz 2015a:201). This means that social workers in private practice carry a great responsibility regarding service delivery, including services to divorced persons. However, it is worth noting that social workers in private practice are mainly clinicians and that many of them develop a specialised practice niche (Rosenberg 2009:173-174). In addition to their professional duties, they also have the added responsibility of social work administration, including billing clients and keeping records of their income and expenditure, and need to be members of an association, such as the South African Association for Social Workers in Private Practice (SAASWIPP) or the National Association for Social Workers (NASW) to avoid isolation (Schultz 2015a:200).

In the next sub-theme, social workers' descriptions of referrals to the DSD and/or NGOs will be presented.

### **5.3.7.3 Sub-theme: Refer to the Department of Social Development and/or NGOs**

**Nomsa** explained that certain cases are referred: *“It’s like they come in for counselling and reach an agreement, but normally we refer them especially if it involves access, because we do not do statutory work, so if it is access or custody case we refer. In some cases the mother would allege that the father is sexually abusing the child and then we would refer such cases”* [Nomsa 151-155]. She further explained where she refers cases to: *“...we refer to the Child Welfare and Social Development, because they work in different areas. The Child Welfare works in the west and Social Development works in the east, but sometimes we refer them to the Master of High Court... Mostly it would be for the access to children, it would be for mediation, especially at the Child Welfare, because they do the mediation where they have to work on the parenting of children according to the Child Care Act. We also refer them to Children’s Court and the Master of High Court, but mostly at the Master of High Court is for custody purposes. We also refer them to Legal Aid Offices for matters relating to divorce”* [Nomsa 216-227].

**Simpson** explained that he does not undertake formal referrals, but informs divorced persons where to go: *“What I usually do especially with regards to maintenance cases is that I would send them back to the Department of Social Development and other NGOs, or to the maintenance court about getting the maintenance and things like that. So I haven’t formally referred any case of divorce, but what happens is that it is not a formal referral. I only tell the member that I cannot help you any further with this matter, but go to the DSD or NGOs for assistance. I sometimes tell them to go to the family advocate offices for assistance. Sometimes I give them the details of the person they are supposed to see even when it comes to rehabilitation, I just tell them that go to that rehabilitation centre”* [Simpson 394-403].

Both Nomsa and Simpson mentioned that they refer divorced persons to either the DSD and/or NGOs. The DSD is the focal point of actions aimed at supporting family life and the strengthening of families in South Africa (White Paper on Families 2013:46). The services provided by the offices of the DSD include prevention programmes, rehabilitation, protection programmes, continuing care, mental health,

and addiction services (Schultz 2015a:202). On the other hand, NGOs are generally perceived to employ social workers who specialise in different fields, such as working with children, youth, the elderly, cases of substance abuse, street children, disabled persons, and families, including divorced persons (Schultz 2015a:206). The fact that participants in this study indicated that sometimes they refer divorced persons to the DSD and/or NGOs for further intervention resonates with Popple and Leighninger's (2008:119) assertion that practitioners often refer clients to agencies with specialised skills.

Social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons were presented in this theme. The next theme presents social workers' opinions on whether they should provide services to divorced persons or not.

### **5.3.8 Theme 8: Social workers' opinions on whether they should provide services to divorced persons**

All the social workers in this study were of the opinion that they should provide services to divorced persons. Their responses to this question are exemplified in the following storylines.

**Linda** expressed the need for social workers to deal with divorced persons as follows: *"I think it is important for social workers to deal with the cases of divorced persons, because as you know that we have three primary methods of intervention in social work. Casework is basically about counselling and prevention. If a divorced person requires counselling then he or she needs a social worker to do so. The other thing is the mediation programmes, especially if there are disputes in the process of divorce. So it is very important for social workers to mediate for divorced persons, because they have children"* [**Linda 198-204**].

**Mashego** was definite about social workers providing services to divorced persons: *"Absolutely. The process of divorce is difficult for any person and therefore it is important that divorced persons receive counselling even if it means an individual counselling. Divorced parties now have to adapt to the new lifestyle, for instance, parties who have been married for the past 20 years need to be assisted to adapt to new life because the family structure would have been messed up and now you need*

*to adjust financially and emotionally. You need to get used to the fact that the person will not be there. Maybe for some people it might be a relief, but to many it brings trauma and other mentally challenging factors to children and divorced parties” [Mashego 241-249].*

This was echoed by **Reneilwe**: *“I think they should, because divorce is very traumatic. People like to internalise their issues and as a result of such unsolved issues, it would definitely impact on the new relationships of which they would enter in future. People should deal with the loss and the issues of divorce so that even when they enter into the new relationships, they would have dealt with their previous baggage. I think that divorce courts should begin to include the social workers” [Reneilwe 215-220].*

**Simpson** was also firmly convinced that social workers should work with divorced persons: *“In our profession as social workers we primarily work with families and divorce is breaking up families. You cannot counsel families and do restoration when there is divorce, because it is so interrelated and linked, that is divorce and healthy families. The main thing about social work for me is family life, to restore and maintain family life and divorce is one of the enemies of that. You cannot divorce from family life or from social work” [Reneilwe 410-415]*

**Tsholofela** also referred to the effects of divorce on family life: *“I think so, because divorce does not only affect the divorced persons, it also affects the children and the entire family as a system. I am saying that because as social workers we work with the kids and we work with the entire family as a system. I think we should be working with divorced persons’ cases... through counselling and forming the support groups” [Tsholofela 201-207].*

**Wilson** explained his opinion as follows: *“...and one of the advantages that we have is that we are able to work as a team in a team approach and that gives us an opportunity to protect the best interest of the child and also to educate divorced persons on what is happening to them, what will happen after divorce and how to cope with divorce, but also about the best interest of the child in the whole process of divorce. Social workers can also be able to deal with the traumatic stages of divorce which includes acceptance and how to take the person through the process and I think*

*those are the things which are very important. Divorce is a very complicated matter, because it deals with the lawyers, but if the social worker is there, even if it means to listen to a divorced person in order to help that person and the children to go through that process, it would be great” [Wilson 227-237].*

The above excerpts reflect that participants are of the opinion that they should provide services to divorced persons. Linda and Mashego feel strongly that social workers should provide counselling and mediation services to divorced persons. This relates to Clapp's (2000:156) suggestion that counselling is a great form of support for divorced persons. According to Seden (2008:163), the use of counselling skills and some supportive counselling remains a critical component in the best practice in social work. In divorce mediation, divorced persons meet with the mediator, a social worker, who helps them resolve issues of property division, child support, child custody, and spousal support in a way that minimises conflict and encourages co-operation (Mooney et al 2011:177).

Reneilwe is of the opinion that social workers should provide services to divorced persons so that when they enter into new relationships, they would have dealt with the baggage from their previous relationship. According to Cullington (2008:252), many people quickly begin new relationships or engage in a succession of relationships after divorce, and an extremely high number of these break down. Similar views are reiterated by Clapp (2000:185) that relationships built when one is feeling needy and vulnerable are usually built on shaky ground. Consequently, the participant reports that social work services to divorced persons are crucial in assisting them to cope with the challenges related to divorce prior to them getting involved in new relationships.

Additionally, Simpson and Tsholofelo are of the view that social work services are critical to the entire family and not only the divorced persons. For them, family life services are very important, because divorce affects everyone in the family. As reported by Boylan and Allan (2008:11), social work has long been dealing with problems related to family life and family relationships. And so, social workers provide family life services through family therapy or family intervention. This resonates with Dulmus and Sowers' (2012:128) views that family intervention is one of several methods used by social workers to facilitate the change process and to emphasise the

development of social skills. As a system-based approach, family-centred intervention emphasises the importance of family structure, family subsystems, boundaries, and the patterns of interactions as integral to understanding family functioning (Dulmus & Sowers 2012:58). In other words, interactions between families and their environments determine how family members, including divorced persons, adapt to the stresses in their environments.

Wilson feels that social workers should provide services to divorced persons in order to enable them to cope with the traumatic stages of divorce. This relates to the suggestion by Sbarra et al (2015:109) that the experience of divorce is a significant source of trauma and stress for divorced persons and their children, and constitutes a major life transition. Likewise, Stack and Scourfield (2015:700) postulate that divorce places divorced persons at higher risk of suicide. This means that the inability of divorced persons to cope with the traumatic effect of divorce may lead to adverse consequences, including suicide.

In this theme, social workers' opinions on whether they should provide services to divorced persons were presented. The next theme presents social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons.

### **5.3.9 Theme 9: Social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons**

The social workers were asked to describe the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons. Their responses are given in four sub-themes, namely that they are not specialists and have no specialised training, that there is a lack of resources, that divorced persons do not co-operate, and that it is emotionally draining.

#### **5.3.9.1 Sub-theme: Not specialists and no specialised training**

**Petunia** described the challenge of not being a specialist in providing social work services to divorced persons: *"I think social workers should provide services to divorced persons, but it should be an area of specialisation. Divorce matters should be dealt with by social workers who have specialised on divorce matters and it should not form part of generic social work. The danger of putting it under generic social work is that you end up not giving them enough time they deserve and some of the clients*

*who are waiting on the queue to be assisted may begin to complain especially when they realise that you are taking too much time. I think social workers can contribute a lot on matters relating to divorce if it can be specialised. Divorced persons deserve enough time to voice out their issues uninterrupted” [Petunia 413-422].*

**Wilson** also referred to the same challenge: *“The challenge is that we are not specialists in divorce. We are doing generic social work, which means that we are doing everything. As a result, we are not able to grow our knowledge in that specific subject of divorce and we are not able to market our services properly to communities. As a result, the community will not come out seeking assistance from us as social workers. I think the other thing is that we are only pushed to push the statistics more than helping people... It compromises the quality and the services, because the certain services will receive more attention than others. For an example, you would push for foster care and make sure that the foster care is being renewed on time and you fail to do the proper reunification process when the child is removed. It also affects the reunification processes between children of divorced persons and their parents, so I can say it affects service delivery to clients” [Wilson 240-255].*

**Tsholofela** identified the lack of training for this type of service as a challenge: *“I don’t know if it is just me, because sometimes when you feel like you do not have training on the specific issue, and I know that during our training as social workers we have studied about the skills but I think we need an in-depth knowledge about the divorce in terms of what it entails and how it affects people. I think the challenge is the lack of knowledge in that specific topic” [Tsholofela 226-231].*

Participants in this study are of the opinion that providing services to divorced persons should be a specialised field. Currently, the education curriculum for baccalaureate-level practice is developed around the generalist method of social work practice (Ambrosino et al 2012:30). As generalist social workers, they work with children, families, and the elderly as protective workers, serve as youth or adult probation workers, work in institutional care agencies that provide services for children or adults, engage in school social work, act as programme workers, work in mental health outreach centres, serve as family assistance workers in industry, or perform professional tasks in many other agencies providing human services (Ambrosino et al

2012:30-31). This implies that social work services to divorced persons are currently not specialised. According to Blom (2004:24), specialised services are services within social work rendered by a qualified social worker who possesses special knowledge or expertise in a particular field or subject. Similar views are shared by Doel (2012:164) that specialist social workers work on a specific level of intervention. Therefore, in order for the social work services to divorced persons to be specialised services, they have to be rendered by social workers who possess special knowledge and expertise in the field of divorce.

The next sub-theme presents lack of resources as one of the challenges experienced by social workers in providing services to divorced persons.

### **5.3.9.2 Sub-theme: Lack of resources**

**Zodwa** referred to the lack of resources as a challenge, particularly for NGOs: *“Challenges regarding the resources. I suppose you know that in NGOs we mostly have challenges with the resources. The set-up of the office is part of the lack of resources” [Zodwa 193-195].*

**Simpson** also mentioned the lack of resources and explained as follows: *“From my own point of view is the lack of resources. It is not so much the counselling itself and the information, because I give valuable information to members and I always provide handouts for my workshops. If I find that the person is having anger issues during counselling, I would give the person anger management handouts and if it is about relationship problems I will give the person handouts on relationships. The information is there, but the challenges that I usually encounter is that the members are working far away and sometimes on shifts and therefore you cannot always access them. You cannot get to them, because we do not have cars to drive to a member and that for me is one of the greatest challenges just to get to a member and for a member to get to me. They cannot just take off from work and even for me just to get to a member I must first get a car so I never tell a member that I am on my way, because I don’t have the car... we do not have vehicles as SAPS social workers, it is HRM [Human resource Management] because we are part of the HRM so we must go out and look for the car. Most of the times the vehicles are all broken or are in the garage or they have already been booked by someone else. Even if the commander tells me that I should*

*come because he has a problem, I cannot tell him that I am on my way because I must firstly find out if there is a car or not” [Simpson 418-437].*

From the above extracts, it is clear that the lack of resources at the participants' employing organisations is a major challenge in providing services to divorced persons. This resonates with Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Luyckx and De Witte's (2011:692-693) suggestion that the availability of resources enhances work performance. And so, resources are necessary for social workers to provide services to divorced persons. For instance, Wilson referred to the unavailability of vehicles for the purpose of visiting the clients as one of the greatest challenges for him, as some clients are far away from his office. According to Patel (2015:270), the organisation must take into account the delivery costs of the programme, including stationery, learning materials, airtime vouchers, transport, computer hardware and software, and attendance of training sessions, to mention a few. The availability of resources reduces burnout for the employee (Van den Broeck et al 2011:693). This means that lack of resources may also lead to burnout for the social workers.

The next sub-theme presents social workers' accounts of divorced persons' lack of co-operation as one of the challenges experienced in providing services to divorced persons.

### **5.3.9.3 Sub-theme: Divorced persons do not co-operate**

**Linda** described divorced persons not co-operating with the social worker, due to a variety of reasons, as a challenge: *“I think the challenge is consistency in terms of counselling. People do not honour their appointments. People do not come for follow-up sessions and the reason is poverty. They do not have petrol money or taxi fare to come to us. Sometimes they are scared to ask their boss at work, especially those who work in the farms. Even if you tell them that you will give them the letter after the session, they do not come. When I said they do not believe in counselling it is because they need solutions from us especially on divorce cases and they believe that when they arrive here you will just give them food parcels. They do not have time for the next appointment, all they want to see is their problem solved” [Linda 224-233].*

**Tsholofela** also mentioned the lack of co-operation as a challenge: “...*maybe sometimes it is the unwillingness of the other party to cooperate. Sometimes you may invite the divorced persons in the office and the other person would simply say, he or she is not coming because she or he is not interested in the matter*” [**Tsholofela 233-236**].

On the other hand, **Nomsa** described the lack of co-operation when the parties do not want to see or speak to each other: “*They do not want to see each other. When you try to invite the other partner to the office, they would mostly say that they do not want to see the other person and then you are stuck, because they do not want to talk to each other*” [**Nomsa 230-233**].

**Reneilwe** described lack of co-operation in clients not completing the required number of sessions: “*The challenge is that most of our people do not complete the sessions. When they feel like they are fine, they would just stop coming... they do not come for all the sessions as scheduled. What I do is that after my assessment I inform them about the number of sessions they would require. For instance, I may say to the person that you would need at least four sessions and you would find that the person just stop coming at the second session when he feels that he is okay. Some will be honest with you and tell you that I am fine, but some would just stop coming without telling you anything*” [**Reneilwe 225-234**].

Participants articulated lack of co-operation by divorced persons as one of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons. Linda stated that divorced persons do not honour their appointments, because they expect instant solutions to their problems from the social worker. In such instances, divorced persons disengage when they realise that the social worker is not providing them with solutions to their problems. This relates to Sekudu’s (2015b:91) assertion that disengagement between the social worker and the client might come abruptly, in cases where the client system is not satisfied with the progress made in the intervention process and decides not to continue with the helping relationship. Apart from that, Tsholofelo and Nomsa raised the issue of the unwillingness of the divorced couples to communicate with one another as one of the reasons for the lack of co-operation when they are invited for the session. The study conducted by Frisby et al (2012:720) revealed that

divorced couples reported less constructive communication, more conflict, and more avoidance. Also, divorced persons that have hostile and limited interactions with one another to avoid further conflict are regarded as angry associates (Frisby et al 2012:720). Reneilwe mentioned that divorced persons sometimes just stop coming for counselling sessions when they feel like they are fine. In other words, divorced persons would stop attending the counselling sessions when they no longer seek further assistance from the social worker. According to Graumann (2009:2), people seek counselling when they experience a difficulty or problems in living that they have never been able to solve. In such instances, divorced persons would discontinue the counselling sessions when they no longer experience problems or difficulties.

The next sub-theme presents social workers' accounts of the consulting sessions with divorced persons and how these sessions affect them emotionally.

#### **5.3.9.4 Sub-theme 9.4: Emotionally draining**

**Mashego** explained that consulting sessions with divorced persons can be emotionally draining and can affect the social worker's neutrality: *"The consultation processes sometimes are draining, because sometimes you get touched emotionally. As human beings we also go through challenges in our families and in one way or the other to get causes that you sometimes can identify with, but in such cases you just refer the case if you want to do justice to the matter. In most cases we try to be neutral, but sometimes it is difficult to be neutral but we try our level best to be neutral and to be focused as well, because our job also needs focus"* [**Mashego 252-258**].

From the participant's extract, it is obvious that consulting sessions with divorced persons are draining him emotionally. According to Cullington (2008:4), emotionally, divorce has the shattering impact of civil strife and breakdown. In most cases, social workers who are exposed to traumatic content as earwitnesses suffer from severe distress and/or burnout (Ben-Porat & Itzhaky 2015:607). A well-known term used in the literature to describe one of the negative consequences of therapeutic work for social workers is burnout (Ben-Porat & Itzhaky 2015:607). Social workers are considered to be at risk of burnout (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas 2011:230). Burnout is a well-known concept that describes a subjective psychological experience that involves feelings of being stressed, emotionally overextended, and drained by

one's work (Acker & Lawrence 2009:272). Burnout manifests in a gradual process leading to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and detachment from work, as well as the absence of accomplishment and effectiveness at work (Ben-Porat & Itzhaky 2015:607). Thus, the emotional exhaustion reported by the participant in this study relates to the concept of burnout.

Social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons were presented in this theme. The next theme presents social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons.

### **5.3.10 Theme 10: Social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons**

The social workers were asked to describe the needs of divorced persons and their storylines are given under three sub-themes, ranging from counselling to financial assistance.

#### **5.3.10.1 Sub-theme: Counselling**

Most social workers supported the idea that divorced persons need counselling. **Kim** explained it as follows: *"A lot of people do not believe in divorce themselves, although they are going through it. So getting therapy, good, transparent, non-judgemental, and good therapist is one of the fundamental resources, because friends are just so opinionated, the in-laws as well. You know good counselling is very difficult to find even if you are seeing a social worker or a psychologist. A person can ruin you, for instance, by telling you that don't get divorced meanwhile you are in a life-threatening situation. They do not believe in divorce and hence they are telling you not to do it. It is also a personal thing where a person is making a decision to break apart or to go back on her contract of which in my opinion is something that is never going to end, but when you are going through that process you have to receive each person's reasons and those reasons may not even make sense and you have to accept that because it is not your life. So, good counselling"* [Kim 261-273].

**Mashego** also emphasised the need for counselling: *"Counselling, we spoke about it. I think counselling would involve how an individual should cope after divorce. I also think that they need services on co-parenting and that process may lead to parenting*

*plans which enables parties to work in harmony together and put their differences aside. I think such services are needed as well, not that we are promoting divorce, but if it happens there is no way that we would run away from it” [Mashego 283-288.*

**Wilson** supported Mashego’s opinion: *“Divorced persons go through trauma and they need someone to walk with them through the entire process until they are able to accept and move on with their lives. Besides having to deal with their own issues, they must deal with their children who are also affected by divorce. They also have to deal with the changes of their lifestyles, because when you live with someone you adopt a specific life style and that change itself would need some support, it would need someone to understand it in order to understand it. It also brings the issue of maintenance and defaulting, because now one has to live within the ambit of the law. They also need guidance in terms of friends who were part of their marriage, because now they are staying alone. They would need guidance in terms of family relationships which has also been addressed in the parenting plan, for instances, about birthdays and things like that. But above all the emotional trauma that one goes through after divorce requires someone to be close by. It could be the sense of blame and failure, asking oneself lots of questions like, ‘what did I do wrong?’ and all the stages of trauma that one would go through after divorce” [Mashego 257-272].*

**Zodwa** also felt that divorced persons need counselling: *“Remember, they were once a couple and now you have to do things on your own. I think they need counselling really, just for them to be independent once more because they two and use to assist one another and now you have to do everything on your own. I think they might need counselling and I do not think that it is an easy process for them, whatever they might be going through, so I think it would be better to prepare them through counselling” [Zodwa 197-203].*

The above extracts reflect the participants’ views that counselling would be ideal in enabling divorced persons to deal with the aftermath of divorce. According to Logren et al (2017:424), counselling is aimed at supporting people in their life challenges, such as divorce, in a way that promotes their strengths and utilises their assets. Similarly, Sekudu (2015a:123) affirms that counselling helps divorced persons to develop a new perspective that enables them to use their newly developed knowledge

and skills to deal effectively with their current and future challenges. Through counselling, individuals are helped to cope with challenges in their lives (Chen 2013:73). Consequently, social workers seek to assist divorced persons to increase their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others, to develop more resourceful ways of living and bring about changes in their lives, through counselling (Miller 2014:110).

Emotional support is presented in the next sub-theme as one of the needs of divorced persons, as described by the social workers.

### **5.3.10.2 Sub-theme: Emotional Support**

Linda and Tsholofelo are of the opinion that divorced persons need emotional support, as supported by their excerpts below.

**Linda** explained it as follows: *“I think they need to be provided with the emotional support, especially from the professionals, because they would come stressed”* [**Linda 235-236**].

**Tsholofelo** shared Linda’s sentiments: *“I think they need an emotional support, because divorce can be so stressful. It can affect your work and other avenues of your life. So I would say they need an emotional support”* [**Tsholofela 213-215**]

Given the adverse consequences of divorce, it is clear from the participants’ extracts that emotional support is one of the needs of divorced persons. This relates to Simonic’s (2014:206) assertion that a wide range of emotions that are mostly negative accompany divorce and they include anger, guilt, fear, sadness, depression (sometimes accompanied by suicidal thoughts), bitterness, and feelings of frustration. This means that divorced persons experiencing these negative emotions would find it difficult to cope unless they receive emotional support from the professional social workers. Emotional support is a form of support that leads divorced persons to believe that they are cared for by social workers (Van Hook 2014:37). According to Jacobs and Sillars (2012:169), emotional support includes the expression of caring, concern, empathy, and reassurance. Furthermore, Pybis, Thurston, Dennison, Broom and Miller (2016:171) postulate that emotional support is when a professional person

supports, listens, and advises the client appropriately, depending on the needs of that particular client. Participants in this study reported that divorced persons need emotional support.

The next sub-theme presents financial assistance as one of needs of divorced persons, as described by the social workers.

### **5.3.10.3 Sub-theme: Financial assistance**

The need for financial assistance was highlighted by Tsholofela, Nomsa, and Kim.

**Tsholofelo** highlighted that divorced persons need some sort of financial assistance or financial advice: *“...maybe because divorce comes with some financial difficulties for some other people simply because they were dependant on their husbands for instance, so I think they would need some sort of assistance financially or financial advice for them to know how to approach their finances and just to learn to be independent, because after divorce you would be on your own” [Tsholofela 215-220].*

**Nomsa** spoke about material and financial needs: *“I think firstly is the material needs, because after divorce you would need a place to stay, I mean one of the people who are divorcing. The other thing is the financial need, because you will find that the other person has moved away with his or her salary or maybe he or she does not want to support the child” [Nomsa 253-257].*

**Kim** also stressed the need for financial support: *“Finance and support. Listening ear, because it is a crazy moment, so someone who would listen to you and listen to your moment and provide structured financial support. When I heard about your research topic, I thought that you were going to tell me that there is going to be a grant for people who are going through divorce, because that is exactly what they need. They need a stipend for six months and that would be a reprieve from financial burdens and that is why these people do not want to leave their marriages, because they ask themselves questions like, ‘how I am I going to pay for the car?’, ‘what if there is no taxi or bus route?’, ‘where would children go to school?’, and if you say to them here is accommodation, here is the transport to school, some services have social network*

*that you can utilise, we shall hold your hand, then we would have whole lot of people surviving this particular experience” [Kim 297-308].*

The participants' excerpts reflect that financial assistance and support is one of the needs of divorced persons. Their excerpts resonate with Emery's (2012:125) affirmation that divorced persons suffer financially as a result of divorce. According to Zagorsky (2005:410), the financial suffering experienced by divorced persons is caused by the reduction of divorced persons' earnings. On a similar note, Mooney et al (2011:172) reiterate that, following divorce, there tends to be a dramatic drop in divorced persons' income and this results in a lower standard of living, less wealth, and greater economic hardship. Balswick and Balswick (2007:313) confirm that the greatest difficulty experienced by divorced persons is a lack of economic resources. Adding to that, Van Hook (2014:29) states that struggling from day to day to meet basic needs leads to additional odds in coping with a variety of life problems, including divorce. Participants in this study reported that divorced persons need financial assistance.

This theme presented social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons. Social workers' suggestions for improvements on the social work services provided to divorced persons are presented in the next theme.

### **5.3.11 Theme 11: Social workers' suggestions for improvements to the social work services provided to divorced persons**

The social workers were asked to make suggestions as to how social work services to divorced persons could be improved. Their suggestions are given in five sub-themes, namely: create a specialisation in social work; design a programme for divorced persons; raise awareness of social work services for divorced persons; go back to the basics of social work; and remain objective.

#### **5.3.11.1 Sub-theme: Create a specialisation in social work**

**Nomsa** suggested that services to divorced persons should be a speciality in social work: *“There are not so many social work services to divorced persons, to be honest with you. I am trying to think about it, but I cannot think of any social work services specifically to divorced persons. With the material things I think we may be trying to*

*assist, but in terms of counselling and therapy. I think we are still lagging behind as social workers. The post-divorce experiences are so traumatic and therefore I think they need specialised social work assistance. Sometimes you may find that after divorce and mostly it happens with men who were (abusers) in their marriages and they would allege that the wife is mentally ill and it happens when they want to apply for the custody of the child. I was thinking that as social workers we do not really understand that whatever behaviour was as a result of that particular divorce and I think as social workers we need to do some extra readings in order to acquaint ourselves with the necessarily knowledge of understanding what these people are going through after divorce. I had a case of a mother who accused the father of sexually abusing the child and if I had no knowledge of what sexual abuse is all about I would have believed it and the father would have lost the custody of the child, but the mother was the one who was manipulating the whole situation... I think as social workers we don't have enough training even on marital counselling we also lack that knowledge... Sitting where I am now, I have no knowledge of divorce mediation and the relevant legislations because we were not trained" [Nomsa 272-299].*

**Simpson** implied that more training is needed: *"...when you think about divorce and all the problems that come with divorce like financial issues, because financial problems is common after divorce, and also the anger and the hurt, and again the issue about the kids and also to take care of the kids, those are the things that a social worker must be trained in, but also the consequences of divorce and whether they have answers to that. A social worker need to have answers in order to help those people cope with divorce. Social workers need to understand the damages caused by divorce and how they help those people and the kids to overcome those challenges. It is difficult also, because once they are divorced you don't get to see them ever again. Usually you see the partner who stays with the kids and it is only that person's story and you do not have the other persons' story. You will never get to know if the person is telling the truth, because you will never get the other person's story and that becomes difficult, because you work with one person. Again when you work with the kids, they are usually coached on what to say and what not to say so you will never know if the kids are telling the truth of not" [Simpson 475-490].*

**Zodwa** echoed the idea of social workers specialising in divorce: *“I think it would be better if it can be made a speciality where there would be social workers fully trained and who specialise in divorce. I think they can be assisted better that way, because for now we are only doing counselling but it is very generic. We do not really get into their shoes and feel what they are exactly feeling. So if we can make it a specialised field, they we would know that we should refer them to a specific person”* [Zodwa 206-211].

Participants in this study are of the view that in order to improve social work services to divorced persons, it has to be a specialised field. This notion by the participants is based on the fact that social workers lack knowledge and training on working with divorced persons and their children. It further relates to Blom’s (2004:26) suggestion that a clear trend within social work is to divide personal social services into specialised units and functions. Studies indicate that specialisation increases the social worker’s skills and competencies within the delimited area of his/her expertise (Raeymaeckers 2016:612). This happens because a social work specialist generally works with one system of practice and with specific levels (Doel 2012:165). Moreover, specialisation offers an opportunity to provide in-depth knowledge on very specific, complicated client problems, including divorce (Raeymaeckers 2016:611). Although specialisation is gaining popularity in social work practice, the vast majority of textbooks and curricula, particularly for BSW programmes, emphasise generalist practice (Blom 2004:26). Therefore, it is imperative to adjust social work curricula in order to pave the way for specialisation, especially on social work services to divorced persons.

A programme for divorced persons is presented in the next sub-theme as one of the improvements suggested by social workers.

### **5.3.11.2 Sub-theme: Design a programme for divorced persons**

**Wilson** suggested that there should be a programme for divorced persons with support groups: *“I think protecting the interest of children is very important by putting the divorced parents down and take them through the entire process on how they should protect the best interest of their children. I would say it is very important after divorce also, because this is where people fight even more. Therefore, it is very important to have a programme that would assist divorced persons to go through their*

*experiences especially when children are involved. Sometimes we need to have support groups in this regard” [Wilson 194-201].*

The study conducted by Lofthus and Skorpen (2016:166) revealed that a programme for the implementation of divorce groups was viewed as an important offer. However, support programmes after divorce are very rare (Velderman et al 2016:1). According to Patel (2015:207), social workers provide treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration services aimed at providing psychosocial support services, care, assistance with reintegration, and the achievement of an optimal level of social functioning through various programmes. For that reason, social work programmes to assist divorced persons would be beneficial, as suggested above by the participant in this study.

Raising awareness of social work services for divorced persons is presented in the next sub-theme as one of the improvements suggested by social workers.

### **5.3.11.3 Sub-theme: Raise awareness of social work services for divorced persons**

**Linda’s** suggestion revolved around raising awareness regarding social work services for divorced persons: *“As for social workers, I would recommend that sometimes it is important to reach out to our clients. We must provide quality services and we need to prepare especially when dealing with cases relating to divorce. We need to go out to the communities and make people aware of social work services available for divorced persons. I am saying that because divorced people think that divorce matters are only for courts and that is why I say it is very important to campaign and make our services known out there” [Linda 239-245].*

**Tsholofela** also commented on the need to raise awareness about social work services for divorced persons: *“...it feels like our services for divorced people are not out there. People are not aware of our services as social workers in the NGOs or DSD. Like I said that whenever they hear about divorce, they think about the courts and therefore we need to put our services out there so that people will become aware of the services we provide to divorced persons. They only come when there is a crisis; maybe after divorce they would feel that it is overwhelming and come to consult with*

*the social worker. Hence I said that we need to put our services out there” [Tsholofela 265-272].*

Improved networking between professionals is also linked to raising community awareness, as suggested by **Petunia**: *“I think the improvement would be on networking, because divorced persons have gone to court and they have consulted with the family advocates, but you will find that the family advocate does not communicate with the social workers to continue with counselling. That is why the divorced persons do not heal immediately. But if the courts and the family advocates would network with us it would be much better, because they would come in big numbers and we shall be able to establish groups. Currently you will find only one person coming after a long time and we are unable to establish groups” [Petunia 461-468].*

**Wilson** agreed that social work services should be marketed: *“I would say as social workers we need to sell our services and our expertise to the community out there. I think we are short selling ourselves and our abilities. In as much as divorce can be categorised, divorce has more important in the lives of people. If you look at the divorce stats given by the Statistician General, it shows that divorce is very high that is why I said that social workers need to sell their services and engage more on group work and community awareness as far as divorce is concerned, those are the thing we should focus on. If we can market our services, I think things would be much better and I also think that we should do more research and publish more” [Wilson 276-283].*

From the above excerpts, it is clear that participants in this study are of the opinion that raising awareness of social work services for divorced persons would assist towards the improvement of such services. Therefore, by raising awareness, social workers promote the services available to divorced persons. According to Patel (2015:208), promotion is one type of social work intervention aimed at promoting well-being through education and information programmes, including campaigns. Through the promotion of social work services to divorced persons, people become aware of the types of social work services to divorced persons and how to access such services. In promoting or raising awareness of social work services to divorced persons, social workers assume different roles and functions, including outreach, networking, and

educator's roles. In the outreach role, social workers inform a variety of audiences about social problems, describe social injustices, and suggest services and policies to address these problems (Miley et al 2013:17). On the other hand, the role of networker involves the formal and informal linking between people and organisations to share resources, contacts, and knowledge, but could also involve partnerships between organisations to achieve a common goal (Patel 2015:144). In the educator's role, the social worker informs the client of ways to access services, possible consequences of specific behaviours, opportunities for change and advancement, and information-processing techniques (Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:117).

The next sub-theme presents going back to the basics of social work as one of the improvements suggested by social workers.

#### **5.3.11.4 Sub-theme: Must go back to the basics of social work**

**Reneilwe** suggested that social workers should go back to the basics to improve their services: *"I think we should go back to basics. Do you still remember about the family preservation or couple enrichment? I think that if we can go back to the basics, maybe we can also reduce the high rate of divorce. If you can have a look now, social workers are mostly focused on foster care and we have forgotten about the care of the family, care of the couples, families and communities. Maybe the directorate in the Department of Social Development should revive and remind people about the core mandate of social work especially with regards to working with couples and families. Currently we have lost focus and we are using the reactive method, so I think we can go back to basics and start having family enrichment I think it would be better. But also, we should market our role as social workers, because social work used to be respected but now it a different thing altogether"* [**Reneilwe 271-282**].

The participant's extract reflects her suggestion for social workers to go back to the basics of social work in order to improve social work services. However, the participant's view does not express the improvement of social work services to divorced persons; instead it reflects the importance of prevention programmes through marriage enrichment in order to reduce the high rate of divorce. This relates to Patel's (2015:207) assertion that prevention programmes refer to interventions that seek to prevent or moderate major problems before they occur. On the other hand, Sager and

Sager (2005:212) postulate that marriage enrichment is a systematic effort to improve the functioning of marital couples through educational and preventative means. Marriage enrichment, according to Bowling, Hill and Jencius (2005:87), is an educational approach to help enhance couples' relationships. The purpose of marriage enrichment is to provide counselling to couples with tools to further develop their relationships into a meaningful, successful union (Petty 2006:144). This means that through marriage enrichment, couples are helped to preserve and enhance the positive aspects of their relationship and resist the negative influences that threaten their relationship. Although many of the programmes were created for couples that are functioning fairly well in their marriages, the programmes are increasingly being used for troubled and dysfunctional couples (Bowling et al 2005:87). Supporting this statement, Sager and Sager (2005:212) reiterate that many marriage enrichment programmes were initially designed for married couples with no severe conflicts, who perceive their marriage as basically healthy, and who seek to enliven their relationship and make it fuller. This suggests that marriage enrichment services/ programmes may also be provided to couples who are experiencing marital problems.

Social workers suggested that they must remain objective in order to improve services to divorced persons and this is presented in the next sub-theme.

### **5.3.11.5 Sub-theme: Must remain objective**

**Tsholofela** suggested that social workers should retain objectivity when dealing with divorced persons: *"...but I think as social workers we should be able to separate ourselves emotionally because I know that some of the social workers might have gone through divorce and probably have kids from their previous marriages, but we need to learn to separate ourselves. I might also be tempted to be judgemental, but I think we need to separate ourselves and be as objective as possible"* [Tsholofela 255-260].

This was re-iterated by **Mashego**: *"As human beings we also go through challenges in our families and in one way or the other to get causes that you sometimes can identify with, but in such cases you just refer the case if you want to do justice to the matter. In most cases we try to be neutral, but sometimes it is difficult to be neutral but*

*we try our level best to be neutral and to be focused as well because our job also needs focus” [Mashego 253-258].*

The participants in this study suggested that in order to improve service delivery to divorced persons, social workers must remain objective. Objectivity, as defined by Tong (2015:748), is the ability to separate facts from opinions and not be influenced by personal feelings. This implies that social workers must not be carried away by the divorced persons' feelings and forget to provide accurate services. This relates to Corey's (2017:175) suggestion that social workers should be able to share the client's subjective world with empathy, yet they must not lose their own separateness. A number of studies about effectiveness in social work suggest that in order to be successful, social workers must establish a relationship of commitment, trust, caring genuineness, empathy, and acceptance, and further employ clear and explicit procedures (Blom 2004:26). In order to apply objectivity, social workers must adhere to professional ethics and values, because the social work profession is based on and guided by these principles (Qalinge 2015b:9).

In addition, Mashego suggested that social workers must be neutral at all times when providing services to divorced persons. This relates to Petty's (2006:156) views that a social worker must remain free and deeply true to his/her self, feelings, and experiences, while at the same time being neutral. This assertion can also be associated with the principle of genuineness, which implies that social workers are real. In other words, they are genuine, integrated, and authentic during the session and their inner experience is in agreement with the outer expression of that experience (Corey 2017:174). Neutrality also implies that social workers refrain from judgement and must remain serene and imperturbable, and not react with embarrassment, shock, or disapproval when people discuss their painful experiences (Grobler et al 2013:41).

This theme presented social workers' suggestions for improvements to the social work services provided to divorced persons. The summary of the chapter will be presented in the next section.

## 5.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the research findings that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with the second group of participants, namely social workers. The findings of this study represent 11 themes together with the accompanying sub-themes and categories, where applicable. The themes, sub-themes, categories, and complementing storylines from the transcripts were subjected to literature verification. The demographic data of the social workers who participated in this study were provided before the discussion of the different themes commenced.

The **first theme** identified was social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations. Three sub-themes were introduced under this theme, namely casework, group work, and community work, and under each of the sub-themes categories were presented. The categories presented under the casework sub-theme include: intake, counselling, relationship and marriage, child neglect and abuse, foster care services, mediation and parenting plans, poverty alleviation, and drug abuse. The group work sub-themes include the presentation of the following categories: no group work, prevention, parenting groups, and groups for school children. Under the community work sub-theme, the following categories were presented: no community work, projects for the unemployed, substance abuse programmes, community awareness on child protection, and information.

The **second theme** presented social workers' descriptions of the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients. The social workers' descriptions were presented according to the following four sub-themes: no clear theoretical approach, PCA plus other approaches, a variety of approaches, and solution-focused therapy

The **third theme** expounds social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons. This theme involves the presentation of the following sub-themes: not often and do deal with divorced persons.

The **fourth theme** relates to social worker's accounts of the kind of social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons. This theme

encompassed the following sub-themes: do not request services related to personal issues, assistance regarding children, and assistance with financial situation.

The **fifth theme** focuses on social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons. The social workers' descriptions included the presentation of three sub-themes: not satisfactory, could be more helpful, and helpful.

The **sixth theme** is based on the presentation of social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons. This theme involves three sub-themes: no theoretical framework used; helpful, but could be improved; and helpful.

The **seventh theme** presented the social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons. This includes the presentation of three sub-themes, namely: refer to a psychologist, refer to a social worker in private practice, and refer to the DSD and/or NGOs.

The **eighth theme** relates to social workers' opinions on whether they should provide social work services to divorced persons. No sub-themes or categories were presented in this theme.

The **ninth theme** focussed on social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons. These challenges include the presentation of four sub-themes: not specialists and no specialised training, lack of resources, divorced persons do not co-operate, and emotionally draining.

The **tenth theme** involves social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons. The needs suggested by social workers involve counselling, emotional support, and financial assistance, and they were presented as sub-themes.

Lastly, the **eleventh theme** presented social workers' suggestions for improvements to the social work services provided to divorced persons. These suggestions were presented according to the following five sub-themes: create a speciality in social

work, design a programme for divorced persons, raise awareness of social work services to divorced persons, go back to the basics of social work, and be objective.

In the next chapter, the researcher presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study based on the findings.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter Four and Five, the findings of this qualitative study that emerged from the process of data collection and analysis with both groups of participants (divorced persons and social workers) were presented in terms of the themes, sub-themes, and categories. The findings, supported by participants' storylines, were complemented by a literature control, meaning that the findings were compared and contrasted with the existing body of knowledge. Therefore, the focus of this final chapter is to summarise the research endeavour, draw conclusions, and make recommendations pertaining to the topic. And so, the summary and conclusions will be presented in terms of the general introduction, literature review, and theoretical orientation of the study; the applied description of the qualitative social work research process adopted for this study; the demographic data of the research participants; and the research findings based on the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the process of data analysis of the data collected.

Thereafter, the limitations of the research study will be provided, followed by the presentation of the recommendations. The recommendations will focus on the development of guidelines that will inform social work practice and social welfare policies, and the suggestions for future research.

### **6.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this section, the researcher presents the summary and conclusions based on the general introduction, literature review, and theoretical orientation of the study; the applied description of the qualitative social work research process as the approach that guided this study; the demographic data of the research participants; the research findings for the first group of participants (divorced persons) presented in Chapter Four; and the research findings for the second group of participants (social workers) presented in Chapter Five of this research report.

### **6.2.1 Summary and conclusions based on the general introduction, literature review, and theoretical orientation of the study**

With regards to the summary and conclusions on the general introduction, literature review, and theoretical orientation of the study, the researcher first outlined the traumatic nature of divorce and its impact on the lives of divorced persons (Nielsen et al 2014:705; Frisby et al 2012:716; Sbarra et al 2011:455; Sakraida 2008:870). In most instances, divorce is associated with negative consequences in the lives of divorced persons (Sarkar 2015:92; Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364; Whiteman 2007:110). Across the globe, each country has its own legislation that regulates marriages and divorce. However, the historical nature of divorce points to the fact that before the 20<sup>th</sup> century divorce was mainly granted under 'fault' grounds, which means that one partner had to prove in court that the other spouse had committed some form of marital misconduct (Duzbakar 2016:118; Lopoo & Raissain 2014:4; Coontz 2007:8-10; Bouteillec et al 2011:194-204).

Through the process of a literature review, the researcher learned that South Africa is also affected by divorce, just like many countries across the globe (Preller 2013:11, 73). Moreover, the researcher observed that a number of studies reported high rates of divorce across the globe (Williamson et al 2016:1121; Perrig-Chiello et al 2015:387; Nielsen et al 2014:705; Symoens et al 2013:177; Toth & Kemmelmeier 2009:280). In addition, there are a substantial number of studies that reported different reasons for divorce, for instance infidelity, incompatibility, substance abuse, lack of commitment, conflict/arguing, economic hardship, lack of support, financial problems, domestic violence, and physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse, amongst others (Tumin & Qian 2017:2; Williamson et al 2016:1121; Scott et al 2013:133; Watson & Ancis 2013:171-174; Allen & Atkins 2012:1478).

Apart from the aforementioned reasons for divorce, the researcher learned that divorced persons often experience the negative consequences of divorce, for instance increased levels of unhappiness, greater physical and psychological distress, more substance abuse problems, less dense and supportive social support systems, lower levels of life satisfaction, deteriorated physical and psychological conditions, elevated risk of suicide, behavioural problems, financial hardship, and a decline in the standard of living (Stack & Scourfield 2015:697; Bouchard & Saint-Aubin 2014:481; Nielsen et

al 2014:705; Simonic 2014:205-207; Frisby et al 2012:716; Sbarra et al 2011:455; Sakraida 2008:871).

The researcher further became aware of the fact that divorced persons also experience challenges related to the upbringing of children (Markham et al 2015:2), as well as disputes and/or violence related to the custody rights, living arrangements of children, and economic hardship (Hansson & Laidmae 2014:89; Watson & Ancis 2013:167). The researcher became knowledgeable of the fact that the post-divorce relationship with an ex-spouse may be challenging, as divorced persons develop new types of relationships with each other following divorce, namely perfect pals, cooperative colleagues, angry associates, fiery foes, and dissolved duos (Frisby et al 2012:720-721). Apart from the challenges experienced by divorced persons, they also experience certain needs, for instance a need to spend quality time with their children, financial needs, and a need to love or to be loved (Markham et al 2015:21; Fagan 2012:464).

The challenges and negative consequences of divorce experienced by divorced persons attest to the fact that a post-divorce adjustment is necessary to enable them to cope with the transition process of changing relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles, as well as managing distress to re-establish a lifestyle (Sakraida 2008:869, 871). In this regard, the researcher observed that several authors have pointed to the factors that influence a person's ability to adjust to divorce, such as gender, education, employment, initiator or non-initiator role, and changes in life conditions (Perrig-Chiello et al 2015:388-389; Hansson & Laidmae 2014:89).

Although the White Paper on Families (2013:22-30) did not include divorce as one of the issues that affects families in South Africa, divorce rates remain high in the country and continue to affect divorced persons and their families (Abbassi & Nori 2015:21; Patel 2015:201; Ambrosino et al 2008:327). Consequently, social work services are crucial in addressing the multiple, complex transactions between divorced persons and their environments (Segal et al 2013:149; Rautenbach & Chiba 2010:5).

The researcher also learned that there are different fields of social work practice involving services to address poverty; mental health issues; substance abuse;

disabilities; health care; the needs of children, youth and families; older persons; youth and adults in conflict with the law or the criminal justice system; social work in rural settings; and social work in the workplace (Schultz 2015b:168-183; Ambrosino et al 2012:139-140). Social work services to divorced persons fall within the children, youth and families field of social work practice. The researcher also became aware of the fact that the role of a social worker in divorce matters is mainly therapeutic, as well as assisting with mediation services and parenting plans (Schultz 2015b:178-180). In this regard, therapeutic interventions are meant to assist divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce and to bring change in their lives, and are mainly provided through the casework and group work methods of social work practice whereby social workers use a range of theories and techniques or skills to promote the physical, emotional, and social well-being of divorced persons (Schultz 2015b:178-179; Segal et al 2013:149).

In the casework method, the helping process involves the development and implementation of a strategy for improving or altering some specified condition, pattern of behaviour, or set of circumstances in an effort to improve a client's social functioning or well-being (Sekudu 2015b:83; Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:105-114). It is worth noting that providing therapeutic services to divorced persons involves the utilisation of professional values and communication skills by the social worker (Sekudu 2015a:112; Grobler et al 2013:39-45). With regards to therapeutic intervention in the group work method of social work practice, the focus is on providing support and counselling to divorced persons experiencing difficulties and stress due to divorce, and there are different stages of group development (Corey 2016:70-112; Toseland & Rivas 2009:151-396). Therefore, the social worker also makes use of professional values, group leadership skills (Corey 2016:29-30), and different theoretical approaches to understand the experiences of divorced persons in order to determine an appropriate intervention (Sekudu 2015b:92; Ambrosino et al 2012:109 113).

In terms of the mediation services to divorced persons, the researcher noticed that mediation provides a means of resolving disputes that promises to reduce litigation while avoiding further damage to relationships (Palihapitiya & Eisenkraft 2014:1; Sotomayor-Peterson et al 2012:622). Conversely, parenting plan evaluative mediation may be necessary in order to provide intermittent, out-of-court assistance to divorced

parents needing expert help with parenting plan re-examinations or with resolving new child custody evaluation disputes (Palihapitiya & Eisenkraft 2014:1; Pickar & Kahn 2011:59)

Although several theories and approaches appeared to be relevant, the researcher identified three theoretical perspectives to guide this study, namely the strengths perspective, eco-systems perspective, and the person-centred perspective, as they offer frameworks for understanding and analysing the interrelationship between individual and social problems (Gray 2010:86) (See Chapter Two, section 2.9). The strengths perspective focuses on helping divorced persons in the context of an enriching collaborative partnership, to identify, secure, and sustain the range of internal and external resources that are required to live in the community normally and independently (Sekudu 2015b:93; Salleeby 2009:48; Yip 2005:446). On the other hand, the PCA rests on the assumption that divorced persons have the capacity to understand their problems and have the resources within themselves to resolve them (Corey et al 2014:116; Grobler et al 2013:3). Lastly, the eco-systems perspective views divorced persons and environments as having transactional problems and needs caused by some changes that might have occurred (Zastrow 2015:51; Miley et al 2009:35; Woodside et al 2006:259).

In conclusion: the literature review confirms that although there are various reasons for divorce, divorce has adverse consequences and results in many challenges in the lives of divorced persons. Therefore, social work services are necessary for post-divorce adjustment, as they enable divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce and manage distress. Reviewing the literature helped the researcher in gathering the historical development and current perspectives of the topic.

The summary and conclusions on the applied description of the qualitative social work research process are presented next.

### **6.2.2 Summary and conclusions on the applied description of the qualitative social work research process**

In this section, the summary and conclusions on the applied description of the qualitative social work research process will be presented. The researcher followed

the qualitative social work research process proposed by Carey (2012:17-28), as it clearly depicts the structure and stages of the qualitative social work research process (see Chapter Three of this report for a presentation of the application of the qualitative social work research process using Carey's framework). This process consists of the following stages: the selection of an appropriate topic and development of a research problem, reviewing literature relating to a topic, creating a research proposal and defining research methodology, applying the research method, analysing data, writing up findings and drawing conclusions, and lastly, disseminating findings.

The summary and conclusions based on each of the aforementioned stages are presented in the next sub-sections.

#### **6.2.2.1 Stage 1: The selection of an appropriate topic and development of a research problem**

This is the first stage of qualitative social work research suggested by Carey and it relates to the selection of an appropriate topic and the development of a research problem. In selecting the topic, the researcher considered the two most common problems associated with the selection of a suitable research topic as suggested by Carey (2012:19), namely a research question that is too broad and general, or a research question that is narrow and vague. Therefore, the researcher concludes that this stage of the selection of an appropriate research topic is vital and it helped the researcher to apply his mind carefully and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills required for the formulation of a suitable research topic (Nikolenko et al 2017:89). Besides this, there are a number of factors that motivated the researcher in the selection of the appropriate research topic, namely: social work teaching and practice, previous encounter with the topic, social policy on divorce, high rate of divorce, and policy and practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons (see Chapter Three, section 3.2.1).

The researcher further concludes that the development of the research problem was founded on the following reasons:

- The knowledge gap between the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons.

- The knowledge gap between the existing literature on divorced persons, social welfare policy, and the nature of social work services to divorced persons.

Given the adverse consequences of divorce (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364; Symoens et al 2013:178), the researcher was of the view that social workers should be able to provide appropriate and needs-based social work services to divorced persons in order to promote positive changes in their lives, as opposed to a generalist service delivery approach (Zastrow 2014:68; Segal et al 2013:149). As mentioned, the researcher could not find any evidence of studies conducted in South Africa regarding the nature of social work services to divorced persons. Most of the studies conducted previously focused on how divorce affects women and children (Jurma 2015:69-70; Hadad 2015:494; Jacobs & Sillars 2012:168 170; Vera 1993:3-4) and therefore little is known about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and their needs regarding social work services. In view of the above-mentioned, there is nothing documented in terms of social welfare policy and social work practice guidelines.

The next stage is about reviewing literature relating to a topic.

#### **6.2.2.2 Stage 2: Reviewing literature relating to a topic**

In this stage, the researcher explained the literature review in terms of the following sub-sections as described by Carey (2012:45-54): purpose of a literature review, stages of review, critical evaluation, key sources, and keeping records (see Chapter Three, section 3.3). Conducting a literature review is essential to developing a research idea, to consolidate what is already known about a subject, and to enable the researcher to identify any knowledge gaps and how the research could contribute to further understanding (Winchester & Salji 2016:308; Macfarlane et al 2015:11).

The researcher further identified and discussed the four stages of literature review suggested Carey (2012:46), namely theory and philosophy, history story and developments in the subject, latest research and developments on the subject, and lastly social research and methodology. It is worth noting that Carey reaffirmed that these stages are not compulsory. Regarding the theory and philosophy, the researcher adopted the participatory and post-modern philosophy based on its democratic stance on both the researcher and the participants. In this regard, the researcher concludes

that the participatory and post-modern philosophy was appropriate and allowed the participants to share their views out of their own free will and in a non-threatening environment. Apart from the participatory and post-modern philosophy, the researcher adopted the following theoretical approaches based on their relevance to the topic: the strengths perspective, the eco-systems perspective, and the person-centred perspective.

During the process of the literature review, the researcher focused on both old and new literature in order to determine the historical development of the subject (Torraco 2016:404; Carey 2012:47). In so doing, it helped the researcher to provide a clear indication on how the same problem was addressed in the past and to identify gaps or contradictions that may have emerged over time. As mentioned, the researcher became aware that no previous studies have been conducted which focused on social work services to divorced persons and that there are no policy and practice guidelines regarding social work services to divorced persons. It should be noted that the process of literature review helped the researcher to decide on the qualitative research approach based on its relevance to the study.

In order to achieve the goal of critical evaluation, the researcher found the following methods suggested by Carey (2012:50) useful. Thus, the researcher:

- considered carefully the arguments presented by authors and whether they are sound and consistent;
- assessed the quality of evidence presented to support a thesis and general arguments;
- assessed how and if an article is linked to his own research and topic;
- assessed whether evidence originates from, and is supported by credible sources, such as other people's research, data, or arguments;
- evaluated how an article or chapter compares with other publications, arguments, and research findings;
- explored whether the use of supporting theory is sound and how this compares to completing theoretical standpoints.
- assessed the strengths and weaknesses of any findings and discussions; and
- appraised the research methodology utilised in comparison to others.

Although the researcher used textbooks, government publications, previous dissertations, chapters in books, and research reports, his main source was published journal articles. The researcher therefore concludes that the articles published in academic journals and other sources used for this study were useful and helped him in identifying 'gaps' in the literature. Finally, the researcher kept electronic records of literature sources and relevant information gained during the process of the literature review. These records were kept in accordance to names of authors, title of each source, dates of publication, and a detailed summary of the source.

In conclusion: the stage of reviewing the literature was of utmost importance as it provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the previous and current studies conducted related to the topic and helped in identifying some possible gaps.

The next stage focuses on creating a research proposal and defining the research methodology.

### **6.2.2.3 Stage 3: Creating a research proposal and defining research methodology**

#### **(i) Creating a research proposal**

In this stage, the researcher discussed the creation of a research proposal, followed by the definition of the research methodology. The research proposal should comprise a number of stages including, amongst others, the research question, aim, objectives, methodology, ethics, and timetable (Carey 2012:24-26; Waller et al 2016:41; Chambliss & Schutt 2013:264). And so, in the creation of a research proposal the researcher followed the six stages suggested by Chambliss and Schutt (2013:265) on how to create a research proposal, namely:

- An introductory statement of the research problem was provided. This is where the researcher also clarified his interest in the study.
- A literature review, in which the researcher clarifies how his research problem and plans build on what has already been reported in the literature review on the same topic, was presented.
- A methodological plan was described, detailing just how the researcher will respond to the particular mix of opportunities and constraints he might face.

- A budget, presenting a careful listing of the anticipated costs, was included.
- An ethics statement was provided, identifying issues relating to human subjects in the research and how the researcher will respond to them in an ethical fashion.
- A statement of limitations, reviewing the weaknesses of the proposed research and the presenting plans for minimising their consequences, was provided.

In view of the above, the researcher concludes that the aforementioned stages were relevant and successfully helped him to draft the research proposal, which was later presented and approved by the Research Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at UNISA.

## **(ii) Defining research methodology**

Methodology is a set of ideas, theory, or philosophy that surrounds, encompasses, and literally holds together a research project (Carey 2012:83). The researcher identified and defined three kinds of research methodology that can be followed by the researcher in the process of his research, namely: qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed methods (Creswell 2016:3). Therefore, the qualitative approach places emphasis on insights, meanings, and interpretations (Creswell 2016:3; Marshall & Rossman 2016:2; Fawcett & Pockett 2015:54). On the other hand, quantitative researching is about determining the relationship between facts and measures of reliability, generalisability and validity, and these are backed up by established statistical tests, which are seen as externally verifiable and are central to the methodology (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:72; Westerman & Yanchar 2011:146). Furthermore, mixed methods research is a systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study for the purpose of obtaining a fuller picture and a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010:272; Johnson et al 2007:119).

In conclusion: research methodology forms part of the research proposal and identifies the ways in which data are collected and analysed, including the philosophical and theoretical framework that will support the project (Carey

2012:25). The researcher adopted and incorporated a description of the qualitative research method in the research proposal presented and approved by the departmental Research Ethics Committee.

The next stage involves applying the research method.

#### **6.2.2.4 Stage 4: Applying the research method**

In this stage of applying the research method, the researcher discussed the following sub-sections: the research questions, the goal of the study, the objectives of the study, the motivation for choosing the qualitative research method, research design, and data collection (see Chapter Three, section 3.5).

At the onset of the study, the following research questions were posed:

- What is the nature of social work services rendered by social workers to divorced persons?
- What are the needs expressed by divorced persons with regard to social work services?
- How do the experience-based perspectives of social workers and divorced persons regarding social work services to divorced persons inform the development of social work practice guidelines and social welfare policies?

The research questions stated above resonate with the goal of this study, which was formulated as follows:

***“To develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.”***

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal, the following research objectives were formulated:

- To explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons.
- To explore and describe the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services.

- To explore and describe guidelines informing social work practice and social welfare policies.

In addition, the following task objectives (i.e. the steps to take to realise the goal) were set in order to realise the aforementioned research goal and research objectives:

- To obtain a sample of social workers who provide social work services to divorced persons and divorced persons seeking social work services through purposive sampling.
- To conduct semi-structured interviews in order to establish the nature of social work services provided by social workers to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons on how they would like to be supported by social workers.
- To sift, sort and analyse data according to eight steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Tesch (in Creswell 2009:186).
- To explore and describe the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to how they would like to be supported by social workers.
- To draw conclusions on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services, and make recommendations on practice and policy guidelines for social work services to divorced persons.

The researcher's decision to use the qualitative research method was motivated by the fact that the qualitative research method takes place in a natural setting, uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, focusses on context, is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, and is fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman 2016:3; Creswell 2016: 6-9; Denzin & Ryan 2007:580).

The researcher employed an explorative, descriptive, and contextual research design. An explorative design examines a subject that is relatively new, thereby trying to gain an understanding of the issue (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:53; Green & Thorogood 2009:25; Krysik & Finn 2010:58). Therefore, the researcher concludes that an explorative research design was helpful based on the fact that little was known about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs expressed by divorced persons regarding social work services.

Descriptive research designs are most useful for describing phenomena or events about which little is known or identifying new or emerging phenomena (Grove et al 2013:632; Rossman & Rallis 2012:34; Babbie 2010:93). And so, the researcher concludes that a descriptive research design was helpful in describing and presenting the detailed personal accounts of the participants' experiences (divorced persons and social workers) on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services.

Lastly, a contextual research design is a design which enables the researcher to focus on specific events in their naturalistic settings (Fawcett & Pockett 2015:55; Chambliss & Schutt 2013:179; Burns & Grove 2010:32). In conclusion, a contextual research design assisted the researcher to consider the contexts and/or settings in which social work services are provided, namely the private sector, NGOs, private practice, government departments, the socioeconomic factor, gender, ethnicity, and the uniqueness of the participants' experiences.

With reference to the population and the sampling process for the study, the researcher concludes that the inclusion of the divorced persons provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore and describe their needs regarding social work services, whereas social workers were afforded an opportunity to describe the nature of the social work services they provide to divorced persons (see Chapter Three, sub-sections 3.5.5.1, 3.5.5.2 and 3.5.5.3).

The researcher further used the purposive and snowball sampling methods for this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the settings and specific individuals within them are recruited by virtue of some angle of the experience related to the topic under study that might help the researcher to understand the topic better (Thorne 2016:98). In purposive sampling, a researcher deliberately chooses people who he/she believes will provide him/her with the basic and best data he/she requires (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:97; Carey 2012:39). In snowball sampling, the researcher begins with one or two participants and then builds the sample by moving on to interview other people recommended or introduced by the initial participants (Chambliss & Schutt 2013:99; Carey 2012:39; Cohen & Arieli 2011:424). Therefore, the researcher concludes that the purposive and snowball

sampling methods were appropriate to adequately address the research goal and objectives. However, data saturation was reached after 10 social workers and 10 divorced persons were interviewed.

As for the methods of data collection, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that the individual face-to-face, semi-structured interviews together with the techniques used were profoundly helpful in managing the process of data collection. Semi-structured interviews integrate a combination of pre-planned and spontaneous questions, which allow the researcher some discretion to ask new questions in response to participants' answers or body language (Carey 2012:112). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a general plan for the topic to be discussed, but does not follow a fixed order of questions or word these questions in a specific way (Packer 2011:43). It is worth noting that the process of gaining access to participants, preparation for data collection, methods of data collection, and testing of the data collection instrument are expansively described in Chapter Three (section 3.5.6.1, 3.5.6.2 and 3.5.6.3).

The next stage focuses on data analysis.

#### **6.2.2.5 Stage 5: Analysing data**

The process of data analysis begins once the researcher begins to collect data and intensifies later during the research process (Marshall & Rossman 2016:215; Chambliss & Schutt 2013:207; Carey 2012:26). Data can be analysed using different methods and approaches, as there are many different approaches to data analysis (Marshall & Rossman 2016:17; Paulus et al 2014:115; Green & Thorogood 2009:197).

For this study, the researcher followed the eight steps of Tesch's approach to data analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2009:186) (see Chapter Three, section 3.6). The descriptive analysis technique of Tesch's eight steps is extensively expounded in Chapter Three (section 3.6). In this regard, the researcher concludes that Tesch's steps of data analysis were useful in the conceptualisation and coding, examining relationships, offering interpretation, and generating possible categories and themes.

The next stage involves writing up the findings and drawing conclusions.

### **6.2.2.6 Stage 6: Writing up findings and drawing conclusions**

The process of writing up relates to stage six of the qualitative social work research process in terms of Carey's (2012:17) framework. The researcher's findings carry an imperative to disseminate these findings and new knowledge that ultimately is of benefit to service recipients, service users, colleagues, students, policy-makers, and other researchers (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:125). This process of writing up entails the following reasons: to persuade the reader to take action, to persuade the reader to accept a particular view, to express understanding or support for a cause, to affirm a continuing position, and to establish the author's reputation in a particular field (Fawcett & Pocket 2015:125).

The researcher began the process of writing up with the creation of a research proposal, which was later presented and approved by the departmental Research Ethics Committee, as explained in Chapter Three (section 3.4.1) of this report. The researcher continued with the writing up process during data collection and data analysis, as also explained in Chapter Three (section 3.5.6 and section 3.6) of this report. These processes took place when the researcher transcribed the audiotaped interviews and analysed the data. In other words, the writing up process happened in every step of the research study.

In addition, the researcher followed the structure of writing a research dissertation or report suggested by Carey (2012:237-238), which comprises the following six sections:

#### **(i) Explaining the purpose of the research**

This section includes the reason why the researcher undertook the research and what the research questions or social problems being explored were. It further includes the aims and objectives of the research (Carey 2012:237). Therefore, the researcher concludes that this section is covered mostly in Chapter One, as it reflects the general introduction, research problem, the significance of the study, research goal and questions, and the research methodology.

**(ii) Describing how the research was done**

This section includes how the research objectives guide the researcher's work, what research methods were applied, the theoretical orientation that influenced the research process, methods of data analysis, and the findings (Carey 2012:237). The researcher concludes that the description of the application of the qualitative social work research process for investigating the chosen topic is presented in Chapter Three, whereas the theoretical framework and literature review are reflected in Chapter Two of this report.

**(iii) Presenting the findings from the research**

This section involves the presentation of the research findings and it is the largest section of most reports and dissertations (Carey 2012:237). The researcher concludes that the findings of this research are extensively presented in Chapter Four (divorced persons) and Chapter Five (social workers) of this report.

**(iv) Discussing and analysing the findings**

In this section, the researcher contextualised his findings by comparing them with previous research and factors that might impact upon findings (Carey 2012:238). Furthermore, the researcher is expected to extract meaning and ways in which the findings can be linked to social work practice. And so, the researcher concludes that the findings of this research are expansively discussed and analysed in Chapter Four (divorced persons) and Chapter Five (social workers) of this report.

**(v) Reaching conclusions**

This section deals with questions regarding what the researcher has discovered and learnt from the study completed (Carey 2012:238). It also includes the improvements and revisions that might be made regarding social work practice. The overall conclusions of the study are outlined and presented in Chapter Six of this report.

**(vi) Making recommendations**

This section involves how the research findings might influence future practice and how policy, legislation, or general practices need to be revised (Carey 2012:238). This is a relatively brief section. Thus, the researcher concludes that

the overall recommendations of the study are outlined and presented in Chapter Six of this report.

The overall conclusion of this stage is that the structure of writing a research dissertation suggested by Carey (2012:237-238) was more appropriate and helped the researcher in the process of writing up.

The next stage is about the dissemination of the research findings.

#### **6.2.2.7 Stage 7: Disseminating findings**

Qualitative research by its very nature is meant to be relevant to a particular audience (Thorne 2016:240; Chambliss & Schutt 2013:272). Dissemination represents the distribution or spreading out of research findings and it may influence the practice or the lives of other people, including service users or colleagues (Carey 2012:241). However, deciding on an audience for dissemination involves questions on how and where to publish, including through media (such as radio, television, and newspapers); the internet; a poster or report; journals, books, or magazines; or a presentation at a conference or group meetings (Matthews & Ross 2010:473).

The researcher concludes that the forms of dissemination used by the researcher as suggested by Carey (2012:241) were more relevant and appropriate to this study. These forms of dissemination include: handing in the research dissertation to be marked; allowing a colleague to read the dissertation; making the research available to the public, for instance in the library and on the internet; allowing research findings to directly influence our beliefs and those of other people; allowing findings to influence social work practice; the discussion of research findings with social work colleagues or service users and carers; writing an article for a social work magazine or an academic journal; presenting an oral paper at a conference; and integrating any findings in future research (see Chapter Three, section 3.8.1).

The researcher further concludes that Guba's model (cited in Krefting 1991:215-222), which comprises the characteristics that ensure trustworthiness, such as truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality, was appropriate and useful for data verification (see Chapter Three, section 3.8.2). Finally, the researcher observed the

following ethical considerations for this study, namely: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, data management, and debriefing and beneficence. Given the sensitive and the traumatic nature of the topic under investigation, the researcher concludes that the ethical considerations applied by the researcher were helpful in evading possible risks, protecting identities, and managing information (see Chapter Three, section 3.8.3).

In conclusion: the researcher is adamant that the aforementioned stages proposed by Carey (2012:17-28) were appropriate and useful, and enabled the researcher to remain focused for the duration of this research study.

The summary and conclusions based on the demographic data of the first group of research participants will be provided next.

### **6.2.3 Summary and conclusions based on the demographic data of the research participants: Divorced persons**

In this section, the summary and conclusion based on the demographic data of the first group of research participants (divorced persons) will be provided (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). A total of 10 divorced persons, comprising five males and five females, were identified and recruited to participate in this study. Participants were between the ages of 32 and 55 and they come from different racial and ethnic groups. For instance, there were six Black participants, two Whites, one Coloured, and one Indian, and their ethnic groups include, Venda, Tsonga, Tswana, Pedi, Sotho, Ndebele, Zulu, Swati, Xhosa, English, and Afrikaans. Nine of the 10 participants have full-time jobs and only one is unemployed. For example, there is one professional nurse, one correctional officer (Warder), one police officer, two admin clerks, one community liaison officer, one colonel from the SANDF, one social worker, and one HIV/AIDS counsellor. It should be noted that the social worker who participated in the first group (divorced persons) did not participate in the second group (social workers).

In addition, three of the participants have academic qualifications and seven of them only have matric (grade 12). The academic qualifications for the three participants include a Bachelor's degree in social work, a diploma in nursing, and a diploma in public administration. However, two of the seven participants who only have matric

(grade12) are studying towards a Bachelor's degree at a university. Additionally, seven of the participants (which constitute the majority) have not remarried and three of them have remarried, and the average interval between the finalisation of divorce and getting remarried is three years.

Consequently, the researcher concludes that the participants (divorced persons) enabled the researcher to gain insight into the nature of social work services and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services.

The next section presents the summary and conclusions based on the demographic data of the second group of participants.

#### **6.2.4 Summary and conclusions based on the demographic data of the research participants: Social workers**

This section provides a summary and conclusions based on the demographic data of the second group of research participants (social workers) (see Chapter Five, section 5.2). A total number of 10 participants, comprising seven females and three males between the ages of 31 and 50, took part in this study. Eight of the participants were Black, one was Coloured, and one was White. The participants represent 10 different organisations, including governmental organisations, NGOs, and private practices, namely ESKOM, the HPCCC, the Office of the Family advocate, the City of Tshwane, the Catholic Women's League, the SAPS, the CMR, the DSD, and FAMSA. The participants' work experience varies between the minimum of four years to the maximum of 27 years. All participants are in possession of a BSW degree and only one of them is registered for a Master's degree in social work.

In conclusion: the researcher is convinced that the participants enabled him to obtain an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding to social work services.

The summary and conclusions arising from the research findings with the first group of participants will be presented next.

## **6.2.5 Summary and conclusions arising from the research findings: Divorced persons**

In this section, the summary and conclusions arising from the research findings with divorced persons will be presented. This involves the presentation of the summary and conclusions derived from nine themes (see Chapter Four, section 4.3).

### **6.2.5.1 *Theme 1: Divorced persons' accounts of their marital life experiences prior to divorce and why they divorced***

From the participants' accounts of their marital life experiences prior to divorce and why they divorced, the researcher came to the conclusion that some of the participants experienced a good relationship initially, some said that their marriage comprised both good and bad experiences initially, and others stated that there was no communication in the marriage. A good marital relationship mainly comprises the following nine components: mutual acceptance, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sex and affection, children and parenting, family and friends, and equalitarian role orientation (Cohen et al 2010:728; Balswick & Balswick 2007:73-74). Thus, a marriage that lacks the aforementioned components results in a bad marital relationship which ultimately leads to divorce. Most of the studies conducted revealed that lack of communication was the nature of the divorced persons' marital relationships prior to divorce and this negatively affected their marriage (Farbod et al 2014:1; Cohen et al 2010:740; Noland 2008:20).

Apart from a lack of communication, participants described the circumstances that led to their divorce, such as extramarital affairs/ infidelity, abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, joblessness/unemployment, child's disability grant, and cultural differences. This resonates with the findings of the study conducted by Scott et al (2013:133) which reported that lack of commitment, infidelity/ extramarital affairs, too much arguing or conflict, economic hardship, lack of support from a spouse, financial problems, substance abuse, domestic violence, marrying too young, little or no premarital education, and religious differences were the main reasons for divorce.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that extramarital affairs/ infidelity, abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, joblessness/unemployment, and cultural differences are the main reasons for divorce.

The next theme relates to participants' accounts of their lives after divorce.

#### **6.2.5.2 Theme 2: Divorced persons' accounts of their lives after divorce**

From the participants' responses after being asked to give their accounts of their lives after divorce, the researcher concludes that divorced persons mostly experience negative aspects, as opposed to positive aspects. However, it is worth noting that although divorced persons mainly experience a decline in well-being, others experience an improvement and resilience (Frisby et al 2012; Mooney et al 2011:172).

Participants in this study mostly expressed the negative aspects of divorce, including post-divorce difficulties and loneliness. More recent reviews of the divorce literature continue to reveal negative outcomes for divorced persons, as they often experience deteriorated physical and psychological conditions for years after divorce, including guilt, depression, distress, and intimacy issues (Sbarra et al 2015:109; Frisby et al 2012:716). This relates to the assertion by Malgaroli et al (2017:1) that divorce is a highly aversive event that has been shown to significantly impact on a person's physical and psychological well-being.

The next theme involves the summary and conclusions of participants' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce.

#### **6.2.5.3 Theme 3: Divorced persons' descriptions of the challenges they experienced after divorce**

From the participants' responses, it is clear that they experienced challenges after divorce. The challenges experienced by the participants' after divorce include stigma, challenges related to children, financial challenges, and lack of support from the church. With regards to stigma, participants articulated that they were socially rejected and discriminated against, and mostly felt devalued. These views relate to the findings of the study conducted by Saleh and Luppicini (2017:188) which revealed that divorced persons were faced with social consequences of divorce, which include rejection, exclusion, and lack of respect. A stigma is an attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context, which includes being the target of negative stereotypes, being rejected socially, being discriminated

against, and being economically disadvantaged (Toyoki & Brown 2014:715-716; Madera 2013:458).

Participants further expressed that they are worried when their children are negatively affected by divorce. In this regard, the majority of the studies in literature on divorce find that parental divorce has adverse effects on children's development (Al-Zamil et al 2016:177; Kim 2010:487; Lansford 2009:141).

Another challenge articulated by the participants in this study relates to finance. This view resonates with Zagorsky's (2005:408) suggestion that divorce causes a sharp fall in income. Similarly, Lavelle and Smock (2012:414) reiterate that divorced persons experience a substantial decline in income after divorce and they start out with fewer resources.

Lastly, divorced persons in this study articulated that they did not receive support from the church. According to Murray (2002:191), married persons and their fellow parishioners may have divergent opinions if they decide to divorce and they will have to discern the blurry lines of religious and societal values. For instance, Christians believe that God desires permanence in marriage, and that married Christians must do all that they can to save their marriages (Balswick & Balswick 2007:309).

For that reason, the researcher concludes that divorced persons are faced with many challenges after divorce and these challenges are related to, amongst others, stigma, children, finance, and lack of support from the church.

The next theme presents the summary and conclusions of participants' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce.

#### **6.2.5.4 Theme 4: Divorced persons' accounts of the losses they experienced due to divorce**

When asked to explain the losses they experienced as a result of divorce, participants in this study articulated that they experienced financial loss, loss of companionship, loss of self-esteem, loss of trust in the opposite sex, and loss of security. This relates to Cullington's (2008:43-53) assertion that divorced persons may lose their houses,

neighbourhoods, income, children and friends, self-worth, and innocence. Echoing Cullington's opinion, Emery (2012:40) states that divorce involves the loss of lover, a mate, a partner, children, extended family, friends, control, trust, security, a home, savings, cherished possessions, and financial plans. Expanding on this, Jakoby (2015:111) suggests that change implies a loss of control and threat to the continuity of everyday life.

Participants in this study further expressed that divorce resulted in financial loss. This corroborates Murray's (2002:191) views that divorce often brings financial loss. Conversely, Zagorsky (2005:410) reiterates that divorce causes many individuals to reduce their income earning efforts.

Apart from financial loss, participants expressed that they experienced loss of companionship due to divorce. According to Terhell et al (2004:720), divorce involves the losses of relationships that were shared by divorced persons with their former spouses, such as in-laws and friends. Adding to that, Drew et al (2004:381-382) postulates that loss of companionship has some negative consequences, which include emotional, social, and economic distress.

Another loss experienced by participants after divorce relates to the loss of self-esteem. This is in agreement with Clapp's (2000:40) sentiments that divorced persons' self-worth generally take a plunge after divorce. The study conducted by Saleh and Luppicini (2017:193) confirms that divorced persons are likely to suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence as a consequence of divorce. Clapp (2000:40) also states that divorce is usually very hard on a person's self-esteem, as it evokes feelings of rejection, worthlessness, and failure.

Furthermore, participants articulated that they experienced a loss of trust in the opposite sex. This confirms the statement by Frisby et al (2012:719) that divorced persons may suffer from anxiety, a loss of trust, and increased worry about being hurt in future relationships, and further corroborates Clapp's (2000:184) assertion that after divorce, divorced persons may have no interest in either dating or sexual intimacy. Tark et al (2008:3) suggest that divorce may damage a person's ability to trust, and as a result diminish the intimacy and emotional bond with a new partner.

Lastly, participants shared that they experienced loss of security due to divorce. In other words, marriage brings some sense of security to married couples and therefore divorce results in a loss of security. This reaffirms the findings of the study conducted by Hurt (2012:859), which found that married couples feel secure and happy in the marriage if they consider the marriage to be a lifelong partnership, comprising secure emotional support, lifelong commitment, enhanced life success, and secure attachment. Similarly, divorce brings changes in divorced persons' lives and those changes result in a loss of security (Zagorsky 2005:410).

In conclusion: divorced persons suffer more losses due to divorce, including financial loss, loss of companionship, loss of self-esteem, loss of trust in the opposite sex, and loss of security.

The summary and conclusions based on participants' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce will be presented in the next theme.

#### **6.2.5.5 *Theme 5: Divorced persons' accounts of the emotions they experienced after divorce***

Although some of the participants described positive emotions, the majority of the participants in this study reported that they experienced a variety of negative emotions after divorce. This resonates with the assertion by Terhell et al (2004:721) that many divorced persons, regardless of who initiated the divorce, experience negative emotions and conflict for many years after divorce. Likewise, Frisby et al (2012:720) postulate that divorce triggers strong emotions and these emotions persist throughout the process and continue after divorce.

Anger is one of the emotions experienced by divorced persons in this study. This confirms the sentiments of Perrig-Chiello et al (2015:387) that divorce is associated with the symptom of anger. In other words, divorced persons are more likely to suffer from anger and aggression after divorce. People often become angry, if not aggressive, when they feel that others have rejected them (Leary et al 2006:111).

Participants further reported that they experienced the emotion of regret after divorce. Similar findings were reported from the study conducted by Saleh and Luppicini

(2017:192), which revealed that divorced persons expressed regret and remorse in the context of feeling that life would have been better if they had not sought divorce. This relates to the assertion by Wiezter et al (2011:326) that regret is one of the emotions experienced by people when they feel in control of the situation and responsible for what has happened, however it can also occur when the person has no control over the situation. This means that people not only regret their own, but also other people's deeds, and this also relates to divorced persons.

Apart from the emotions of anger and regret, participants reported that at some stage they wanted to kill themselves and/or their children. These sentiments attest to the fact that divorce places divorced persons at higher risk of suicide, which may involve the killing of other family members (Stack & Scourfield 2015:700). Many studies have reported a higher rate of suicides among divorced persons (Nielsen et al 2014:705).

Lastly, participants in this study reported that they experienced feelings of loneliness and rejection. The feelings of loneliness among divorced persons are mainly due to the lack of a spouse (Kalmijn & Van Groenou 2005:457). According to Leary et al (2006:111), rejection may be one of the most common precursors to aggression.

The researcher concludes that although some divorced persons experience positive emotions after divorce, most of them experience negative emotions, including anger, regret, wanting to kill self and/or children, loneliness, and rejection.

In the next theme, participants' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce will be summarised and concluded.

#### **6.2.5.6 Theme 6: Divorced persons' descriptions of the support they sought or received during and after divorce**

When asked to describe the kind of support they had sought or received during and after their divorce, participants' responses referred to informal and formal support. Informal support involves informal networks such as family, friends, and colleagues (Weinberg 2017:209). According to Mosack and Wendorf (2011:1554), informal social support from partners, friends, colleagues, and family has been associated with improved psychological and physical health. For that reason, divorced persons are

generally more likely to seek support from others, especially friends, family members, and colleagues (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1372). The caring, warmth, and reassurance of others, especially friends, colleagues, and family members, seem to serve as a cushion that softens the impact of divorce-related stress (Clapp 2000:156).

Unlike informal social support, formal support to distressed individuals is provided by professionals (Weinberg 2017:209). Participants in this study described various formal support systems they had consulted, including a psychologist, children taken to a psychologist/social worker, spiritual support, a helpline, a support group, and the employer's wellness programme. A trained psychologist has a superior understanding of human behaviour to that of a lay person (Kagee & Breet 2015:402-403) and this means that psychologists are best suited to assist divorced persons with their challenges.

Some participants indicated that they had taken their children to see a psychologist and/or a social worker. Research has shown that children encounter notably negative consequences as a result of their parents' divorce, as they underachieve in school, have more behavioural problems, score lower on psychological and emotional well-being, have lower self-esteem, and display more problems in social relationships (Velderman et al 2016:1). Similarly, Hetherington (2003:220) suggests that in the immediate aftermath of a parental divorce, most children experience emotional distress and behaviour problems, including anger, resentment, demandingness, non-compliance, anxiety, and depression, as they try to cope with the shifts in their life situation. The aforementioned stressors suffered by children due to parental divorce are reason enough for them to receive formal support from professionals. In so doing, it would assist them to adjust to the aftermath of their parents' divorce.

Amongst other forms of support sought or received, participants reported that they sought and/or received spiritual support. According to Roff et al (2009:285), spiritual support is assistance that helps people maintain and deepen their faith, as well as apply their religious beliefs in daily life. A person may have access to spiritual support throughout his/her life, because even if some individual supporters become unavailable, there will be others with similar beliefs who can replace them (Roff et al 2009:286).

Participants further reported that they received support via a helpline. A helpline is a special telephone service that people can call to get advice on the challenges they are facing in life. Helpline counsellors assist callers to develop strategies and manage relationship difficulties by offering advice in the form of suggestions rather than directives (Feo & LeCouteur 2017:133). Divorced persons who seek this kind of support system may call and be assisted to deal with the aftermath of divorce.

Additionally, participants reported that they joined some support groups. The primary goal of support groups is to help members cope with stressful life events, and revitalise and enhance members' coping abilities so they can effectively adapt to and cope with future stressful life events (Toseland & Rivas 2009:20). Support groups are mainly formed to satisfy a particular need, such as support (Qalinge 2015a:136). As a result, support groups can be crucial in helping divorced persons to cope with divorce as a stressful life event.

Lastly, participants reported that they made use of the employer's wellness programme. The employer's wellness programme, or EAP, is aimed at providing counselling and assistance to employees who have a wider range of work-related problems, such as divorce and family problems (Schultz 2015a:198). Through the employer's wellness programme, social workers help employees to balance work and family life in a better way (Ambrosino et al 2008:493).

In conclusion: divorced persons in this study sought and/or received both informal and formal support. In this regard, informal support involves family, friends, and colleagues, whereas formal support includes consulting with a psychologist, taking children to a psychologist and/or social worker, receiving spiritual support, contacting a helpline, attending a support group, and utilising the employer's wellness programme.

The summary and conclusions related to participants' accounts of the social work services they received will be provided.

#### **6.2.5.7 Theme 7: Divorced persons' accounts of the social work services they received**

Although some of the participants' mentioned that they have received some form of counselling from the social workers, most of them did not know about social work services available to divorced persons. According to Jackson (2015:86), people who presents psychological concerns reach out to a variety of sources for assistance, including social workers. As counsellors, social workers provide guidance to individuals, including divorced persons, and assist them in reaching a stage of psychological competence (Qalinge 2015b:17).

The fact that most of the participants in this study indicated that they were not aware of social work services to divorced persons signifies the importance of outreach and community awareness with the aim of making people aware of the social work services available to them. As outreach workers, social workers disseminate information to communities aiming at increasing knowledge regarding social service interventions and service delivery (Black-Hughes & Strunk 2010:118). In so doing, communities are made aware of the social work services available to them. Moreover, a social worker may mobilise a community to create awareness about divorce and how it can affect their lives (Qalinge 2015b:17).

Therefore, the researcher concludes that although there are divorced persons who received counselling from social workers, most of them did not know about the social work services available to divorced persons.

#### **6.2.5.8 Theme 8: Divorced persons' recommendations regarding social work services to divorced persons**

From the participants' responses when requested to recommend whether social work services should be available to divorced persons and how they could be improved, the researcher concludes that participants suggested the following: that social work services to divorced persons should be specialised services; counselling services should be available; social work services should be provided on a long-term basis; support groups are needed; and lastly, psychologists are needed.

Although social work services are mainly provided through generic practice, specialised services are services within social work rendered by a qualified social worker who possesses special knowledge or expertise in a particular field or subject (Blom 2004:24). Through specialised services, divorced persons receive social work services from a competent social worker who possesses special knowledge and expertise in the field of divorce.

Participants also recommended that counselling services should be available to divorced persons. According to Sekudu (2015a:122), counselling entails a process that is facilitated by the social worker to empower the client to develop skills and knowledge that will enhance his/her well-being. Thus, divorce counselling is supportive and involves helping the person to set goals for himself/herself in order to enable him/her to reclaim the status and well-being of a single, autonomous person again (Petty 2006:149-150).

Apart from counselling services, participants recommended that social work services to divorced persons should be provided on a long-term basis. This resonates with Grabowski's (2008:59) assertion that long-term care embodies a set of services delivered over a sustainable period of time to people who lack some degree of functional capacity. Social workers are committed to the process of planned change and this change may not happen overnight (Ambrosino et al 2008:34).

Participants further stated that support groups are needed. According to Toseland and Rivas (2009:20), support groups provide an opportunity for members to share their collective experiences in coping with stressful events. Similarly, Strydom and Strydom (2010:124) suggest that support groups help members to overcome feelings of alienation, stigmatisation, and isolation by affirming and normalising their experience.

Participants also felt that divorced persons should be provided with more information. This relates to the assertion by Black-Hughes and Strunk (2010:116) that at times clients may call for assistance from the social workers, because they are unaware of the services/resources available or the steps to take to generate new services. As an educator, a social worker provides such knowledge and information to clients, including divorced persons (Qalinge 2015b:17).

Lastly, participants in this study stated that psychologists are needed more. Psychologists often work with social workers in assisting clients (Ambrosino et al 2012:36). The core competencies of psychologists, as defined by the Professional Board for Psychology of the HPCSA, are psychological assessment, psychological intervention, and expertise in referral (Abel & Louw 2009:99). In other words, psychologists are also well placed to assist divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce.

The next theme presents the summary and conclusions related to participants' advice to other couples.

#### **6.2.5.9 Theme 9: Divorced persons' advice to other couples**

When asked about the kind of advice they would give to other couples, participants responded that they should first find out about the available resources, they should not rush into a new relationship and, lastly, they should not rush into divorce. According to Qalinge (2015b:17), one of the key roles and functions of the social worker is to link clients to needed systems, programmes, and resources. This includes providing the divorced persons with the relevant information and support they need.

With regards to rushing into new relationships after divorce, Amato and Kane (2011:1074) state that when parents enter into new relationships or remarry right after divorce, it increases the risk of behavioural, emotional, social, and academic problems among children. Thus, it is advisable for divorced persons to avoid rushing into new relationships and marriages so that children can also be well prepared and supported.

The participants further advised that couples should not rush into divorce, but instead they should first seek other ways of resolving their marital problems, including counselling. In counselling, divorced persons and the counsellor enter into a counselling relationship with the aim of enhancing the divorced persons' ability to deal with their situation. Providing a similar definition, Graumann (2009:2) states that counselling refers to an activity that takes place when someone who is troubled invites and allows another to enter into a particular kind of relationship with them. Couple's counselling is a process that aims to assist couples to improve their responses to each other through increasing their knowledge about themselves and their partners (Petty

2006:146). Through this process, couples are able to decide on the kind of life they want to build together, the kind of partners they want to be, and the attitudes and behaviours that are necessary to achieve this.

In conclusion: divorced persons in this study suggested that couples should first find out about the available resources, they should not rush into a new relationship, and lastly, they should not rush into divorce.

The next section presents the summary and conclusions arising from the second group of participants.

### **6.2.6 Summary and conclusions arising from the research findings: Social workers**

In this section, the summary and conclusions arising from the research findings with the social workers will be presented. This involves the presentation of the summary and conclusions derived from 11 themes (see Chapter Five, section 5.3).

#### **6.2.6.1 *Theme 1: Social workers' descriptions of the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations***

When asked to describe the type of social work services they provide at their employing organisations, participants in this study gave their responses based on the three primary methods of social work practice, namely casework, group work, and community work. Regarding casework, participants mentioned that the types of social work services they provide at their employing organisations include intake, counselling, relationship and marital problems, child neglect and abuse, foster care services, mediation and parenting plans, poverty alleviation and financial issues, and drug abuse.

Intake is a process of assessing a potential client's needs and eligibility for service (Wright 2007:98). Thus, an intake interview is primarily an assessment tool, although the task of establishing a therapeutic alliance is an integral element (Shoai 2014:26). It is worth noting that almost every professional counselling relationship between a counsellor and a client begins with an intake interview (Freeburg & Van Winkle 2011:1)

The participants further articulated that they provide counselling services at their employing organisations. According to Egan (2014:12), counselling helps the client to diffuse and manage their acute problem situation and further helps them to develop basic problem-solving skills through engaging them in the helping process as partners. Moreover, Corey (2017:18) states that counselling is an intimate form of learning and it demands a practitioner who is willing to be an authentic person in the relationship in order to allow clients to grow.

Apart from the intake and counselling services, participants indicated that they mostly deal with cases related to relationship and marital problems at their organisations. Although intimate and marital relationships provide many individuals with a sense of intimacy and well-being, for others these relationships involve physical violence, verbal and emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and /or neglect (Mooney et al 2011:159). Couples who are faced with these challenges/ marital problems in their relationships are more likely to seek support or services from professionals such as social workers, regardless of the cause of such problems. The aim is to assist the couples to acquire a better understanding of themselves and their partners in order to interact more constructively.

There are also participants in this study who mentioned that they mainly deal with child abuse and neglect cases at their organisations. According to Karadag et al (2015:874), child neglect and abuse is a worldwide problem. Child neglect is a form of abuse involving the failure to provide adequate attention, supervision, nutrition, hygiene, health care, and a safe and clean living environment for a minor child (Mooney et al 2011:162). Child abuse refers to the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18 by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare (Mooney et al 2011:162). The role of the social worker in these situations is to consider what is in the best interest of the child and implement statutory actions when it is warranted, and this may include moving the child or children to a place of safety, either to a children's home or a foster parent (Schultz 2015b:174).

Furthermore, participants indicated that they provide foster care services at their organisations. Foster care services are based on the principle of providing an

alternative family that offers a stable period of care for children who cannot remain with their birth parents or relatives because of parental problems, the risk of abuse or neglect, or other conditions such as family rejection (Maluccio & Ainsworth 2006:20). The study conducted by Schwartz (2008:614) revealed that social workers are overloaded with foster care cases. This means that social workers spend most of their time involved in foster care services.

Mediation and parenting plans are also some of the services provided by participants. The aim of mediation and parenting plans is to assist parents in developing a meaningful environment for their children when they as parents are no longer living together, while considering the relationship between the parents and the relationship they each have with the children (Schultz 2015b:180). A parenting plan is a design for the way divorcing parents will raise their children after they are divorced (McWilliams 2011:3). In divorce mediation, divorcing couples meet with a neutral third party, a mediator, who helps them resolve issues of property division, child support, child custody, and spousal support in a way that minimises conflict and encourages co-operation (Mooney et al 2011:177).

In addition, participants reported that they also deal with cases related to poverty alleviation and finance issues. According to Popple and Leighinger (2008:226), poverty refers to a lack of money and other resources leading to a person's inability to function in a productive and efficient manner in a given society. Social work, more than any other profession, maintains a strong commitment to fighting poverty at all levels (Ambrosino et al 2012:167).

The last type of service under casework as stated by the participants relates to drug abuse. Drug abuse is referred to as a pattern of drug use that results in recurrent and significant adverse consequences associated with the frequent use of drugs (Dulmus & Sowers 2012:121). It should be borne in mind that drug abuse is the violation of social standards of acceptable drug use, resulting in adverse physiological, psychological, and/or social consequences (Mooney et al 2011:77). The social work approach in this regard looks at more than just the person's substance problem; it also recognises that the person may have a number of problems and that he/she should be prepared to work through these problems too (Galvani 2008:75). In other words,

social workers apply a holistic approach in their assessment instead of focusing solely on the substance or drug abuse problem.

Although some of the participants reported that they facilitate prevention groups, parental groups, and groups for school children, most of the participants indicated that they do not undertake group work at their employing organisations. This contradicts Zastrow's (2012:1) suggestion that social work with groups is practiced in different agencies, including adoption agencies, correctional settings, halfway houses, substance abuse treatment centres, physical rehabilitation centres, family service agencies, private psychotherapy clinics, mental hospitals, nursing homes, community centres, public schools, and many other social service settings.

As with the group work method, most of the participants in this study also mentioned that they do not undertake community work at their organisations. Although it is done sporadically, some of the participants reported that they conduct projects for the unemployed, substance abuse programmes, and are also involved in community awareness on child protection. The fact that most of the participants in this study reported that they do not undertake community work at their employing organisations contradicts Sesoko's (2015a:153) view that the majority of social workers employed in both governmental organisations and NGOs provide services to communities as part of the service delivery method.

In conclusion: social workers employed in different organisations mainly provide services related to intake, counselling, relationship and marital problems, child neglect and abuse, foster care services, mediation and parenting plans, poverty alleviation and financial issues, and drug abuse. Moreover, most of them do not undertake the group and community work methods of social work practice.

The next theme presents the summary and conclusions based on the participants' descriptions of the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients.

### **6.2.6.2 Theme 2: Social worker' descriptions of the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients**

Participants were asked to explain the theoretical approach used at their employing organisations in dealing with clients and their responses were at times not very clear or definite, and appeared to be mostly the approach followed by the individual social worker rather than the organisation. In this regard, participants' responses include the following: no clear theoretical approach is used, the PCA plus other approaches are used, a variety of theoretical approaches are used, and solution-focused therapy is used. Theoretical knowledge and its component use are central features of professional social work (Forte 2014:1). Without a theoretical framework, it is impossible for the social worker to facilitate change in the client's life (Sekudu 2015b:83).

According to Teater (2010:1), some social workers may not necessarily acknowledge or understand the theoretical framework they practice from, but rather practice from assumptions and beliefs that are guided by their personal or professional experiences and not necessarily from established and researched theories. In such situations, the social worker could be putting clients at risk of harm by practising from assumptions and the social worker's own values, instead of established theories and the values set by the social work profession.

Although there are participants who indicated that they use other theories, they mostly referred to the PCA as the main theoretical framework used at their organisations in dealing with clients. The goal of the PCA is to help clients discover their true self, a self that has been hidden from the client's awareness (Teater 2010:192). The PCA is based on a subjective view of human experiences and it places faith in and gives responsibility to the client in dealing with problems and concerns (Corey 2017:7).

There are participants who also mentioned that they use a variety of theoretical frameworks at their organisations in dealing with clients. The use of a variety of theoretical approaches, also known as an eclectic approach, is common in social work practice. This resonates with the assertion by Miley et al (2013:26) that social workers draw upon diverse theoretical perspectives to construct an eclectic approach. Similarly, Sheldon and Macdonald (2009:46) suggest that social work is and should

remain an eclectic discipline, as its field of operation means that it depends on concepts and findings drawn from a wide variety of sources/theories for theoretical sustenance.

Lastly, solution-focused therapy was reported to be one of the theoretical frameworks used by the participants. Solution-focused practice is a short-term model of practice that seeks to amplify what clients are already doing well and help clients realise a future where the problem is no longer a problem (Teater 2010:162). The role of the social worker using solution-focused therapy is to help divorced persons identify and come up with solutions, as they are experts on the problem and the solutions (Van Hook 2014:160).

Therefore, the researcher concludes that social workers at their employing organisations mostly use the theoretical approach of their choice, rather than that of the organisation.

The next theme presents the summary and conclusions based on the participants' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons.

### **6.2.6.3 *Theme 3: Social workers' accounts of how often they deal with divorced persons***

When asked about how often they deal with divorced persons, most of the participants responded that they do not often deal with divorced persons, or rarely deal with them. However, a few of them responded that they dealt with them more frequently. This is despite the fact that a considerable proportion of all marriages end in divorce (Nielsen et al 2014:705; Emery 2012:4) and that the majority of divorced persons experience increased levels of unhappiness, greater physical and psychological distress, more substance abuse problems, less dense and supportive social support systems, and lower levels of life satisfaction (Bowen & Jensen 2017:1364). This relates to Ntimo-Makara's (2009:120) study conducted in Lesotho which revealed that the majority of divorced persons are literally left on their own to either sink or swim. Although some divorced persons eventually recover from divorce-related stress, the speed of recovery depends on their ability to access resources, including social work services (Amato 2014:11).

Regarding the participants who articulated that they often dealt with cases of divorced persons, their focus was more on the care of children after divorce, including parental rights and responsibilities through mediation and the development of parenting plans. Mediation is a conflict-resolution technique that is offered for and used by parents who are divorced and have continuing post-divorce conflict (Douglas 2006:15). The primary goals of mediation involve helping parents to negotiate more cooperatively, to make their own decisions about what is the best for their children, to contain conflicts, and to truly protect their children's best interests (Emery 2012:3). Similarly, a parenting plan is a design for the way parents will raise their children after they are divorced (Emery 2012:103; McWilliams 2011:3). The role of the social worker during the formulation of a parenting plan is to facilitate a process where both parents will participate and decide on the upbringing of their children after divorce, including their parental rights and responsibilities as stipulated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2006a: Section 18).

In conclusion: although some of the social workers employed at different organisations provide mediation and parenting plan services to divorced persons, most of them do not deal with cases directly related to divorced persons.

In the next theme, the summary and conclusions based on participants' accounts of the kind of social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons will be provided.

#### **6.2.6.4    *Theme 4: Social workers' accounts of the kind of social work services mainly requested by and provided to divorced persons***

In this theme, participants were asked to describe the types of social work services sought by divorced persons and provided to them. In this regard, some of the participants indicated that they often seek assistance with children and their financial situation, however a number of them described divorced persons as not seeking social work services for their own personal issues. It should be noted that participants did not provide absolute reasons as to why divorced persons do not seek social work services; instead they presented their opinions. For instance, participants shared the view that society often does not perceive social workers as people who can assist with divorce-related matters, other than assisting with children. The study conducted by Ntimo-

Makara (2009:121) revealed that divorced persons had a need for counselling services, as they were not getting this kind of service from the legal representatives handling their cases. This raises the question as to whether divorced persons are aware of the fact that they can also seek and receive counselling services from social workers.

The participants further indicated that divorced persons sought social work assistance for children. This resonates with Clapp's (2000:138) assertion that many parents take their children to counselling sessions to ensure that they have appropriate coping skills and are on track handling the divorce. It is stated by Whiteman (2007:1) that children often suffer from divorce more than their parents do, as they are flooded with emotions they do not understand. In the same way, divorce is known to have significant and largely negative effects on children (Harvey & Fine 2010:6; Douglas 2006:1).

In addition, participants articulated that divorced persons sought services regarding their financial situation. This confirms Emery's (2012:125) suggestion that divorced persons suffer financially as a result of divorce. This is expounded by Simonic (2014:206) who postulates that the change in the financial status of divorced persons can reflect in other forms of material loss, such as moving into less expensive housing, the sale of properties, and leaving the community.

In conclusion: although some of the divorced persons sought and received social work services regarding their children and their financial situations, a number of them do not seek such services for their own personal issues.

The summary and conclusion based on participants' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons will be provided next.

#### **6.2.6.5 Theme 5: Social workers' descriptions as to the helpfulness of and their satisfaction with the services provided to divorced persons**

When asked as to whether they were satisfied with the social work services provided to divorced persons and if they thought the services were helpful, participants' responses range from not satisfied to helpful. The participants' dissatisfaction with the kind of services they provide to divorced persons is based on the fact that they only

assist divorced persons with the drafting of parenting plans and not counselling. This means that they would be more satisfied if they also provided counselling services to divorced persons. Through counselling, social workers would empower divorced persons to develop skills and knowledge that will enhance their well-being (Sekudu 2015a:122).

Some of the participants stated that they could do more in working with divorced persons if only they could involve group work and community awareness. However, there are participants who mentioned that social work intervention has slightly deviated from theory. In other words, they were implying that social work intervention is not entirely guided by theory. This view contrasts with Payne's (2014:5) assertion that theory tells the social worker what to do and how to do it. Similarly, Sekudu (2015b:92) suggests that theories are used in social work practice to assist the social worker to understand the client systems better, so as to pave the way for appropriate intervention. Without a theoretical framework as a guiding principle, social work intervention would hardly serve its intended professional purpose.

Participants further indicated that they could do more by providing post-divorce support services to divorced persons. Post-divorce support services are essential in coping with the detrimental emotional and psychological consequences that divorced persons experience (Frisby et al 2012:716). Counsellors are good resources for divorced persons and their children, as they answer questions raised, offer practical suggestions, and they are always available to address future problems that may arise (Clapp 2000:138). For that reason, post-divorce social work support services are crucial for divorced persons.

Lastly, there are participants who mentioned that they find counselling services to divorced persons helpful and beneficial. This assertion resonates with Sekudu's (2015a:123) suggestion that counselling is beneficial to clients in that it helps them to develop new skills that will assist them to understand themselves better and interact more effectively with their environments. This view is also shared by Logren et al (2017:424), who state that counselling aims to support people in their life challenges.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that although there are social workers who believe that the counselling services provided to divorced persons are helpful, most of them are not entirely satisfied and feel that they could do more by involving the group work and community work methods of social work practice, and also through the integration of theory into practice.

The summary and conclusions based on participants' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons will be provided next.

#### **6.2.6.6 *Theme 6: Social workers' descriptions of the helpfulness of the theoretical approach applied to divorced persons***

After describing their satisfaction with and the helpfulness of the services they provide to divorced persons, participants were asked whether the theoretical approach they applied was helpful for divorced persons. From their responses, the researcher concludes that while there are social workers who find the theoretical framework applied to divorced persons helpful, there are social workers who failed to recognise or acknowledge that any theoretical framework was applied. On the other hand, some of them indicated that it could be improved in some instances.

The failure of participants to recognise and acknowledge that any theoretical framework was applied to divorced persons confirms Teater's (2010:1) suggestion that some social workers may not necessarily acknowledge or understand their theoretical framework, but rather practice from assumptions and beliefs that are guided by their personal or professional experiences and not necessarily from established and researched theories. On a similar note, Gray and Webb (2013:1) state that every social work practice is the bearer and articulation of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts.

There are participants in this study who expressed that the theoretical approaches they apply in working with divorced persons are helpful to them. According to Payne (2014:5), social work theory helps social workers to do or understand social work. Moreover, Miley et al (2013:25) suggest that knowledge about how change occurs in individual systems, including divorced persons, influences the ways that social workers approach practice

Lastly, there are some of the participants who believe that improving their theoretical framework could also help improve service delivery to divorced persons. These participants further believe that the current social work methodology is not enough. This view relates to the suggestion by Ambrosino et al (2012:48) that because social work draws its knowledge base from many disciplines, many theories are applicable to social work. In the same manner, Miley et al (2013:23) postulate that because of the multisystem and interdisciplinary nature of social work, practitioners draw from many diverse theoretical perspectives.

The next theme presents the summary and conclusions of participants' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons.

#### **6.2.6.7 *Theme 7: Social workers' descriptions of when and to whom they refer divorced persons***

From the participants' responses after being asked to describe when and to whom they refer divorced persons, the researcher concludes that social workers refer divorced persons to other resources and/or professionals, including psychologists, social workers in private practice, and the DSD and/or NGOs.

Regarding the psychologists, most participants indicated that they refer to psychologists for different reasons, including long-term psychological counselling, anger management, assistance with children who are unable to cope, sexual abuse and assault issues, and emotional support for divorced persons who are struggling to cope emotionally. Psychologists are counted among those whose formal role is to help people manage the distressing problems of life (Graumann 2009:2). The psychologists who assist with clients' psychological and emotional problems are generally referred to as clinical or counselling psychologists (Ambrosino et al 2012:36).

Participants further mentioned that they also refer divorced persons to social workers in private practice. Social workers in private practice provide clinical services such as psychotherapy, couple's counselling, and family therapy (Rosenberg 2009:173). Apart from counselling, social workers in private practice are involved in child care matters, for example working with mediation and parenting plans, while others provide full-time training sessions at companies, addressing staff development and skills training for

personal development, and presenting conflict and anger management courses (Schultz 2015a:201).

Lastly, some of the participants stated that they refer divorced persons to either the DSD and/or NGOs. The services provided by the offices of the DSD include prevention programmes, rehabilitation, protection programmes, continuing care, mental health, and addiction services (Schultz 2015a:202). On the other hand, NGOs are generally perceived to employ social workers who specialise in different fields, such as working with children, youth, the elderly, cases of substance abuse, street children, disabled persons, and families, including divorced persons (Schultz 2015a:206).

The next theme presents the summary and conclusions on whether social workers should provide social work services to divorced persons.

#### **6.2.6.8 *Theme 8: Social workers' opinions on whether they should provide social work services to divorced persons***

When asked about whether social workers should provide social work services to divorced persons, all the participants were of the opinion that they should provide services to divorced persons. Participants raised various reasons for this suggestion, including that it would assist divorced persons to deal with the baggage from their previous relationship prior to entering into new relationships, and it would enable them to cope with the traumatic stages of divorce. Participants also stated that they could provide counselling services to the entire family, not only the divorced persons, as well as mediation services,.

Given the traumatic nature of divorce and the effect it has on divorced persons, their children and the entire family, social work services are crucial in helping them to cope. The experience of divorce is a significant source of trauma and stress for divorced persons, their children and the entire family, and constitutes a major life transition (Sbarra et al 2015:109). In this regard, the inability of divorced persons to cope with the traumatic effects of divorce may lead to adverse consequences.

In conclusion: social workers are of the opinion that they should provide services to divorced persons, as well as to their children and the entire family.

The summary and conclusions based on participants' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons will be provided next.

**6.2.6.9 Theme 9: Social workers' accounts of the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons**

When asked to describe the challenges they experience in providing services to divorced persons, participants highlighted the following as some of the challenges experienced: divorce is not a specialised field, there is no specialised training, lack of resources, divorced persons do not co-operate, and that it is emotionally draining.

With regards to divorce as a specialised field of service delivery in social work, Blom (2004:24) suggests that specialised services are services within social work rendered by a qualified social worker who possesses special knowledge or expertise in a particular field or subject. Therefore, specialist social workers work on a specific level of intervention (Doel 2012:164). In order for the social work services to divorced persons to be considered specialised services, they have to be rendered by social workers who possess special knowledge and expertise in the field of divorce

Participants also indicated that a lack of resources is one of the challenges faced by social workers in providing services to divorced persons. This resonates with the assertion by Van den Broeck et al (2011:692-693) that the availability of resources enhances work performance. In other words, resources are necessary for social workers in providing services to divorced persons

Additionally, lack of co-operation by divorced persons is another challenge experienced by the participants in providing services to divorced persons. This manifests itself when divorced persons fail to honour their appointments, as they expect solutions to their problems from the social worker. Therefore, divorced persons disengage immediately when they realise that social workers are not providing them with instant solutions. Similarly, Sekudu (2015b:91) suggests that disengagement between the social worker and the client might come abruptly in cases where the client system is not satisfied with the progress made in the intervention process and decides not to continue with the helping relationship. The unwillingness of divorced couples to communicate with one another is mentioned as one of the reasons for their lack of co-

operation when they are invited for the session. This resonates with the findings of the study conducted by Frisby et al (2012:720) which reported that divorced couples reported less constructive communication, more conflict, and more avoidance.

Finally, participants mentioned that the consulting sessions with divorced persons are emotionally draining for them. According to Cullington (2008:4), emotionally divorce has the shattering impact of civil strife and breakdown. Social workers exposed to traumatic content as earwitnesses often suffer from severe distress and/or burnout (Ben-Porat & Itzhaky 2015:607). In this regard, a well-known term used in the literature to describe one of the negative consequences of therapeutic work for social workers is burnout (Ben-Porat & Itzhaky 2015:607). Burnout describes a subjective psychological experience that involves feelings of being stressed, emotionally overextended, and drained by one's work (Acker & Lawrence 2009:272).

In conclusion: lack of resources, lack of co-operation by divorced persons, lack of specialisation in the field of divorce, and the emotionally draining nature of the consulting sessions with divorced persons are the challenges experienced by social workers in providing services to divorced persons.

The next theme provides the summary and conclusions based on the descriptions of the needs of divorced persons.

#### **6.2.6.10 Theme 10: Social workers' descriptions of the needs of divorced persons**

After being asked to describe the needs of divorced persons, most participants supported the idea that divorced persons need counselling. In this regard, participants were of the opinion that counselling would be ideal in enabling divorced persons to deal with the aftermath of divorce. According to Logren et al (2017:424), counselling is aimed at supporting people in their life challenges, such as divorce, in ways that promote their strengths and utilise their assets. Through counselling, social workers seek to assist divorced persons to increase their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others, to develop more resourceful ways of living, and to bring about changes in their lives (Miller 2014:110).

Given the traumatic nature of divorce, participants are of the opinion that divorced persons need emotional support. This relates to Simonic's (2014:206) assertion that a wide range of emotions that are mostly negative accompany divorce, including anger, guilt, fear, sadness, depression (sometimes accompanied by suicidal thoughts), bitterness, and feelings of frustration. Consequently, emotional support would lead divorced persons to believe that social workers care for them (Van Hook 2014:37).

Participants further mentioned the issue of financial assistance and support as one of the needs of divorced persons. This is based on the fact that divorced persons mostly suffer financially because of divorce (Emery 2012:125). Lack of economic resources is regarded as one of the greatest difficulties experienced by divorced persons (Balswick & Balswick 2007:313). In this regard, struggling from day to day to meet basic needs leads to additional odds in coping with divorce (Van Hook 2014:29),

The researcher therefore concludes that divorced persons need counselling, emotional support, and financial assistance and support in order to cope with the aftermath of divorce.

The summary and conclusions of the participants' suggestions on the improvements of social work services to divorced persons will be presented next.

#### **6.2.6.11 Theme 11: Social workers' suggestions for improvements to the social work services provided to divorced persons**

When asked about their suggestions as to how social work services to divorced persons could be improved, participants suggested that a specialisation should be created in social work, a programme for divorced persons must be developed, awareness of social work services for divorced persons must be raised and, lastly, social workers must remain objective.

Participants in this study were of the view that in order to improve social work services to divorced persons, it has to be a specialised field. This notion was based on the fact that social workers lack knowledge and training on working with divorced persons.

Studies indicate that specialisation increases the social worker's skills and competencies within the delimited area of his/her expertise (Raeymaeckers 2016:612).

Participants further suggested that a programme for divorced persons must be developed. This resonates with the findings of the study conducted by Lofthus and Skorpen (2016:166) which revealed that a programme for the implementation of divorce groups was viewed as an important offer. However, support programmes after divorce are very rare (Velderman et al 2016:1).

In addition, the participants voiced the opinion that raising awareness of social work services for divorced persons would assist in the improvement of such services. In other words, by raising awareness, social workers promote the services available to divorced persons. According to Patel (2015:208), promotion is one type of social work intervention aimed at enhancing the well-being through education and information programmes, including campaigns. Through the promotion of social work services to divorced persons, people become aware of the types of social work services to divorced persons and how to access such services.

Adding to the above-mentioned suggestions, participants suggested that social workers should go back to the basics of social work in order to improve social work services. However, the participants' views do not express the improvement of social work services to divorced persons, but instead they reflect the importance of prevention programmes through marriage enrichment aiming at reducing the high rate of divorce. Patel (2015:207) maintains that prevention programmes refer to interventions that seek to prevent or moderate major problems before they occur. On the other hand, Sager and Sager (2005:212) state that marriage enrichment is a systematic effort to improve the functioning of marital couples through educational and preventative means.

Lastly, participants in this study suggested that in order to improve service delivery to divorced persons, social workers must remain objective. Objectivity is the ability to separate facts from opinions and not be influenced by personal feelings (Tong 2015:748). This means that social workers must not be carried away by divorced

persons' feelings and forget to provide accurate services. In other words, social workers should be able to share the client's subjective world with empathy, yet they must not lose their own separateness (Corey 2017:175).

In conclusion: social workers' suggestions on how social work services to divorced persons could be improved include the fact that a specialisation should be created in social work, a programme for divorced persons must be developed, an awareness of social work services to divorced persons should be raised, and that social workers must remain objective in practice.

The next section presents the limitations of the study.

### **6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The limitations of this study are noted below:

- In view of the fact that qualitative research is interpretative in nature, the research findings on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services cannot be generalised to the general population of divorced persons and social workers.
- Given that the criteria were set for the selection of the population, the scope of the population was limited. The criteria involved social workers employed in the private sector, NGOs, government departments, and/or in private practice, and divorced persons who sought or received social work services in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Therefore, not all social workers employed in various sectors in the Gauteng Province, or other provinces of South Africa, were included in this study. Similarly, not all divorced persons in the Gauteng Province, or other provinces of South Africa, were included in this study.
- Due to the lack of available literature relating to social work services to divorced persons, literature from other fields of social work practice were used. In this regard, old literature was used in some instances. Additionally, the fact that previous studies on divorce did not focus on social work services to divorced

persons and that most of them were conducted globally, is also considered to be a limitation of this study.

- Although the topic of divorce cuts across many disciplines, for example psychology, sociology, theology, and psychiatry (Graumann 2009:2), it should be noted that this study focused on the topic of divorce from within the ambit of social work in order to enrich the body of knowledge of this discipline. Thus, the research findings cannot be generalised to other disciplines.

The next section presents the recommendations for this study.

## **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations for this study emerged from the research findings and the subsequent conclusions drawn, and they are presented in terms of social work practice, social work training and education, social welfare policy, and further research.

### **6.4.1 Recommendations for social work practice**

The recommendations for social work practice will focus on the practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons and the practice guidelines related to social work intervention strategies.

#### **6.4.1.1 *Practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons***

The practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons are based on participants' suggestions (divorced persons and social workers) on what social work services to divorced persons should look like. The divorced persons' suggestions were informed by their post-divorce experiences and needs regarding social work services, and the social workers' suggestions were based on their experiences in working with divorced persons. The summary of the participants' views about social work services to divorced persons and the recommended practice guidelines for social work services are presented in Table 6.1 below.

**Table 6.1: Summary of the participants' views about social work services to divorced persons and the recommended practice guidelines for social work services**

<b>Participants' views/suggestions about social work services to divorced persons</b>		<b>Recommended practice guidelines for social work services</b>
<b>Divorced Persons</b>	<b>Social workers</b>	
Divorced persons feel strongly that social work counselling services should be readily available to divorced persons.	Most social workers supported the view that divorced persons need counselling.	Counselling services for divorced persons should be provided and readily available.
Although the participants did not know about mediation and parenting plans, some of them mentioned that they attended a few sessions with the social workers about the best interests and the upbringing of their children after divorce.	Social workers mentioned that they provide mediation and parenting plan services mainly to divorcing parents and on a limited basis.	The mediation and parenting plan services that are provided should be in the best interests of children and seek to enhance co-operation between the divorced parents in raising their children after the divorce.
Divorced persons are of the view that support groups for divorced persons would be helpful and therefore should be established.	Social workers do not provide support groups for divorced persons, but they feel that it could be helpful.	Post-divorce support groups for divorced persons should be established and conducted regularly.
Divorced persons expressed the view that they were not aware of social work services to divorced persons. They thought that social work services are meant for the poor and children in need of support.	Social workers suggested that awareness of social work services for divorced persons should be raised.	Awareness campaigns focusing on divorce-related matters should be conducted regularly.
Divorced persons mentioned that their financial situation was negatively affected by divorce.	Although most of the social workers do not undertake community work, they strongly feel that poverty	Poverty alleviation programmes for divorced persons should be undertaken.

	alleviation programmes for divorced persons will be helpful, as divorced persons often seek assistance with their financial situation.	
Divorced persons are of the view that social work services should be extended to children of divorced persons, as they are equally affected by divorce.	Social workers articulated that divorced persons usually seek assistance regarding their children.	Social work services to divorced persons should involve other family members, including children.
Divorced persons are of the view that social work services should be provided on a long-term basis.	Social workers expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that they rarely provide social work services to divorced persons, and if they do, it is mainly mediation and parenting plans, and then only on a limited and short-term basis.	Social work services to divorced persons should be provided on a long-term and continuous basis.
Divorced persons recognise the support provided by other professionals, such as psychologists, to divorced persons.	Social workers expressed the view that they often refer divorced persons to psychologists and social workers employed at other organisations who possess special knowledge and skills in working with divorce-related matters.	Social workers should collaborate with other professionals involved in providing services to divorced persons.
Divorced persons are of the view that social work services to divorced persons should be a specialisation.	Social workers suggested that a specialisation should be created in social work.	A specialised field of practice with a specific focus on social work services to divorced persons must be created.

The recommended practice guidelines for social work services to divorced persons are presented in detail below. Based on the findings of this study and the participants' views about social work services to divorced persons, it is therefore recommended that:

- **Counselling services for divorced persons should be provided and readily available.** The findings of this study reflect that most social workers provide mediation and parenting plan services to divorced persons, but on a limited basis. It is for this reason that counselling services for divorced persons by social workers is recommended. It is further recommended that counselling services for divorced persons should be readily available and focus on divorced persons' experiences, including both pre- and post-divorce experiences. These services should be aimed at helping divorced persons to develop problem-solving skills that would enable them to cope with the aftermath of divorce. The counselling services should be provided on an individual basis or through a therapeutic group until such time that the social worker and the divorced person are satisfied that the change process has been attained and the divorced person's optimal functioning/well-being has been revived. In doing so, it is recommended that the intervention strategies outlined in subsection 6.4.1.2 be implemented.
- **The mediation and parenting plan services that are provided should be in the best interests of children and seek to enhance co-operation between the divorced parents in raising their children after the divorce.** It is further recommended that mediation and parenting plan services should consider the relationship between the divorced parents and their children, as this may enhance the well-being of both divorced parents and their children. A follow-up plan on the mediation and parenting plan services provided prior to/ after divorce should be developed to ensure that the best interest of the child is prioritised. There should be an emphasis on enhancing the co-operation between the divorced parents in raising their children and this should be done in such a manner that it will not compromise the best interest of the child.
- **Post-divorce support groups for divorced persons should be established and conducted regularly.** It is imperative that social workers establish and conduct post-divorce support groups, as this would be beneficial to divorced

persons. Post-divorce support groups provide divorced persons with the opportunity to learn and receive psycho-social support from other group members who have had similar experiences. Divorced persons will receive emotional support from the social worker at such post-divorce support groups. The support groups for divorced persons should be aimed at enhancing the psycho-social functioning of divorced persons and they should be conducted regularly.

- **Awareness campaigns focusing on divorce-related matters should be conducted regularly.** In so doing, social workers would be able to impart the necessary information regarding divorce and the kind of social work services available to divorced persons. Through awareness campaigns, the community also becomes aware of the experiences faced by divorced persons and the resources available to them. Thus, the awareness campaigns should comprise important information about divorce, such as the different types of divorce, the divorce process, the consequences of divorce, court procedures, and the resources available to divorced persons, including social work services. The awareness campaigns can be done in collaboration with other disciplines or stakeholders involved in divorce, such as the family advocate, psychologists, and attorneys.
- **Poverty alleviation programmes for divorced persons should be undertaken.** Poverty alleviation programmes undertaken by social workers would be of great benefit to divorced persons, as they mostly experience financial challenges and losses due to divorce. The poverty alleviation programmes should be based on the needs of divorced persons and they should be sustainable. In other words, these should be the programmes that are aligned to the needs of divorced persons and they should be conducted in such a manner that divorced persons will eventually take the ownership of the programmes.
- **Social work services to divorced persons should involve other family members, including children.** It is worth noting that divorce is likely to affect other family members, such as the children, therefore by involving other family members who are affected by the divorce, it enhances the relationship between the divorced persons and the other family members, and ultimately contributes

towards the well-being of divorced persons and the entire family. This can be done, for instance, by means of involving other family members affected by divorce, such as children, in the counselling process. It is advisable that children should not be included in the interview session with adults, as their understanding of divorce may differ from the adults' understanding. For example, children mainly blame themselves for their parents' divorce.

- **Social work services to divorced persons should be provided on a long-term and continuous basis.** Given the traumatic nature and the adverse consequences associated with divorce, it is recommended that social work services to divorced persons be provided on a long-term and continuous basis. These services should be aimed at enabling divorced persons to cope with the aftermath of divorce until such time that they feel empowered and ready to face life anew on their own.
- **Social workers should collaborate with other professionals involved in providing services to divorced persons.** There are so many role players involved in divorce-related matters, for instance psychologists and lawyers, and by collaborating with other professionals it broadens social workers' knowledge of the other services available to divorced persons and keeps them abreast of new developments regarding such services. Collaborating with other role players can take different forms, for instance working together in organising awareness campaigns, referring divorced persons for specialised services, and many more. It is further recommended that a committee comprised of different role players in divorce-related matters be established in order to facilitate and coordinate services to divorced persons.
- **A specialised field of practice with specific focus on social work services to divorced persons must be created.** By creating a specialised field of practice, it would help to improve social work services to divorced persons and enable them to better cope with the aftermath of divorce. There is no doubt that a social worker who possesses specialised knowledge and expertise in the field of divorce would improve social work services to divorced persons.

The next section presents recommendations related to the practice guidelines of social work intervention strategies.

#### **6.4.1.2    *The practice guidelines related to social work intervention strategies***

It should be borne in mind that the practice guidelines related to social work intervention strategies were formulated based on the findings of this study and they were informed by the theoretical orientation underpinning the study. Table 6.2 below provides the summary of the theoretical orientation that informed the study and the recommended practice guidelines related to social work intervention strategies.

**Table 6.2: Summary of the theoretical orientation that informed the study and the recommended practice guidelines related to social work intervention strategies**

<b>Theoretical orientation that informed the practice guidelines for social work intervention strategies</b>			<b>Recommended practice guidelines for social work intervention</b>
<b>PCA</b>	<b>Strengths perspective</b>	<b>Eco-systems perspective</b>	
The process of change in the client depends to a large degree on the quality of the mutual relationship they have with the social worker (Corey 2017:173).	Social workers best serve clients by establishing a good working relationship and collaborating with them (Salleebey 2009:15).	A social worker using the eco-systems perspective would establish a good working relationship with the client in order to understand the level of person-environment (Teater 2014:27).	Establish a good working relationship.
The basic assumption in the PCA is that people are capable of self-directed growth if they are involved in a specific kind of therapeutic relationship in which the social worker demonstrates interest (Corey 2017:165).	Social workers should be able to demonstrate an interest in clients by conveying respect for their struggles (Smith 2006:39).	With the eco-systems perspective, the social worker becomes interested in understanding individuals in context (Neal & Neal 2013:722).	Demonstrate an interest in the client.
The PCA deals with the conscious experiences and the unconscious experiences which cannot be allowed into the conscious mind because	The social worker understands the process of healing from pain and adversity and designates counselling sessions to help	The eco-systems perspective focuses on the maladaptive interpersonal problems between individuals, families, and the environment (Zastrow 2015:51).	Deal with the negative experiences.

they threaten the <b>self</b> of the client (Grobler et al 2013:4).	clients heal from their pain (Smith 2006:37).		
In the PCA, the social worker tries to understand how the client sees himself/herself and looks at the experiences that do not threaten the self (Grobler et al 2013:4).	A social worker must encourage and instil hope by means of focusing on clients' positive experiences (Smith 2006:41).	As people go through life, they strive to maintain a positive level of fit with their environment (Teater 2014:27).	Identify and stay with the positive experiences.
Every person has within himself/herself the capability to become who he/she wants to become in life (Rogers 1987:487).	With the strengths perspectives, social workers are challenged to see every person as having some inherent strengths and available resources, regardless of the problems they might be experiencing (Sekudu 2015b:93).	The eco-systems perspective emphasises the complex transactions between individuals and their environments and encourage social workers to tailor their work to achieve the best 'adaptive fit' in the client-environment interface (Gray 2010:86).	Focus on the divorced person's strengths and available resources.
PCA seeks to enable people to discover for themselves what they are struggling with and then find their own unique way forward (Grobler et al 2013:3).	The Strengths perspective positions the clients as the experts to their life challenges and people who are capable of dealing with their current and future challenges (Gray 2010:91).	A fundamental principle of the eco-systems perspective states that a change in one part of the system creates change in other parts of the system, which changes the functioning of the entire system (Miley et al 2009:38).	Deal with possible future challenges

<p>The final stage of the change process happens when the client finds new or alternative ways and values to deal with their struggles (Rogers 1987:522).</p>	<p>Towards the end of the session, the social worker and the clients must honour the progress that has been made by determining whether changes can be attributed to the intervention, and what client strengths and available resources were significant in helping them achieve their goals (Smith 2006:48).</p>	<p>The focus of the eco-systems perspective is on growth, development, and the potential of human beings and the properties of their environments that support or fail to support the expression of human potential (Gitterman &amp; Germain 2008:8).</p>	<p>Evaluation, assessment, and termination.</p>
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The recommended practice guidelines for social work intervention are presented in detail below. In providing psycho-social therapeutic services to divorced persons, the following intervention strategies are recommended for social workers:

- **Establish a good working relationship.** It is recommended that social workers first establish a good working relationship with divorced persons. A good working relationship can be established by means of acceptance, refraining from judgment, being genuine, and allowing divorced persons to share their experiences freely. In addition, a social worker should be able to attend to divorced persons and listen to their personal experiences. A social worker should also be able to use the basic skill of empathy to communicate his/her understanding of the divorced person in order to create a conducive environment. The significance of establishing a good working relationship between the social worker and the divorced person is that it lays a good foundation for the change process to occur.
- **Demonstrate an interest in the client.** It is imperative that social workers demonstrate interest in working with divorced persons. In so doing, social workers assure divorced persons that they are readily available to work with them. It should be noted that demonstrating interest goes beyond the assurance by the social worker that he/she is willing to work with and support the divorced person. It requires the social worker to be genuine about his/her desire to work with the divorced person to such an extent that the divorced person would be able to see the eagerness of the social worker to work with him/her. Moreover, a working plan or procedures may be developed by the social worker and divorced persons at this stage.
- **Deal with the negative experiences.** Without a doubt, there are many negative experiences associated with divorce. In fact, these experiences become impediments to the well-being of divorced persons. For that reason, it is recommended that social workers deal with the negative and painful experiences that may lead to an inability to cope. While dealing with the negative and painful experiences of divorce, it is vital that the social worker communicates his/her understanding with empathy. It is worth noting that dealing with negative experiences might involve dealing with divorced persons' marital experiences,

their fears, challenges, losses, stigma, negative emotions experienced due to divorce, and any other matters associated with the negative consequences of divorce. As divorced persons share their experiences, the social worker should remain impartial, assume a non-judgemental attitude, and convey his/her understanding of the client.

- **Identify and stay with the positive experiences.** After dealing with the negative experiences of divorce, social workers should work with divorced persons to identify and deliberate on the positive experiences associated with divorce. This might be a daunting task, as most of the divorced persons do not always perceive divorce in a positive light. At this stage, the social worker must remain supportive and continue to apply professional values and communication skills. The social worker should encourage divorced persons to think and share with him/her anything positive about themselves and/or their lives. By sharing the positive experiences, divorced persons become hopeful that there is something positive about themselves and their lives, regardless of the adverse experiences they suffer as a result of divorce.
  
- **Focus on the divorced person's strengths and available resources.** In most instances, divorce makes divorced persons feel powerless and vulnerable. It is for this reason that social workers working with divorced persons should help them unleash their strengths and identify resources around them that can be useful in helping them with their post-divorce adjustment. These strengths could refer to the divorced persons' coping strategies and skills, and the available resources could refer to the divorced persons' support systems. At this stage, the social worker continues to provide support, remain attentive, and listen carefully.
  
- **Deal with possible future challenges.** Divorced persons do not always perceive their future as bright. In fact, without any form of support such as social work services, divorced persons continue to suffer the negative consequences of divorce long after the collapse of their marriages. Additionally, without dealing with their fears and possible future challenges, it would be difficult for divorced persons to cope. When divorced persons are able to deal with the aftermath of divorce and

develop plans to deal with possible future challenges, the post-adjustment stage would have been reached.

- **Evaluation, assessment, and termination.** The final stage of the intervention process involves evaluation and termination. It should be noted that assessment is a continuous process which starts at the first contact. However, at this stage, the social worker evaluates and assesses with divorced persons the changes in their lives since the intervention process started. Therefore, evaluation and assessment can be done by means of reflecting on the divorced persons' experiences at the beginning of the sessions and their current perceptions of the entire situation. This includes the social worker and the divorced person reflecting on the changes that occurred since the beginning of the intervention process and the impact it has had on them. The evaluation and assessment process would determine if termination is imminent. Termination may come after a number of sessions, but more importantly, it should come when the divorced person feels that he/she is ready to face life anew on his/her own.

Recommendations for social work training and education will be presented next.

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations for social work training and education**

The following recommendations relate to social work training and education and they are based on the findings of this research. The following is therefore recommended:

- The institutions of higher learning should incorporate the topic of divorce in their syllabus, including the reasons for divorce, post-divorce challenges and needs, consequences of divorce, emotions and losses associated with divorce, and social work services available to divorced persons. In this way, knowledge and skills would be imparted to the social work students and they would be able to intervene in a better way when working with divorced persons.
- The DSD should develop a comprehensive programme aimed at enhancing social work services to divorced persons. On that note, it is recommended that managers and social workers employed in different sectors be trained thoroughly on such a programme so that they would be conversant with its implementation.

The recommendations for social welfare policy are presented below.

### **6.4.3 Recommendations for social welfare policy**

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations regarding social welfare policy are made. It is recommended that the DSD:

- includes divorce as one of the issues that affect families in South Africa in social welfare policy;
- incorporates into social welfare policy temporal poverty relief support for divorced persons experiencing challenges in meeting basic needs;
- develops social welfare policy aimed at enhancing the psycho-social functioning of divorced persons;
- develops social welfare policy encompassing social welfare programmes that empower the divorced persons;
- develops social welfare policy aimed at addressing the challenges that prevent the delivery of effective social work services to divorced persons;
- considers the practice guidelines proposed in section 6.4.1.1 and 6.4.1.2 of this chapter when policies and intervention strategies related divorce and/or social work services to divorced persons are developed; and
- develops social welfare policy that addresses and enhances the relationship between divorced persons and other systems, including family and children.

The recommendations for further research are presented next.

### **6.4.4 Recommendations for further research**

In this section, the researcher provides the recommendations for further research based on the conclusions of this study.

- In view of the fact that this research study was conducted in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, it is recommended that similar research be conducted in other provinces in order to generate a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services.
- This study focused on social work services to divorced persons and therefore it is recommended that future research focusing on the nature of social work services to children whose parents are divorced be conducted, as children are equally affected by divorce.
- From the researcher's point of view, there is a need to investigate whether the kind of training, including the theoretical framework, offered to social work students at undergraduate level by institutions of higher learning equips them to provide effective services to divorced persons.
- Since a marriage combines the two families of the married couple, there is a need for in-depth research to explore the relationship between divorced persons' families, that is, the relationship between the families of the ex-partners.
- In addition, the researcher is of the opinion that further research that focuses on divorced persons' experiences and perceptions of intimate post-divorce relationships is necessary, as some of them remain single whereas others remarry, and in some instances some of them remarry more than once.
- Lastly, it is recommended that a research study be conducted focusing on the experiences of children whose parents have divorced and married someone other than their biological parent.

The next section presents the summary of the chapter.

## **6.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter was aimed at presenting the summary and conclusions of the study, and to put forward some recommendations. The chapter began by providing an introduction, followed by the summary and conclusions on the general introduction, literature review, and theoretical orientation of the study. Subsequent to the general introduction, literature review, and theoretical orientation of the study, the summary and conclusions of the applied description of the qualitative social work research process adopted for this study were presented. The qualitative social work research framework adopted was relevant and appropriate to realise the goal of this study.

The conclusions and summary based on the demographic data of the research participants (divorced persons and social workers) were also presented. This was followed by the presentation of the summary and conclusions of the research findings based on the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the process of data analysis for the data collected. Thereafter, the limitations of the research study were provided, followed by the presentation of the recommendations. The recommendations were presented in terms of social work practice, social work training and education, social welfare policy, and further research.

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## **ADDENDUM A: A PREAMBLE TO AN INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR DIVORCED PERSONS**

Dear Participant

I, Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi, the undersigned, am the Lecturer employed by UNISA, and also a part-time doctorate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of requirements for the doctoral degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic:

### **POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES.**

In view of the fact that you are well-informed about the subject under study, I hereby approach you with the request to participate in the study. For you decide whether or not to participate in this research project, I am going to give you information that will help you to understand the study (i.e. what the aims of the study are and why there is a need for this particular study). Furthermore, you will be informed about what your involvement in this study will entail (i.e. what you will be asked/or what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits involved by participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study).

The ultimate goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

Should you agree to participate, you would be requested to participate in a face to face interview(s) that will be conducted at your home at a mutually agreed time for one hour per interview. The following questions will be directed to you:

- Would you please share with me your experiences of marital life prior to divorce?
- What is your experience of life after divorce?

- How did divorce affect you?
- Would you share the kind of needs you have experienced after divorce?
- Kindly describe the challenges you have experienced after divorce?
- How did you deal with the post-divorce challenges you experienced?
- Would you share the losses you have experienced as a result of divorce?
- Would you describe the emotions you have experienced after divorce?
- What kind of support have you sought or received during and after divorce?
- Have you sought services from a social worker after divorce? If so, what kind of services did you receive?
- How did you experience the services provided to you by the social worker?
- Do you think that social work services should be provided to divorced persons? Please motivate your answer.
- How do you think social work services to divorced persons could be improved?
- What kind of advice would you give to other couples that are going through divorce?

With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. Your responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotaped(s) videotape(s) will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in a secured place and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking. My research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner.

The audiotapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the study. Identifying information will be deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings.

Please note that participation in the research is voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research. Your decision to participate, or to not participate will not affect you in anyway, now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which

you may otherwise be entitled. Should you agree to participate, please sign the information and informed consent documents contained herewith as proof of your willingness to participate. Please note that you are not signing your rights away.

If you agree to take part, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation in the study without any loss of benefits. However, should you withdraw from the study; you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in an informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

As the researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you divulge is emotionally sensitive and upsetting you, to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be dismissed from the study. Should I conclude that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling if you agree.

You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me on **0761368302** (anytime of the day) or **012 429 8628** (during working hours). My supervisor, Dr HM Williams is also available at **012 429 4269** should you need clarity.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries that have not been sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, you are more than welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: **012 429 6739**, or email: [alpasah@unisa.ac.za](mailto:alpasah@unisa.ac.za).

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa and their answers have not satisfied you, you may direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003.

Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being fully aware of your rights, you are asked to give your full consent in writing should you want to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent forms provided herewith, and initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions contained herewith.

Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards,



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Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi

012 429 8628/076 136 8302

Email: [mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za)

## **ADDENDUM B: A PREAMBLE TO AN INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR SOCIAL WORKERS**

Dear Participant

I, Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi, the undersigned, am the Lecturer employed by UNISA, and also a part-time doctorate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of requirements for the doctoral degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic:

### **POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES.**

In view of the fact that you are well-informed about the subject under study, I hereby approach you with the request to participate in the study. For you decide whether or not to participate in this research project, I am going to give you information that will help you to understand the study (i.e. what the aims of the study are and why there is a need for this particular study). Furthermore, you will be informed about what your involvement in this study will entail (i.e. what you will be asked/or what you will be requested to do during the study, the risks and benefits involved by participating in this research project, and your rights as a participant in this study).

The ultimate goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

Should you agree to participate, you would be requested to participate in a face to face interview(s) that will be conducted at your offices at a mutually agreed time for one hour per interview. The following questions will be directed to you:

- What is your experience in social work?
- What kind of cases do you mainly deal with at your organisation?

- What theoretical approach do you use at your organisation?
- What is your experience of dealing with cases involving divorced persons?
- What are the main problems raised by divorced persons?
- Kindly describe the kind of social work services sought by divorced persons.
- What kind of social work services do you provide to divorced persons?
- Do you find the theoretical approach you use when dealing with divorced persons helpful? Kindly motivate your answer.
- Are you satisfied with the kind of social work services you provide to divorced persons? Kindly motivate your answer.
- What kind of challenges do you experience in providing services to divorced persons?
- From your point of view, what should be done to overcome these challenges?
- Kindly describe when and how you refer divorced persons to other sources.
- Do you think that social workers should provide services to divorced persons?
- How do you think social work services to divorced persons could be improved?

With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. Your responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotaped(s) videotape(s) will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in a secured place and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking. My research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner.

The audiotapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the study. Identifying information will be deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings.

Please note that participation in the research is voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in the research. Your decision to participate, or to not participate will not affect you in anyway, now or in the future and you will incur no penalty and/or loss to which

you may otherwise be entitled. Should you agree to participate, please sign the information and informed consent documents contained herewith as proof of your willingness to participate. Please note that you are not signing your rights away.

If you agree to take part, you have the right to change your mind at any time during the study. You are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation in the study without any loss of benefits. However, should you withdraw from the study; you would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in an informal discussion with you so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

As the researcher, I also have the right to dismiss you from the study without regard to your consent if you fail to follow the instructions or if the information you divulge is emotionally sensitive and upsetting you, to such an extent that it hinders you from functioning physically and emotionally in a proper manner. Furthermore, if participating in the study at any time jeopardises your safety in any way, you will be dismissed from the study. Should I conclude that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset, or perturbed, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling if you agree.

You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me on **0761368302** (anytime of the day) or **012 429 8628** (during working hours). My supervisor, Dr HM Williams is also available at **012 429 4269** should you need clarity.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries that have not been sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, you are more than welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: **012 429 6739**, or email: [alpasah@unisa.ac.za](mailto:alpasah@unisa.ac.za).

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa and their answers have not satisfied you, you may direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003.

Based upon all the information provided to you above, and being fully aware of your rights, you are asked to give your full consent in writing should you want to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent forms provided herewith, and initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree to the conditions contained herewith.

Thank you for your participation.

Kind regards,



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Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi

012 429 8628/076 136 8302

Email: [mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za)

**ADDENDUM C: INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT****POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCED –BASED PERSPECTIVES.**

REFERENCE NUMBER: 31348912  
 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ RESEARCHER: Mr Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi  
 ADDRESS: 2304 Villa Iantana estates, 161 Salie Street, Amandasig, 0182.  
 CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER: 012 429 8628/076 136 8302

<p>DECLARATION BY OR ON BEHALF OF THE PARTICIPANT:</p> <p>I, THE UNDERSIGNED, _____ (name), [ID No: _____] the participant or in my capacity as _____ of the participant [ID No _____] of _____        _____ (address)</p> <p><b>A. HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:</b></p> <p>1. I/the participant was invited to participate in the above research project which is being undertaken by Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi of the Department of Social Work in the School of Social Science and Humanities at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.</p>	Initials
<p>2. The following aspects have been explained to me/the participant:</p> <p>2.1 Goal: The ultimate goal of the study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.</p>	Initials

<p>2.2 I understand that I am participating in this research project without any expectation of payment of whatsoever and that I will be interviewed on the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services.</p>	<p>Initials</p>
<p>2.3 Risks: As the research proceeds I may be emotionally too overwhelmed to handle some of the experiences that I will be sharing and the researcher will in this regard refer me for debriefing.</p>	<p>Initials</p>
<p>Possible benefits: As a result of my participation in this study, I will be afforded an opportunity to share my experiences about the nature of social work services to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons regarding social work services and therefore I would be playing a huge role in making the voices of social workers providing social work services to divorced persons or divorced persons seeking social work services to be heard.</p>	<p>Initials</p>
<p>Confidentiality: My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the investigator/researcher.</p>	<p>Initials</p>
<p>Digital recording of interviews: I also understand that the interviews will be digitally recorded through a digital voice recorder in order for the researcher not to miss important data during analysis and this process will not result in my identity being revealed.</p>	<p>Initials</p>
<p>Possible follow-up interviews: I am also aware that the researcher may come to do some-follow-up interviews in order to get clarity on issues which may not be clear.</p>	
<p>Access to findings: Any new information/benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared with me.</p>	
<p>Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation: My participation is voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect me now or in the future.</p>	<p>Initials</p>

3. The information above was explained to me by Mr Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi in English or the language of my choice and I am in command of these languages. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactory.	Initials
4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participate and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage from the study without any penalty.	Initials
5. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to me.	Initials
<p><b>B. I HEREBY CONSENT VOLUNTARILY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE PROJECT.</b></p> <p>Signed/confirmed at _____ on _____ 20__</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Signature or right thumbprint of participant      Signature of witness</p>	Initials

**ADDENDUM D: STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS**

<p><b>STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR(S)</b></p> <p>I, Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi (name of investigator), declare that I have explained the information given in this document to _____ (name of participant) he/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;</p> <p>this conversation was conducted in English and/or the participant language of choice and no translator was used/this conversation was translated into English by Mr Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi.</p> <p>Signed at _____ on _____ 20____ (place) (date)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Signature of investigator/representative Signature of witness.</p>	
<p><b>IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT</b></p>	
<p>Dear Participant/Representative of participant</p> <p>Thank you for your/the participant's participation in this study. Should at any time during the study an emergency arise as a result of the research, or you require any further information with regard to the study, or the following occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You suffer any harm as a result of the researcher process, kindly contact Mr Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi at 0761368302.</li> </ul>	

**ADDENDUM E: CONSENT FORM REQUESTING PERMISSION TO PUBLISH  
AUDIOTAPES OR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPTS OF AUDIOTAPE RECORDINGS**

<p>As part of this project, I have made an audio recording of you. I would like you to indicate (with ticks in the appropriate blocks next to each statement below) what uses of these records are you willing to consent to. This is completely up to you. I will use the records only in ways that you agree to. In any of these records, names will not be identified.</p>	<p>Place a tick [✓] next to the use of the record you consent to</p>
<p>1. The records can be studied by the research team and photographs/quotations from the transcripts made of the recordings can be used in the research report.</p>	
<p>2. The records (i.e. quotations from the transcripts made of the recordings) can be used for scientific publications and/or meetings.</p>	
<p>3. The written transcripts and/or records can be used by other researchers.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of participant</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>

**ADDENDUM F: A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH AND USE THE AVAILABLE INFORMATION: NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)**

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi, the undersigned, am the Lecturer employed by UNISA, and also a part-time doctorate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of requirements for the doctoral degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic:

**POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES.**

The ultimate goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

The decision to undertake this research project was motivated by an identified and verified gap in the knowledge and practice of social work regarding social work services to divorced persons. Data will be collected from social workers in private practice, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government departments as well as divorced persons who ever received or sought services from social workers. Participation in the research is voluntary and therefore participants are not obliged to take part in the research.

I therefore request your permission to conduct the research with the social workers employed at your organisation. Should the participants agree to participate, they shall be provided with the informed consent documents to sign as a proof that they have agreed to participate willingly. Participants are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation in the study without any loss of benefits. However, should

they withdraw from the study; they would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in an informal discussion with them so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

With the participants' permission, the interviews will be audio-taped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. The participants' responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotaped(s) videotape(s) will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in a secured place and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking. My research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by participants in a confidential manner.

The audiotapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the study. Identifying information will be deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me on **0761368302** (anytime of the day) or **012 429 8628** (during working hours). My supervisor, Dr HM Williams is also available at **012 429 4269** should you need clarity.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries that have not been sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, you are more than welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: **012 429 6739**, or email: [alpasah@unisa.ac.za](mailto:alpasah@unisa.ac.za).

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa and their answers have not satisfied you,

you may direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003.

Thank you for your assistance.

Kind regards,



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Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi  
012 429 8628/076 136 8302  
[mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za)

**ADDENDUM G: A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH AND USE THE AVAILABLE INFORMATION: CITY OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY**

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi, the undersigned, am the Lecturer employed by UNISA, and also a part-time doctorate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. In fulfilment of requirements for the doctoral degree, I have to undertake a research project and have consequently decided to focus on the following research topic:

**POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVES.**

The ultimate goal of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of social work services rendered to divorced persons and the needs of divorced persons with regard to social work services in order to develop guidelines that would inform social work practice and social welfare policies.

The decision to undertake this research project was motivated by an identified and verified gap in the knowledge and practice of social work regarding social work services to divorced persons. Data will be collected from social workers in private practice, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government departments as well as divorced persons who ever received or sought services from social workers. Participation in the research is voluntary and therefore participants are not obliged to take part in the research.

I therefore request your permission to conduct the research with the social workers employed in the City of Tshwane Municipality and the divorced persons who they provide services to. Should the participants agree to participate, they shall be provided with the informed consent documents to sign as a proof that they have agreed to participate willingly. Participants are free to withdraw this consent and discontinue participation in the study without any loss of benefits. However, should they withdraw

from the study; they would be requested to grant me an opportunity to engage in an informal discussion with them so that the research partnership that was established can be terminated in an orderly manner.

With the participants' permission, the interviews will be audio-taped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. The participants' responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed versions) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotaped(s) videotape(s) will be coded to disguise any identifying information. The tapes will be stored in a secured place and only I will have access to them. The transcripts (without any identifying information) will be made available to my research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and an independent coder with the sole purpose of assisting and guiding me with this research undertaking. My research supervisor(s)/promoter(s), and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by participants in a confidential manner.

The audiotapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed upon the completion of the study. Identifying information will be deleted or disguised in any subsequent publication and/or presentation of the research findings.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me on **0761368302** (anytime of the day) or **012 429 8628** (during working hours). My supervisor, Dr HM Williams is also available at **012 429 4269** should you need clarity.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. Without the approval of this committee, the study cannot be conducted. Should you have any questions and queries that have not been sufficiently addressed by me as the researcher, you are more than welcome to contact the Chairperson of the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH (Nicky) Alpaslan, telephone number: **012 429 6739**, or email: [alpasah@unisa.ac.za](mailto:alpasah@unisa.ac.za).

If, after you have consulted the researcher and the Research and Ethics Committee in the Department of Social Work at Unisa and their answers have not satisfied you,

you may direct your question/concerns/queries to the Chairperson, Human Ethics Committee, College of Human Science, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003.

Thank you for your assistance.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RPM', is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi  
012 429 8628/076 136 8302  
[mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za)

# ADDENDUM H: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: CITY OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY



## Community and Social Development Services Department.

Services Social Services Unit  
Room L1029| 2nd Floor | Es'kia Mphahlele Library| Sammy Marks Building, Sammy Marks Square | Pretoria | 0002  
PO Box 2673 | Pretoria | 0001  
Tel: 012 358 8941/Fax: 086 6421600  
Email: [MmantwaH@tshwane.gov.za](mailto:MmantwaH@tshwane.gov.za) | [www.tshwane.gov.za](http://www.tshwane.gov.za) | [www.facebook.com/CityOfTshwane](https://www.facebook.com/CityOfTshwane)

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEW FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY

This is to confirm that the consent was granted for Mr Paul Mbedzi to conduct interviews with the participant for his research studies.

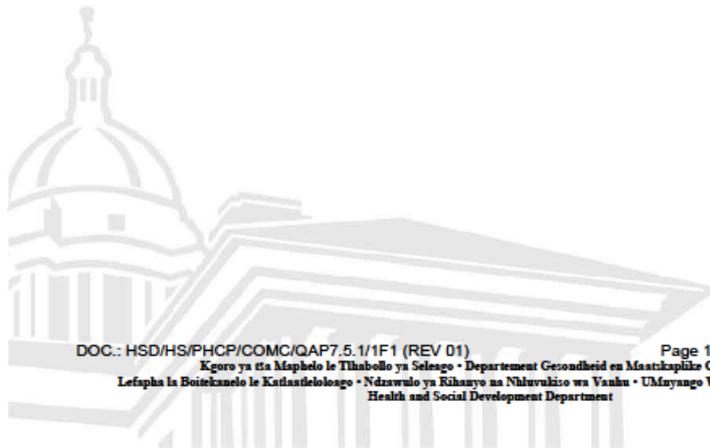
I understand that the results will be captured in a research report and will be published in a professional journal that will also will shared with the City of Tshwane organization.

Signed by: Siphwiwo Ngobeni

Acting Functional Head

Signature:

Date: February 2017



## ADDENDUM I: PROOF OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH AND ETHICS COMMITTEE



### DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH AND ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

10 December 2015

Ref#: DR&EC_2015_003 Name of Applicant: RP Mbedzi Student#: 31348912
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Dear Mr Mbedzi

#### DECISION: ETHICAL APPROVAL

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Name: **Mr RP Mbedzi**  
 Address & contact details: **303 Belvoir Flat, 330 Jacob Mare Street,  
 Pretoria, 0002**  
**076 136 8302/ 012 429 8628**  
[mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mbedzrp@unisa.ac.za)

Supervisor **Dr HM Williams**

Title of Proposal: ***POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO DIVORCED PERSONS: SOCIAL WORKERS' AND SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCED-BASED PERSPECTIVES***

Qualification: **D Phil in Social Work**

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Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Department Of Social Work Research And Ethics Review Committee.

The application was reviewed in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics by the abovementioned Committee at a meeting conducted on 17 September 2015.

**Final approval is granted for the duration of the project.**

<sup>1</sup>Note: The reference number (top right corner of this communiqué) should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication (i.e. Website, E-mail messages and letters) with the intended participants as well as with the Department of Social Work Research and Ethics Review Committee.



**ADDENDUM J: DEBRIEFING LETTER**

**Catholic Women's League**  
 DIOCESAN COUNCIL • ARCHDIOECESSE PRETORIA



REGISTERED WELFARE ORGANISATION  
 REGISTRATION NUMBER - 001 678 NPO

**Katolieke Vrouebond**  
 RAAD VAN DIE AARHISBIEDOM • PRETORIA

207 Jeyissen Street  
 Sunnyside  
 Pretoria  
 0002

Tel: 012-343-0111  
 012-343-0112  
 Fax: 012-343-0575  
 012-623-0054  
 e mail: [owjpretnlg@wcl.co.za](mailto:owjpretnlg@wcl.co.za)

Date: 04 September 2015

To whom it may concern

This is to acknowledge that Mr Mbedzi R.P has requested our services to debrief his participants if and when need arises. Mrs Mpho Phoshoko and Mrs RefilweMatsimbi, social workers stationed at Hamanskraal and Mamelodi respectively will be available to offer counselling to research participants as requested.

You are welcome to contact us for further clarity.

Mrs. Mpho Stella Phoshoko  
 SOCIAL WORKER

CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE  
 207 Jeyissen Street  
 0002 Sunnyside, Pretoria