



A CALL FOR SUBMISSION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EoI)

RESEARCH AGENDA 2026/2027:

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL FOR ETHICS CLEARANCE APPLICATION AND FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

THE PREVALENCE AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS AMONG SOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Research companies are invited to submit expressions of interest to offer research services to the HWSETA to conduct a research study based on the terms of reference attached to this call.	
Date Call Published:	02/07/2026
Closing Date of Call:	13/07/2026
Reference Number:	HWSETA-26/27 EvalResearch-0001
Service Category:	Evaluation Research
Person to submit Eols to:	Simbulele Shabalala
Email address:	research@hwseta.org.za
Title of the research project:	The prevalence and contributing factors of mental health disorders among social service practitioners in South Africa

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE PREVALENCE AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF
MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS AMONG SOCIAL SERVICE PRACTITIONERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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1. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) is mandated by the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 as amended, to develop and update it annually a Sector Skills Plan (SSP) within the framework of the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP). The SSP addresses the skills development needs of the health and social development sector, in line with the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes as per the HWSETA constitution. The SSP is developed at the start of a strategic period and is then updated annually within the strategic period in order to keep track with new developments, adjusting and adapting it to significant changes that affect the skill levels of the sector. As such, the HWSETA requires the services of a research service provider to conduct a research study that will ultimately contribute towards the update of an SSP.

Social Service Practitioners (SSPs) play a crucial role in the health and social development sector, providing essential services to vulnerable populations in South Africa. They also play a key role in the supply of the skills needed to the sector. SSPs include social workers, auxiliary social workers, community development practitioners, and child and youth care workers.

Despite the importance of their work, SSPs are often exposed to challenging working environments that can adversely affect their mental health status. High workloads, insufficient support, and exposure to emotionally taxing situations are common stressors in this profession, contributing to a range of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and burnout (Leka & Jain, 2010) (Leiter & Maslach, 2017).

In 2012, the NDP determined that the supply of SSPs had a shortfall of 40 000 against the estimated need of 55 000. With more demand of the SSPs against limited supply due to poor working conditions, lack of funding, and other structural conductions, it is has become important to ascertain through this research study the extent to which different working environment aspects and other factors impact the mental health status of SSPs.

2. RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

This serves as a request for proposals and quotations from relevant research service providers to conduct a review of the research proposal, lead ethics application, and review the final research report that will contribute towards the update of the Sector Skills Plan (SSP).

3. GOAL

This study aims to examine various possible factors that may be associated with mental health outcomes among SSPs in SA. Specifically, the study will identify demographic characteristics, determine the prevalence of mental health disorders, describe the physical and mental aspects of their working environment, and investigate the work-related factors linked to mental health issues.

4. OBJECTIVES

The study should, therefore, address the following related objectives:

1. To identify the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of social service practitioners within the health and social development sector.
2. To determine the prevalence of mental health disorders among social service practitioners.
3. To describe the mental, physical, and social aspects of the working environment for social service practitioners.
4. To examine the factors that are associated with mental health disorders among social service practitioners.
5. To establish possible intervention options available for the social services practitioners to prevent or manage mental health problems within the profession

5. SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research study seeks to answer the following specific questions in relation key objectives as numbered above:

1. To identify the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of social service practitioners within the health and social development sector

- 1.1 What is the age, gender, and educational backgrounds of social service practitioners within the health and social development sector?
- 1.2 What is the income range and employment status of social service practitioners in this sector?
- 1.3 What is the distribution of work experience and job roles among social service practitioners in the health and social development sector?

2. To determine the prevalence of mental health disorders among social service practitioners.

- 2.1 What is the prevalence of common mental health disorders (includes depression, anxiety, stress) among social service practitioners?
- 2.2 Are there any significant differences in the prevalence of mental health disorders based on demographic factors such as age, gender, or job role?
- 2.3 What are the most self-reported mental health symptoms among social service practitioners?

3. To describe the working environment, including job demands, influence at work, social support, and the physical working environment of social service practitioners.

- 3.1 How are the job demands and expectations of the working environment perceived by SSPs and how do they affect the mental health of SSPs?

3.2 How is work influence or job autonomy in the working environment perceived by SSPs and how does it affect the mental health of SSPs?

3.3 How are the social aspects of the working environment, including teamwork, support from colleagues, and supervision perceived by SSPs and how do they affect the mental health of SSPs

3.4 How are the physical aspects of the working environment, such as workspace, safety, and ergonomics, perceived by SSPs and how do they affect the mental health of social service practitioners?

4. To examine the factors within that are associated with mental health disorders among social service practitioners.

4.1 What factors, including demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, the working environment, physical health, stigma, resilience, and self-care play a role in mitigating or exacerbating mental health challenges among SSPs?

5. To establish possible intervention options available for the Social Services Practitioners to prevent or manage mental health problems within the profession

5.1 What types of mental health interventions are currently available to social service professionals, and how effective are they perceived to be?

5.2 What workplace interventions could be implemented to prevent or manage mental health issues among social service professionals?

6. SCOPE OF WORK

The aim of this study is to investigate the current state of mental health of social service practitioners in South Africa and determine how mental health among SSPs is impacted by the working environment.

The service provider will be required to support the research team through a thorough review of the following key project deliverables:

6.1. Review of the Research Proposal

The service provider will review and provide critical input on the full research proposal to ensure clarity, scientific rigor, alignment with objectives, and feasibility. The review should cover the following key components:

a) Literature Review

- Assess the quality, relevance, and currency of references.
- Identify any critical gaps in the background/context.
- Confirm alignment of the literature with the study objectives.

- Suggest additional literature or theoretical frameworks, where necessary.

b) Research Aim and Objectives

- Assess whether the aim is clearly defined and researchable.
- Check if objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).
- Ensure that objectives align with the stated problem and the proposed methodology.

c) Methodology

- Evaluate the suitability of the research design (e.g., cross-sectional mixed methods).
- Review sampling strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and recruitment plan.
- Assess the feasibility and appropriateness of data collection methods.
- Comment on the validity and reliability of the study design.

d) Data Analysis Plan

- Assess the appropriateness of proposed analytical methods for both qualitative and quantitative data (e.g., descriptive stats, chi-square, ANOVA, logistic regression).
- Confirm whether proposed methods align with the research questions and data types.
- Evaluate any plans for handling missing data (e.g., imputation, listwise deletion).

e) Survey Tools

- Review the structure, language, and length of the questionnaire.
- Assess whether survey sections align with objectives and key variables (e.g., mental health, job demands, resilience).
- Evaluate appropriateness of scales used (e.g., SRQ-20, COPSQ, BRS).
- Provide input on improving the clarity, sensitivity, or comprehensiveness of questions.

6.2. Lead the Ethics Application Process

The service provider will be responsible for preparing, compiling, and submitting the ethics application to a recognised Research Ethics Committee (REC). This includes:

- Drafting and finalising all necessary ethics documents, including the ethics application form, participant information sheet, informed consent forms, and data protection plans.
- Compiling supporting materials, such as the full proposal, survey tools, recruitment letters, and institutional permissions (if required).
- Ensuring compliance with national and institutional ethical guidelines, including the Department of Health's Ethics in Health Research Guidelines and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

- Liaising directly with the ethics committee to respond to queries, submit revisions, and track the status of the application.
- Ensuring timely submission and approval before commencement of data collection.

6.3. Review of the Final Research Report

The service provider will critically review the final research report to ensure high-quality reporting, technical accuracy, and consistency with ethical and methodological standards.

a) Literature Review

- Ensure inclusion of relevant and updated literature aligned with the study's findings and context.
- Evaluate the strength of the discussion and theoretical framing.

b) Research Aim and Objectives

- Confirm that the results and conclusions appropriately address the original objectives.
- Check for logical flow and consistency between findings and recommendations.

c) Methodology

- Assess whether the methods used are clearly described, justifiable, and consistent with the approved proposal.
- Review any deviations or limitations and how they were handled.

d) Data Analysis

- Review the clarity and appropriateness of data presentation (e.g., tables, figures, summary stats).
- Evaluate the interpretation of results and the robustness of conclusions drawn.

7. COMPETENCY AND EXPERTISE REQUIREMENTS

Prior to the bidder being subjected to the competency/ functional criterion, it is mandatory for the bidder to have the research ethics approval capacity for all research project team members. Research ethics approval capacity means that all project team members are confirmed to have an active certificate of Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation (TRREE) for Module 1 (Introduction to research ethics) and Module 3 (Informed consent). For more information on TRREE: <https://elearning.trree.org/>. The certificates should be provided.

NB: If a bidder does not meet these mandatory requirements, they will be disqualified immediately without undergoing the competency/functional criterion.

The successful bidder must have the following competencies:

FUNCTIONAL CRITERION	KEY COMPONENTS	MAXIMUM POINTS AVAILABLE															
1. Organisational Structure and function	1.1 The team leader must have a minimum of 8 years of experience in research. A minimum of at one (1x) team member is required. A team member must have at least 4 years of individual work experience. The research service provider must submit CVs of all team members listed above. <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name & Surname</th><th>Title/Position</th><th>Years of experience in research</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td><td>Team members (at least one) [5]</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>Project/Team leader [5]</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>NB: Project/Team leader cannot be team member</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>Total [10]</td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table> - Table above not provided in the proposal = [0] - Table completed with individual team member with less than 4 years of experience = [0] - Table completed with team leader with less than 8 years of experience in research = [0] - Table completed with at least one team member having 4 years of experience in research specified = [5] - Table completed with a team leader with a minimum of 8 years of experience in research = [5]	Name & Surname	Title/Position	Years of experience in research		Team members (at least one) [5]			Project/Team leader [5]			NB: Project/Team leader cannot be team member			Total [10]		[10 points]
Name & Surname	Title/Position	Years of experience in research															
	Team members (at least one) [5]																
	Project/Team leader [5]																
	NB: Project/Team leader cannot be team member																
	Total [10]																
2. Professional Qualifications of the Research Team	The Project/Team leader should be in possession of the following qualifications (provide certified copy of the team leader's qualification the stamp must not be more than 6 months): A minimum of a Master's degree in the field of Psychology, Psychiatry, Behavioural sciences, Public health, and Social Work, and social sciences. - Qualifications below Master's degree = [0] - Master's degree = [20] - PHD = [30] NB: International qualifications must be verified by SAQA and a copy of letters confirming verification. Total [30 points] The research service provider must submit the qualifications of at least one (1x) other team member that will be involved in this project <u>listed on the organisation and structure table</u> above in possession of the following qualifications (excluding team leader). A minimum of a Master's degree in the field of Psychology, Psychiatry, Behavioural sciences, Public health, and Social Work, and social sciences. - Qualifications below Master's degree = [0] - Master's degree = [10] - PHD = [20] (Provide a certified copy of the qualification listed. the stamp must not be more than 6 months). NB: International qualifications must be verified by SAQA and a copy of letters confirming verification. Total [20 points]	[50 points]															
3. Reference Letters	The service provider must submit a minimum of 1 (1x) reference letter with contactable references in <u>provision of research services</u>. The reference letter should be between 2020 and 2026. For a reference letter to be valid it must be dated and signed. No reference letters = [0] Minimum one (1x) reference letters = [20] In addition to meeting minimum one (1x) reference letter, <u>bonus points</u> will be added when the follow aspects are stated with a valid reference letter. - Reference letter must at least confirm the experience of research service provider in designing and managing online surveys [10] - Reference letter must at least confirm the experience of research service provider in conducting research in Mental health [10]	[40 points]															
Subtotal for Functionality (maximum) 100%		100 points															
NB: A service provider must score <u>a minimum of 80 points on functionality</u> [competency and expertise requirements] to be considered.																	

8. TIMELINES OF THE PROJECT

The duration of the project will be eighty (80) working days from the signature date of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). However, adjustments for longer duration maybe accommodated for the purposes of research ethics approval process.

9. EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

The service provider will be required to deliver:

- Annotated proposal review with written summary feedback.
- Ethics application package including all supporting documentation.
- Revised or resubmitted application materials (if required).
- Final report review with tracked changes, comments, and a summary report.
- Participation in consultation meetings with the research team and relevant stakeholders.
- Annotated research report review with written summary feedback

10. QUALITY AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The service provider will report directly to the Researcher (appointed as project lead from HWSETA) and the Research and Information Manager of HWSETA, as and when required. The service provider must oversee the general management of the service and performance.

11. PRICING

- The proposed project pricing must be all inclusive of VAT.
- The HWSETA may require a breakdown of rates on any of the items priced and service providers are required to provide same.
- The HWSETA reserves the right to negotiate the selection/prioritisation of deliverables in line with the contract price.

The research report for the proposal review, ethics application, and research report review will be confined to the following parameters:

No	The prevalence and contributing factors of mental health disorders among social service practitioners in South Africa	MAX NO. OF PAGES	MAX NO. OF WORDS
1	Proposal review for ethics application	30	10 000
2	Final research report review	100	30 000

The following two tables must be used for the quotation. However, you are free to include more quotation details in your own preferred format in addition to the table shown below.

First table below accounts for proposal review and ethics application.

Outcome/Output	Activity	Team member(s) involve (Name and position)	Cost inclusive of VAT
Proposal review for ethics application			
Ethics Application <i>(should include the ethics committee cost)</i>			
Total			

Second table below accounts for research report review. However, you are free to include more quotation details in your own preferred format in addition to the table shown below.

Key activities	Team member(s) involve (Name and position)	Cost inclusive of VAT
Reviewing the final research report with the view to identify strengths and weaknesses		
Strengthening the final research report by conducting additional research and ensuring that it makes a policy contribution		
Locating the report within the skills development literature		
Meeting the Research Manager or research team virtually to exchange ideas on the report (This is a capacity-building component)		
Quality control and self- editing		
Total		

NB: consider the guideline below for reviewing research study proposal & report at HWSETA.

ANNEXURE 1: GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH STUDY PROPOSALS & REPORTS
GENERAL OVERVIEW
Review whether the proposal/report used: ○ appropriate structure to document research processes followed to conduct the study ○ appropriate style of writing, that considers construction of paragraphs and sentences, where:

ANNEXURE 1: GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH STUDY PROPOSALS & REPORTS

- a succession of well-structured paragraphs helps to create a coherent and logical argument,
- paragraphs contain a number of sentences which develop new ideas or expand upon existing ones,
- paragraphs which, develop new ideas starts with an introductory sentence (a topic sentence). This tells the reader the purpose of the paragraph and introduces the main idea under development, expanding upon or contrasting with another.
- appropriate language
 - Use of transitional hook, which leads to the next paragraph or topic
- Citations appropriately, where:
 - ideas, facts, theories, concepts, derived from the research and thoughts of others summarized, paraphrased, or used as direct quotes in the report acknowledge sources.

ABSTRACT

Review whether the abstract:

- provides a concise of description the content and scope of the research study; which:
 - identifies the study's objective,
 - its methodology and key findings,
 - conclusions and recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Review whether the introduction:

- provides a **context or background to the topic by** explaining the title in own words or use a quotation from an author who offers a supporting or contradictory statement about the topic area;
- provides a **purpose for writing about this topic by explaining** the problem addressed by the research study;
- **explains the rationale and significance of the research study;**
- **indicate intended users of the report and its intended use;**
- provides **definitions** for complex terminology or acronyms used in the report that need defining, conceptualisation or operationalisation;
- **presents the main ideas that stem from the topic** in the precise order in which they will be discussed;
- narrows the topic down to a specific focus of an investigation;
- establishes a direction for the entire report;

ANNEXURE 1: GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH STUDY PROPOSALS & REPORTS
○ points forward to the conclusion; ○ takes a position and justify further discussion.
LITERATURE REVIEW
Review whether the literature review: ○ Places each work in the context of its contribution to understanding the research problem being studied. ○ Describes the relationship of each work to the others under consideration. ○ Reveals any gaps that exist in the literature. ○ Resolves conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies. ○ Identifies areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort. ○ Points the way in fulfilling a need for additional research. ○ Locates the research study being conducted within the context of existing literature [very important].
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Review whether the presentation of the method used clearly articulate how data was obtained and the reasons why a particular procedures or techniques were used, by: ○ Introducing the overall methodological approach used for investigating the research problem, ○ Indicating how the approach fits the overall research design; ○ Describing the specific methods of data collection used; ○ Explaining how collected data was analysed; ○ Providing background and a rationale for methodologies that are unfamiliar for readers; ○ Providing justification for participant selection and sampling procedure; and ○ Describing limitations.
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS
Review whether the presentation of primary and secondary data collected provides: ○ understanding the results within the context of the research problem underpinning your study. ○ visuals such as, figures, charts, photos, maps, tables, etc. for non-textual elements to further illustrate key findings, if appropriate.

ANNEXURE 1: GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH STUDY PROPOSALS & REPORTS
○ A systematic description of results, highlighting for the reader observations that are most relevant to the topic under investigation ○ A short paragraph that concludes the results section by synthesizing the key findings of the study.
INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
Review whether the interpretation of findings: ○ Most effectively demonstrates the author's ability as a researcher to think critically about issues, to develop creative solutions to problems based upon a logical synthesis of the findings, and to formulate a deeper, more profound understanding of the research problem under investigation, ○ Presents the underlying meaning of the research study, ○ notes possible implications in other areas of study, and ○ explores possible improvements that can be made in order to further develop the concerns of the research study, ○ Highlights the importance of the study and how it may be able to contribute to and/or help fill existing gaps in the field. ○ reveals new gaps in the literature that had not been previously exposed or adequately described, and Review whether the discussion provides: ○ Explanation of whether or not the results • go into greater depth when explaining findings that were unexpected or especially profound; • take note of any unusual or unanticipated patterns or trends that emerged and explain their meaning in relation to the research problem. ○ References to previous research by making a comparison with the findings from other studies to support a claim. ○ a claim for how the results can be applied more generally. ○ a possible conclusion arising from the results, which may be proved or disproved in subsequent research.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Review whether the conclusion ○ Presents the last word on the issues raised in the report; ○ Summarises thoughts and conveys the larger significance of the study; ○ Identifies how a gap in the literature has been addressed. ○ Demonstrates the importance of the author's ideas.

ANNEXURE 1: GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING RESEARCH STUDY PROPOSALS & REPORTS

- Introduces possible new or expanded ways of thinking about the research problem.

REFERENCES, TABLES, AND FIGURES

Check:

- accuracy, numbering and citation appropriateness
- quality and readability of figures
- completeness of legends, headers and axis labels
- presentation consistency

12. MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

- Company registration documents
- Service provider's business address
- Service provider's contact person (name, email address, and telephone number)
- Proof of registration on the Central Supplier Database (attached relevant documents)
- Signed POPI Consent (**Refer to Annexure A below**)

ANNEXURE A: CONSENT IN TERMS OF SECTION 11 OF THE PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION ACT, 2013 ("POPIA")

In order for the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority ("HWSETA") to consider the applicant's response to the advertisement to become a service provider of the HWSETA, it will be necessary for the HWSETA to process certain personal information which the service provider may share with the HWSETA for the purpose of the bid, including personal information.

The HWSETA will process the Service Provider's Personal Information in accordance with its Privacy Policy. Access to your Personal Information and purpose specification: Personal Information will be processed by the HWSETA for purposes of assessing the service provider's submission in relation to the advertised EOI and the purposes of assessing current services required by HWSETA. We may also share the service provider's Personal Information with third parties within the Republic of South Africa, including to carry out verification and background checks. In this regard, the service provider acknowledges that the HWSETA's authorised verification agent(s) and service providers will access Personal Information and conduct background screening.

Consent:

By [ticking] "Yes" and signing below, you agree and voluntarily consent to the HWSETA's processing of your Personal Information for the purposes of evaluation, including to confirm and verify any information provided in the submission and service provider gives HWSETA permission to do so. The service provider understands that it is free to withdraw its consent on written notice to HWSETA and the service provider agrees that the Personal Information may be disclosed by HWSETA to third parties. Please note that if you withdraw your consent at any stage, we may be unable to process your bid submission.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Supplier Name

Date

Signature