The Impacts of Western Theories: Application to Professional Social Work Practice in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of western social work education on decision-making among Saudi Arabian social workers within an Islamic context. Specifically, it investigates the integration of theoretical frameworks learned at university into practical social work, exploring factors such as professional experience, religious beliefs, and cultural influences that may shape decision-making. Research questions address whether social workers recall and utilize theories from their studies, the influence of practicing in an Islamic society, and potential conflicts between Western theories and Islamic values.

Findings reveal that while social work education has significantly shaped professional practices—particularly through problem-solving skills and systematic approaches—many social workers are also guided by religious values in their practice. The research highlights that, for the majority, Western social work principles, including client dignity, respect, and autonomy, align with Islamic values, suggesting successful integration of these frameworks into their professional identity. Approximately twenty percent of participants did experience some tension between academic education and real-world practice but those social workers with longer experience in the field felt more confident in their interventions and decision-making.

The study underscores the universal applicability of social work values and professional processes and how they transcend cultural circumstances and world views. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how non-western cultural and religious values intersect with Western social work-oriented education in a manner which leads to a selection of interventions by social workers which adhere to principles of competent practice. At the same time these values are deeply rooted in the culture of the society in which they are practiced and are adapted to fit within context

specific agency policies. The findings provide a basis for curriculum enhancements that support culturally competent practice in Saudi Arabia and similar settings.

Key words: Western theories, social work practice, Islamic context, theoretical frameworks, religious beliefs, curriculum development, cultural adaptation.

DEDICATION

To my family and my children, whose unwavering love and patience have been my greatest strength.

This work is dedicated to you.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AASW **-** Australian Association of Social Worker

NASW - National Association of Social Workers (United States)

IASSW - International Association of Schools of Social Work

ISFW - International Federation of Social Workers

ICSW - International Council on Social Welfare

UQU - Umm Al-Qura University

UN – United Nations

UK - United Kingdom

USA - United States of America

GLOSSARY

Global Definition of Social Work

The internationally recognised definition that encompasses the principles and practices guiding social work around the world, established by ISFW and IASSW.

Assessment

The process of analysing collected data to understand a client's situation, needs, and challenges.

Behavioural Approach

A model in social work focusing on understanding client behaviours within their environmental or social contexts, often emphasizing external influences.

Casework

A method of social work that involves working directly with individuals or families to assess and address their needs.

Crisis Intervention

A short-term, emergency-based social work approach aimed at helping clients cope with immediate psychological crises, typically by addressing emotional and situational stress.

Data Collection

In social work, this refers to gathering relevant information about a client's background, issues, and environment to inform assessment and intervention.

Existential Social Work

An approach in social work that addresses clients' concerns around meaning, purpose, and self, often incorporating spiritual and philosophical perspectives.

Family Intervention Model

A social work approach where the family, rather than the individual, is the primary focus of intervention, with a goal to improve dynamics and support among family members.

Functional Approach to Casework

A model focusing on the client's "will" and the relationship between social worker and client, emphasizing the client's active role in problem-solving.

Global Definition of Social Work

The internationally recognised definition that encompasses the principles and practices guiding social work around the world, established by ISFW and IASSW.

Indigenisation

Adapting foreign concepts, including social work practices, to align with the local cultural, social, and political context.

Interpersonal Practice

A social work approach focusing on direct engagement with clients, helping them manage personal and relational issues.

International Social Work

Social work practices and education adapted for application across various cultural and national contexts.

Intervention

Actions taken by social workers to help clients manage or resolve their issues, based on an assessment.

Islamic World

The phrase “Islamic world” is used in this thesis to refer to countries and societies in which Islam plays a central role in shaping social norms, values, institutions, and public life. It is a commonly used term in academic literature, especially in history, religious studies, and the social sciences, to describe Muslim-majority regions and the global community of Muslims. The usage has been retained with this understanding in mind.

Localisation

A process in social work where foreign models are adapted to better fit the specific cultural and social environment of a local area.

Makkah

The holy city located in western Saudi Arabia, regarded as the spiritual center of Islam. The spelling Makkah is used consistently throughout this thesis in line with common academic convention in English-language scholarship.

Professional Imperialism

The dominance of one set of professional standards or practices (often Western) in other cultures, potentially disregarding local values and needs.

Psycho-Social Model

A framework in social work that integrates psychological and social aspects to understand and help clients, often emphasizing understanding underlying motives and emotions.

Spirituality in Social Work

A social work approach that considers clients' spiritual or religious beliefs as central to their identity and well-being.

Task-Centred Approach

A structured social work method where clients are given specific tasks to complete, aimed at promoting independence and self-efficacy.

Western Social Work

A term used to describe dominant social work theories, educational philosophies, and professional models developed primarily in North American and European contexts. This includes frameworks that emphasize individual autonomy, critical thinking, secular ethics, and human rights-based practice.

Westernisation

The process by which Western ideas, practices, or values are adopted or imposed in non-Western societies.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university;

2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University;

3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text and

4. I acknowledge that I used artificial intelligence as a help in the editing and formatting of my thesis.

Signed:

Nouf Saud S Barasay

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the Research

Graduates of social work in Saudi Arabia have received a professional education that largely adapts western philosophy as well as replicating aspects of western theoretical interpersonal practice frameworks, leading to paramount implications for educators. Adapting western pedagogy and philosophy as well as directly replicating aspects of western theoretical frameworks into social work curriculum, has important implications for graduates on their professional practice in social work. Researchers such as Al-krenawi and Graham (2003) cite numerous examples of western biases in teaching, research and practice in the Muslim Arab world.

After the Second World War professional education, including social work, was globalised, and proliferated across the world, invariably carrying with it the cultural assumptions originating from Western Europe and America (Healy, 1999; Midgley, 1999). According to Barise (2004), social work as a social construct is still predominantly shaped by the European and North American socio-cultural contexts in which it originated, according to some a form of academic imperialism (Payne, 1997; 2005). Social work is a predominantly western value-based profession and when it is taught in a Middle Eastern university the question arises about the extent to which it takes into account Arab students' dissimilar perceptions of what is right and what is wrong behavior (Ragab, 1995); Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003).

When looking at social work education specifically, a significant disparity is noted between Saudi Arabia and western countries in the societal context for this learning. This discrepancy is most relevant in the teaching of theoretical approaches, paradigms and frameworks found in the teaching

units on direct client-worker interactions. The teaching of western-based perspectives in social work faces several challenges in different ethnocultural settings of non-western countries such as Saudi Arabia (Tsui & Yan, 2010). One of these is how to ensure relevancy of western social work approaches and case material to a population of students living within and eventually going to practice in an Islamic society.

Saudi Arabia is a society deeply rooted in the Islamic religion and culture, which significantly influences the conduct of helping professionals. The pre-social work educational philosophy and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia differs considerably from that of western educational systems, and this can challenge the conduct of graduates who engage in professional practice (Holtzhausen, 2011). The Arab conduct and practices are guided by the Islamic religion and culture, which dictates what is acceptable and what is unacceptable (Epstein et al., 2018).

1.1 Personal Motivation for PhD Study

My personal background is that I currently hold an academic teaching position in social work at Umm Al Qura University (UQ) located in Makkah. This teaching experience has influenced me to develop a deeper interest into researching ways to improve teaching of social work at the university by understanding if what is being taught to students is being internalised and guiding them in their post-study professional life. Since the establishment of the social work course at UQU University in 1984 and until 2019 most of the literature and theoretical perspectives incorporated into the social work teaching of interpersonal practice had been drawn from western social work theoretical paradigms, models, and approaches as I will discuss in the next chapter. Most graduates with social work degrees take jobs in government agencies that are steeped in Islamic culture and religion, positions which they obtain because of their university qualifications. They seldom return to the

university to provide feedback to the staff about the relevancy and usefulness of the theoretical frameworks they studied.

During the last few years, I have undertaken a Master of Social Work degree in Adelaide, Australia, which has furnished me with western perspectives and values as well as various western-based social work interpersonal practice theories. Additionally, the experience gained during my master's program placement gave me industry related specific experience for social work in South Australia and in Australia. The theoretical paradigms used in social work education in Australia are based on western approaches to the application of theory to practice, but to identify them as also forming the basis of interpersonal practice theory in Saudi Arabia has raised questions for me since much of this same literature and theories were incorporated into the social work teaching program at UQU University. I have become increasingly curious about how graduates utilise the information and content they received at university when they are faced with the reality of social work practice in a non-western, Islamic societal context.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The proposed research is aimed at identifying experiences of graduates who studied social work in Saudi Arabia where the curriculum was based on a western curriculum and who are now employed as professionals delivering their services in the Islamic state[1] of Saudi Arabia. The objectives are to determine whether the teaching of a professional curriculum program based on a western pedagogy, theory and philosophy has impacted the professional practice or affected the decision-

[1] The term "Islamic state" refers to state whose governance, legal framework, and social systems are informed by Islamic principles and values derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. In this thesis, the term refers specifically to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where national laws and social institutions operate within an Islamic framework that integrates religion and governance.

making of social work graduates who work in government agencies within an Islamic framework in an Islamic society.

1.3 Research Questions and Sub-Questions

The following research questions will guide the research:

1) What factors influence decision-making?
    - What do workers draw upon in making decisions?
2) How aware are the social workers of drawing on or being influenced by any theoretical perspectives they studied at university?
    - Do they remember the theoretical frameworks they were taught at university?
    - Do they feel that they utilise any theoretical frameworks they were taught at university?
3) Does practicing within an Islamic agency[2] and society influence decision-making?
    - Do workers perceive any conflict in their practice between social work theories and the Islamic framework of the agency and society?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide valuable insights into the intersection of western social work theories and Islamic cultural frameworks, shedding light on how these two paradigms coexist within professional practice in Saudi Arabia. It addresses a critical gap in understanding the adaptability and relevance of western curricula when implemented in a distinctly

[2] The term "Islamic agency" refers to an organisation or institution whose mission, values, and practices are guided by Islamic teachings and ethical principles. In the context of this study, the term refers to social service or welfare agencies in Saudi Arabia that provide assistance in alignment with Islamic moral values and social responsibilities, such as compassion, charity (zakat), and community solidarity.

Islamic social and professional context.

Saudi Arabia is a society deeply rooted in Islamic values, where religion not only shapes personal identity but also informs public institutions, including education, healthcare, and social services (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Long, 2005). Islam, as both a faith and a moral framework, plays a central role in defining appropriate social behavior, ethical conduct, and communal responsibilities (Doumato, 2003). The participants in this study operate within this context, where social work is seen not only as a professional field but also as a form of moral and religious duty (Yusuf, 2012; Khan, 2019). This worldview is essential to understanding how Saudi social workers interpret Western theories, navigate ethical dilemmas, and integrate their personal faith with their professional roles (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011).

This study is particularly significant for several reasons:

1. Cultural Relevance in Social Work Education

The research examines the applicability of western social work theories in a non-western, Islamic context, contributing to a growing discourse on the decolonisation of social work education. It highlights the need for culturally responsive curricula that align with the societal, ethical, and religious values of the region.

2. Professional Practice and Decision-Making

By exploring how graduates incorporate their western education into their professional practice, this study identifies the influences on decision-making processes within an Islamic framework. This understanding could guide the development of practice models that harmonise theoretical knowledge with the cultural and religious ethos of Saudi society.

3. Policy Implications for Social Work Education

The findings of this study could inform policymakers and educators about the need to localise and adapt social work education to better meet the needs of Saudi professionals. This could lead to the creation of hybrid pedagogies that integrate western theories with Islamic principles, ensuring both global competence and cultural authenticity.

4. Empirical Data Contribution

The research will provide empirical evidence on the lived experiences of social work graduates, offering a nuanced understanding of how they navigate potential conflicts or synergies between their academic training and professional practice in an Islamic society.

5. Enhancing Professional Development

Insights from this study could lead to targeted professional development programs for social workers, focusing on bridging gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical application in culturally specific contexts.

6. Global Implications

While focused on Saudi Arabia, the findings of this research could resonate with other Islamic or non-western countries grappling with similar challenges in integrating western professional education with indigenous practices.

This study's contributions will advance both the academic understanding of social work practice in diverse cultural settings and the practical strategies for curriculum development and professional training. The research underscores the importance of reconciling global knowledge systems with

local values to create meaningful, impactful, and culturally relevant social work practices.

1.5 Summary

The chapter provided an overview of the historical globalisation of social work education and the potential for cultural imperialism to transport western culture into a non-western society which could pose some challenges to social work practitioners. It discussed the background to the research, the personal motivation of the researcher in undertaking this research, and outlined the research questions, aims and objectives of this thesis which will examine the experiences of employed social work graduates in Saudi Arabia. These graduates were educated using western models, paradigms and perspectives as the foundational approaches to interpersonal practice. Important questions were posed concerning the impact of this training in a Muslim environment. The chapter also highlighted the importance of this research in providing new insights and knowledge about the ways in which these professionals integrate western theories with Islamic cultural values in their thinking and practice. The proposed research intends to provide important findings which could contribute to the prospects of social work education making modifications to the culturally specific context in the teaching of social work theory in Saudi Arabia, with the purpose of enhancing future educational practices and policies in the country.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY-BASED SOCIAL WORK IN SAUDI ARABIA

2. Introduction

This chapter provides a context for this dissertation and lays a foundation for the analysis of the relationship between the theoretical western social work models presented in social work education in Saudi Arabia and the influence of that education by practicing social workers in the Islamic society of Saudi Arabia. The chapter provides the history of education in Saudi Arabia, the development of social work as a university degree and the curriculum in place when the participants in this research were undertaking their social work degrees. The topics relating to social work practice theory are identified.

2.1 History of Education in Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently at the forefront of educational influence on other countries of the Islamic world (UQU, 2020). This is likely due to its religious status as well as its historic and religious importance. The most notable significance status and roles include the *Qiblah* (Ka`bah) which the Muslims face during their daily prayers. The development of formal educational institutions and programs have taken place over the last ninety years.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932. It was a poor country with a small educational program comprising 12 schools with 700 students. This situation changed dramatically after 1938, when oil was discovered in huge amounts in Saudi Arabia. By 1950 there were 365 schools educating 42,000 students (Simmons & Simmons, 1994). In 1954, the Ministry of Education was established,

and it assumed responsibility for all educational levels in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, the education was offered to males only, and there were no schools offering education for females. In 1957, there was a need to open a university to educate Saudi students instead of sending them abroad for education, therefore, King Saud University was established and inaugurated in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. In 1959, King Saud discussed the issue of educating women in Saudi Arabia, and he sought support from religious scholars to start education for girls. In 1960, the first school for girls started in Riyadh (Al-Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). Thus, schools were established which separated boys and girls at all educational levels, a structure which has continued into the present.

Elementary through secondary education in Saudi Arabia was free to all Saudis and non-Saudi students. On the other hand, higher education was available exclusively for Saudi citizens only, and the students were paid stipends for joining higher education institutions. Even though students were paid to join schools and institutes, the literacy level was low in Saudi Arabia, especially in the case of women. The estimated level of literacy in 2003 was 78.8%. For males it was 84.7% males and 70.8% for females (CIA, 2011).

After King Saud University was established in 1957, there were six other universities which were established in Saudi Arabia over the period of 20 years. According to their university websites these universities were:

- Islamic University was established in 1961.
- King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals was established in 1963.
- King Abdul-Aziz University was established in 1967.
- Um Al-Qura University was established in 1967.
- Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University was established in 1974.

- King Faisal University was established in 1975.

As the number of the universities increased to seven universities, it was necessary to establish the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia since higher education had previously been under the Ministry of Education. The purpose of this establishment was to deal exclusively with higher education under one ministry whose responsibilities included:

- proposing the establishment of higher educational institutions and authorising them to offer special programs in accordance with the country's needs
- creating and administering universities and colleges in the Kingdom
- raising the level of communication and coordination between institutions of higher learning and coordinating with other governmental ministries and agencies in terms of their interests and needs in higher education
- representing the government abroad in all educational and cultural affairs, through various cultural and educational offices distributed over 32 countries (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to Washington DC, 2011).

The Ministry of Higher Education is currently a centralised authority responsible for directing university education in accordance with the adopted policy, supervising the development of university education in all sectors, coordinating among universities especially in the field of scientific departments and degrees, encouraging research, and formulating rules and regulations for compliance by all institutions of higher learning (SACM, 2011).

Higher education in Saudi Arabia has undergone a tremendous growth over the past decade. The higher education system, which is based on diversification has expanded to include: 23 government universities, 18 primary teacher's colleges for men, 80 primary teacher's colleges for women, 37

colleges and institutes for health, 12 technical colleges and 33 private universities and colleges (Ministry of Education, Saudi Arabia, 2024).

Despite the fact that private institutions started in the last decade, there is a good number of private institutions which provide higher education, and their number is increasing consistently.

During recent times, the kingdom has become a role model for the Islamic countries, as it utilises the latest developments in modern civilisation while maintaining its originality and special characteristics. This is in addition to its distinguished internal and external policies, which are based on the Islamic Shari`ah (UQU, 2020).

The kingdom has acquired great status, which has led it to implement an influential role in the field of international politics and economics thanks to its successful policies. Furthermore, the five-year development plans adopted by the kingdom 30 years ago have led to an economic boom and have accelerated the growth rate in a manner that has rarely occurred in other countries. According to what is defined as a "balanced policy," the kingdom has adopted an approach towards construction and development, establishing facilities and vital structures together with the preparation and qualification of the citizens for a new generation.

Since the annexation of Hijaz in 1344 A.H.(After Hijrah — the Islamic calendar, which begins with the Prophet Muhammad's migration to Madinah) (1925), the kingdom has paid major attention to learning and education and has given attention to researchers. Consequently, it established the first General Directorate of Knowledge, followed by establishing several schools in various parts of the Kingdom and supplying them with teachers from both inside and outside the kingdom (UQU, 2020).

One of the first institutes in the kingdom is the Scientific Institute in Makkah, which was established

in 1345 A.H./1926 A.C. Other educational institutions included the Scholarship Preparation School, which was established in 1355 A.H./1936 A.C., and Dar Al-Tawheed in Taif, which was established in 1368 A.H. (1948). After that, scientific institutes and schools were established in different cities and districts.

2.2 Establishment of Umm Al Qura University

In 1369 A.H. (1949) King Abdulaziz ordered the establishment of the College of Shari`ah in Makkah. In so doing, it became the first higher education institution in the kingdom, the nucleus for Umm Al-Qura University, and the main college at this university (UQU, 2020).

The establishment of Umm Al-Qura University coincided with the establishment of the new buildings of the University City. Al-Abdiyyah, which is in the southeast of Makkah facing Mount Arafat, selected as a new location for the university. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz (may Allah be merciful to him — a respectful phrase used in Islamic tradition when referring to a deceased person), laid the foundation stone for this huge project in 1406 A.H. (1985) The second phase of this project is expected to be completed in the near future (UQU, 2020).

Although Umm Al-Qura University has recently been restructured, the university will always maintain its status as one of the most distinguished universities due to its location and noble origin. Moreover, it has acquired a superior status as an academic institution that has a great reputation regarding Shari`ah sciences, education, and Islamic studies, as well as modern scientific and applied specialisations (University Umma AL-Quraa, UQU, 2020).

The university encompasses about 30,000 students at the main headquarters in Makkah, and the

specialisations of its colleges keep increasing, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of the society and the requirements of the development plans for qualified personnel in different fields.

The university has been offering different specialisations, and has been granting bachelor's degrees, higher diplomas, master's and PhD degrees in Shari`ah, Arabic language, education, social and applied sciences, medicine, and engineering (University Umma AL-Quraa, UQU, 2020).

2.3 The College of Social Sciences at UQU

The mission of the College of Social Sciences is derived from the UQU overall vision that aims at contributing to enhancing the educational level of the students, and improving its methodologies to ensure quality and local and international accreditation, along with building the capacity of researchers, benefiting from modern developments, focusing on the issues of the society, Makkah Al-Mukarramah and the Holy Sites, serving the issues of the Islamic Ummah, and building the capacity of the academic staff.

The College of Social Sciences seeks to contribute to providing proper university education, encouraging scientific research and publication in the field of humanities, and understanding and solving the social and humanitarian problems, to achieve the goals of the comprehensive development and society service.

2.4 Department of Social Work in the College of Social Sciences, UQU

The establishment of the Social Work Department was approved in 1405 A.H. (1984). The course offered by the department consisted of (145) credits, to be studied during eight semesters (levels) to obtain a bachelor's degree in social work. Of these units, (33) are dedicated to the requirements of the college and general preparation, and (112) units to the requirements of specialisation (UQU,

2020). In Muharram, 1424 A.H (2003), within the framework of the efforts exerted to improve the academic program, the Social Work Department formed a committee of faculty members to carry out the tasks required to develop the bachelor's program in the Social Work Department, in accordance with the following rationales to make changes in the bachelor's plan:

1. To keep pace with the general trend in the university to reconsider the number of units required for graduation in theoretical disciplines, which is preferred to be about (130) units, to reduce the burden on the students and the faculty members and to avoid redundancy in the contents of the courses.
2. To keep abreast of the developments in a field with rapid social change resulting in professional guidance which is based on the best scientific findings in the field of social work's understanding of continuing community problems in all aspects of social life.
3. The requirements of the need for periodic follow-up on the academic development of the program of study in the department due to the emergence of new publications and trends in the field, in order to make use of them to enhance the influence of the program.

In Jumada I, 1425 A.H. (2004), the respected University Council, at its sixth session held in 05/05/1425 A.H, approved the bachelor's program in social work, after being revised and developed by the department, in accordance with the scientific, practical and social developments on a local and global level. It is a program which was followed until 2019 (UQU, 2020). The curriculum adopted in 2004 is as shown in the Figure 1, was followed until a subsequent review in 2019.

The curriculum covers a wide variety of subject areas as would be expected at a Bachelor level degree. The subjects that are highlighted in bold are those most specifically related to social work practice theories where students learn the approaches to interpersonal helping with individual, group and community client systems. These few subject areas provided the students with the

theoretical foundation for the actions they would conduct in the field. This is the foundational knowledge that students took into their Practicum where they were required to demonstrate their ability to practice as a social worker. Although only a small number of subjects in the overall degree, these theoretical units were critically important in guiding the students towards a thoughtful, planned, and articulated practice. The specific theories that were covered will be considered in Chapter three.

Figure 1. Curriculum of required topics to complete the BSW degree at Umm AL Qura University from 2019 to 2004.

Level 1 (Year 1- Semester 1)	
Principles of Psychology	This topic aims to study the concept of psychology. Its goals, important in various social sciences.
Islamic Culture I	It aims to provide the student with the principles and systems of fundamental Islamic knowledge and clarifying the reality of scientific thinking in Islam.
The Holy Qur'an I	In this course, students learn and discuss the holy Quran
Geography of the Muslim World	This topic aims to introduce the students to the Islamic world from a geographic perspective it includes location, population and distribution.
Introduction to Information Science	The topic provides students with essential knowledge about information science and its role in scientific research.
Social Welfare	It aims to provide students with the necessary knowledge about social welfare, its philosophy, goals, principles, and characteristics. The topic explains its relationship with social work, as well as

	modern trends. It Introduces social welfare in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
Introduction to Social Sciences	This course is concerned with social sciences that study society, focusing on the overlap of these sciences
Saudi Arabian Society and Environment	The topic provides the student with knowledge of the environment and society in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It deals with both the natural and social environment to understand the issues of social progress and development.
Level 2 (Year 1 - Semester 2)	
Principles of Islamic Economics	It aims to provide a clear idea of the Islamic economic system.
Mental Health	This topic aims to help the student to understand mental health as a science, concept and aspects of compatibility of mental health.
Arabic Language	In this topic student learn and practice rules of the Arabic language.
Islamic Culture II	This topic aims to provide the student with the principles and systems of fundamental Islamic knowledge and clarifying the reality of scientific thinking in Islam.
The Holy Qur'an II	In this topic, students learn and discuss the holy Quran
English Language I	This topic aims to provide students with basic English grammar and skills.
	The topic aims to introduce the student to the social

Foundations of Social Work	work profession as one of the relatively recent professions in Saudi society which contribute to social well-being and improved quality of life.
Principles of Sociology	The topic is concerned with the main components of sociology and its relationship to other social sciences. It addresses the subject of social formation, social systems, and issues of deviation. It includes topics related to the process of social mobility and its contributions to the understanding and analysis of contemporary social problems.
Level 3 (Year 2 - Semester 1)	
The Biography of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh)	The biography of the prophet and Their values and behaviour is introduction to the definition of the biography.
Islamic Culture III	It aims to provide the student with the principles and systems of fundamental Islamic knowledge and clarifying the reality of scientific thinking in Islam.
The Holy Qur'an III	In this topic, students learn and discuss the holy Quran
Social Casework I	**This topic acquaints the student with social casework which aims to assist individuals and families at the individual level to prevent or treat problems that prevent them from adequately fulfilling their social roles.**
Educational Sociology	The topic aims to acquaint the students with educational sociology in the social sciences.
Social Theory	The topic aims to introduce the student to the theoretical framework for the study of society as well

	as the process of developing knowledge from the beginning to the scientific method.
Social Anthropology	The aim of this topic is to introduce the student to the concept of anthropology.
Urban Sociology	This course aims to introduce students to urban sociology, focusing on urban studies in Saudi society. intending to lay the foundations for a coherent urban society distinguished by the components of a healthy urban life.
Level 4 (Year 2 - Semester 2)	
Arabic Language	In this topic student learn and practice rules of the Arabic language.
The Holy Qur'an IV	In this topic, students learn and discuss the holy Quran.
Social Group Work I	**This topic introduces working with groups as one of the social work methods, by exploring its origin, group dynamics and the role of the social worker.**
Community Organisation I	**This topic introduces students to the context of community organisation, which is one of the social work methods. This topic will explain its relationship to other methods, its origin and stages of development. It will also describe the constituent foundations such as goals, philosophy, principles and tools.**
Social Psychology	This topic introduces an essential requirement for all social work students, as it aims to study the different psychological aspects of an individual's behaviour within different social settings in the presence of others, such as family, school, and general society.

Population Studies	This topic includes essential concepts used in the study of population phenomena. It also addresses critical population issues as the main axis for social and economic development problems.
Level 5 (Year 3 - Semester 1)	
Social Casework II	**This topic is as an extension of the topic 'Working with Individual Cases 1'. It will equip students with vital necessary skills for working with individuals.**
Social Group Work II	**This topic focuses on group operations in exploring the most important theories and models used. It also analyses various social situations while working with groups, especially evaluation and supervision and the practice of working with groups in specific areas.**
Community Organisation II	**This topic will introduce students to community organising by looking at models of professional practice, social organiser roles and community organising issues such as volunteering and professional intervention.**
Social Work Practice in Educational Institutions	This topic aims to acquaint the student with the necessary knowledge about social work in the educational setting. It discusses the role of social work in dealing with the problems facing by students.
Social Work Research Methods I	The topic aims to identify the most critical theoretical frameworks, concepts and research methods used in various areas of social sciences.
Practicum I	This topic provides students with some of the social

	work skills, for example, interview skills, observation and recording skills. As well as emotional communication and maturity, among others. It is also training students on how to play the role of the social worker in various social institutions.
Management of Social Institutions	This topic includes the definition of the concept of management in light of the nature of social institutions and social organisations. It explains their relationship to environment management functions.
Social Policy and Legislations	This topic provides students with the necessary knowledge in the field of social policy and legislation offered by society to achieve welfare and social security.
Level 6 (Year 3 - Semester 2)	
Contemporary Therapeutic Approaches	**This topic aims to introduce the student to the theories and models of working with individual and families, the hypotheses of these theories, their concepts and clients. The problems they would deal with and their therapeutic methods as well as presenting models for applied cases are considered.**
Social Work Practice with the Aged	The topic aims to provide the student with knowledge related to the elderly and their needs. As well as the social standing of the elderly in Islam and to identify the government efforts in the field of caring for the elderly. The role of the social worker in this field is considered.
Practicum II	This topic provides students with some of the social

	work skills, for example, interview skills, observation and recording skills, as well as emotional communication and maturity, among others. It is Also training students on how to play the role of the social worker in various social institutions.
Medical Social Work	This topic introduces the students to one of the main areas of work for social work, the medical field. It explores the nature of the medical institution and its departments and the role of the social worker within the team of the medical institution. The classifications of chronic diseases, and the role of social work in mitigating their effects is considered.
Social Problems	This topic considers the student's standing on the nature, characteristics and causes of some phenomena that can result in social problems, and impact of these problems on the community.
Social Work Practice with Youth	This topic aims to provide the student with knowledge related to the concept of youth, its characteristics and problems and its roles within society. Youth institutions and the performance of a specialist in dealing with youth are considered.
Social Work Research Methods II	The course aims to provide students with the scientific and methodological foundations for scientific research in the social work field so that they can reach a sound understanding of the path and the outcome of professional intervention in various aspects of social life.
Level 7 (Year 4 - Semester 1)	

Social Work in the field of family and childhood	The topic aims to introduce the student to the concept of family and childhood, focusing on the role of social work and on how to prevent problems that hinder them from performing their role.
Principles of Statistics for Social Sciences	The topic aims to provide students with knowledge of the nature of statistics and its applications. It will provide them with the skills which will enable them to use the statistical method in collecting, presenting and analysing statistical data.
Practicum III	**This topic provides students with some of the social work skills, for example, interview skills, observation and recording skills, as well as emotional communication and maturity, among others. It is also training students on how to play the role of the social worker in various social institutions.**
Social Work Practice with Delinquents and Criminals	The topic aims to introduce the student to the role of social work in facing crime and delinquency by providing them with theoretical knowledge related to the reformist form in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
Social Work for People with Special Needs	The topic aims to identify the field of caring for people with special needs and the professional practice of social work within the institutions.
Electronic Social Work Resources	The topic aims to introduce the student to the primary English texts in social work. It assists the student on how to take advantage of the various electronic sources on the Internet such as databases, books, periodicals and other related sites.
	This course is a continuation of the ‘Research

Research Project I	Project Decision 1', which seeks to prepare the student for the systematic design and direct field professional practice of scientific research in social work. While dealing with community experiences and problems, allowing the student to use technology to obtain information and data that the research problem requires.
Level 8 (Year 4 - Semester 2)	
Social Planning and Social Development	This topic aims to provide the student with the necessary knowledge about social planning, its goals, types, and levels. The contributions of social services and social work in all form of development are considered.
Social Work Communications	The topic aims to introduce the student to the concept of public relations and its role in influencing and measuring public opinion. Students will gain the skills of practising public relations and communication in social work.
Social Work Practice in Mental Health Care	The topic aims to study mental health, mental disorders and distinguish between types of disorders. It introduces various treatment methods and the role of social work in improving the quality of life for this group and society.
Statistical Applications Using Computer Packages	This topic provides students with practical computer applications in statistical data analyses. It will provide students with the necessary skills that will enable them to conduct applied research as well as train students to use the SBS program.
	This topic provides students with some of the

Practicum IV	**social work skills, for example, interview skills, observation and recording skills, as well as emotional communication and maturity, among others. It also trains students on how to play the role of the social worker in various social institutions.**
Research Project II	This topic is a continuation of the 'Research Project I' topic, which seeks to prepare a distinguished student in the direct field practice of social research. as well as dealing with community phenomena and problems.

The inclusion of courses such as The Holy Qur'an and Seerah (the biography of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him) in the Bachelor of Social Work curriculum reflects the university's ongoing commitment to integrating Islamic values within professional education. These subjects are designed to strengthen students' spiritual and moral awareness and to enhance their understanding of human behaviour, compassion, and ethical responsibility through an Islamic framework. For social work students, this moral foundation complements the applied and theoretical learning offered in psychology, sociology, and other social science subjects. Together, these components prepare students for culturally sensitive and ethically grounded practice within Saudi society. The presence of religious courses in the BSW program is not unique to social work alone but reflects a broader university-wide approach to integrating Islamic knowledge with modern professional education, including subjects such as psychology, social sciences, and sociology. The social work subjects, including psychology, sociology, and other social sciences, were likewise taught to Bachelor of Social Work students through the same religious lens.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed the development of education in Saudi Arabia, the establishment of Higher Education across the country and the administrative structures to manage the whole educational industry. It traced the establishment of Umm AL Qura University and subsequently the founding of the social work department where the researcher is a staff member. The curricula used in the teaching of a Bachelor for Social Work degree during the years 2004 to 2019 was presented with attention focused on the subject areas that pertained to social work theoretical perspectives, since these theories were the ones that students were expected to understand and implement in their Practicums. The target study population for this thesis were Bachelor of Social Work graduates from the years 2004 to 2019 when the curriculum included in this chapter was in place at Umm AL Qura University and in general was followed by other social work programs in Saudi Arabia. A strong personal reason for the researcher carrying out this study is based on her involvement at Umm AL Qura University as a staff member teaching social work during this period.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3. Introduction

This chapter highlights the literature which discusses social work as a profession positioned within western, Judeo-Christian culture and values and its influence on social work development and education globally. To link this theme to the current research, four sub-sections of literature were examined. These are: The Western Context for Social Work Practice; Western Social Work Approaches in Non-Western Societies; Social Work Theories of Interpersonal Practice and The Application of Social Work Theory to Practice & Decision Making. These themes were selected as they are directly relevant to the university experiences of the research target group when they studied social work in Saudi Arabia. The literature also helps to identify factors around how social workers report on their use of educational social work theory and decision-making in their practice.

3.1 The Western Context for Social Work Practice

Social work originated as a profession in the 19th century as a movement primarily established within the United States and United Kingdom (Al-Krenawi et al., 2000) due to the complexities associated with the social changes occurring during the industrialisation and urbanisation period especially the effects on traditional patterns of family and community support systems. As a result, a modern organised form of support and care system called “professional social work” was developed to supplement and complement family and community care systems (Ibrahim, Q. A, 2017).

The practices around institutionalised social care systems were structured around an Anglo-

American standpoint of liberal, Judeo-Christian, capitalist values and philosophies (Racovita-Szilagyi, & Diaconu, 2016; Banks, 2021; Brown, 2022). The historical frameworks of settlement movements and the social care demands of urbanisation in the west made significant impact on the social work profession which then led to more responsive changes to the local needs of western countries (Gray & Fook, 2004). But western social work practices and philosophies still faced various challenges in non-western ethno-cultural settings (Althumali, 2021).

Although the social work profession was developed to meet the needs of the ethno-cultural communities in western industrialised societies it spread to a wide range other context (Brydon & Dunstan 2016). There is a growing awareness that social work theories and knowledge have been mostly developed within a particular socio-cultural and historical context of western countries and as such they embody values, assumptions and beliefs that may not be shared in societies of different culture (Mahmoud, 2022).

To clarify what is meant by "Western social work" in this context, scholars such as Dominelli (2004) and Gray and Fook (2004) describe it as a professional practice grounded in Western liberal, secular, and individualist traditions. These ideological foundations emphasise personal autonomy, individual rights, scientific rationalism, and value neutrality. Rooted in Enlightenment thinking and humanist psychology, Western models often conceptualise the individual as the primary unit of analysis and intervention. While these values have informed professional codes of ethics and practice standards globally, they may also present tensions when applied in collectivist or religious societies that prioritise communal responsibility, spiritual well-being, or alternative moral frameworks (Dominelli, 2004; Gray & Fook, 2004).

In the early 1980s the issue of the "professional imperialism" of Western social work in the Third

World was addressed by Midgley (1981). He noted that social work students in the Third World "study the same textbooks, read the same journals and are taught the same theories and methods" as if the contents were equally applicable in "countries of disparate economic, political, cultural, social and other characteristics" (Midgley, 1981 (33-34)) Researchers such as Al-krenawi and Graham (2003) Alfalasy (2009) cite numerous examples of western biases in teaching, research and practice in the Muslim Arab world. When examining the teaching of social work in particular, a significant disparity is noted between countries such as Saudi Arabia and western countries in teaching practices and educational approaches (Ibrahim, 2017; Ragab, 2016).

The research of this thesis focuses on the impact of western theories on social work practitioners in Saudi Arabia and whether the professional decision-making in their daily interacting with clients is influenced by the western-based theoretical knowledge they studied in their social work courses. Given the positioning of social work in a western context, further exploration considers the ways in which this has relevance for the education of social workers at university level in Saud Arabia. To maintain and clarify this focus, the relevant literature in this chapter has been grouped into themes. These are: Western Social Work Approaches in Non-western Societies; Social Work Theories of Interpersonal Practice and The Application of Social Work Theory to Practice & Decision Making.

3.1.1 Western Social Work Approaches in Non-Western Societies.

This section identifies literature related to the multicultural and multiracial nature of practice and the research on the issues of adapting social work to communities that are geographically, either outside or on the periphery of western culture. The application of western social work theories to non-western students in specific countries such as African schools of social work, the Arab Muslim world Arab Muslim world, Hong Kong, Singapore, Nigeria, and Chinese Mainland are reviewed

(Shockley & Baskind, 2018). Some literature also focuses on the need for international social work to offer a cognitive, cross-cultural approach (Gray & Fook, 2004).

There is a great deal of literature that discusses the multicultural and multiracial nature of social work, fields which began to receive attention in the beginning of 1970s. Although some of the discourse is around the inappropriateness of educating and practicing western models of social work in order to resolve the social problems of developing countries (as cited in Payne, 2020), a number of studies also discuss the impact of distinct historical and cultural factors, traditions, and customs on social welfare and social work practice (Midgley, 1981; Cowley, & Howlett, 1982; Asamoah & Creigs, 1988; Tsang ,1997; Brydon, 2011; Brydon, & Lawihin, 2016; Panagiotopoulos Spaneas, Kerfoot, & Michael, 2017; Qusai, 2017 and Mabvurira, 2020). Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) reported on a United Nations (UN) meeting which emphasised the importance of recognising the importance of the socio-political, cultural, and economic characteristics of each country (Healy & Wairire, 2014).

Considering the fact that social work as profession was established in western societies, there remains dissatisfaction with the hegemonic spread of western social work. Social work practice and education is essentially a modernist western invention, primarily from the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (USA), which has a history of importing itself into diverse cultural contexts across the world (Gray & Fook, 2004). Many academics and professionals in less developed or developing countries have been influenced by US and UK social work models, with the consequence that these models have emerged as exemplar practices (Nimmagadda & Cowger, 1999). Ferguson (2005) claims in contrast that the presence of multicultural, multi-ethnic and religiously diverse populations in many developing countries has also precipitated an indigenisation process of the western social work models as well as an authentication of native responses to the

unique social problems of each country (Nimmagadda & Cowger, 1999, p. 2). This suggestion is supported by the fact that most countries do not have a distinctive national or regional social work framework of their own initiative (Gray & Fook, 2004). The result is the embracing of social work theories and models developed in other countries (Ibrahim, 2018).

Midgley (1981) raises concerns about the relevance of western social work to traditional, developing or industrialising post-colonial countries as opposed to the relevance of social work theory and practice for a modern, developed, industrial environment. He examines the culture dimension in different contexts which raises major debate around issues of westernisation, localisation, professional imperialism and indigenisation in social work as well as a commonly accepted definition of "international social work" (Ibrahim, 2016).

Several studies elaborate the need for challenging the dominance of western centred constructions of social work practice and the need for an "indigenisation" of social work to fit within the culture in which it is located (Bryce et al., 2024; Racko & Mikulcová, 2024). Another body of research provides insight, into social work education in non-western countries. For example, a study of both global and localised dimensions of social work organisations and education presented from the perspectives of practitioners and educators in universities in eight Arab countries, found that academic institutions and professional social work organisations failed to provide assistance and support for the development of international content in the social work curriculum in the Arab world (Ibrahim, Q. A, 2017). This is despite the fact that there are national and local issues and problems, as were identified through the perspectives of the study participants (Pulman & Fenge, 2024).

The literature review suggests that there is a need for a more detailed and in-depth analysis of the models of social work that are delivered in any non-western, international context (Nagy, & Falk,

2000; Healy & Thomas, 2020). There is also a need to review various theories underpinning social work practice which are advocated in social work education and the cultural context in which they are interpreted and implemented (Healy, 2014; Howe & Hill, 2024; McIvor, 2024).

Analysis of literature that discusses cultural orientations in various contexts suggests that a western context is largely defined by values and characteristics inconsistent with many of the non-western cultural orientations (Goldberg, 2000; Brown, 2022; Bryce et al., 2024). Such literature illustrates the importance of this proposed research study and its aims to identify the impact of western pedagogy and theories on social work graduates who are practicing in Saudi Arabia, a non-western country that has a deeply rooted cultural identity that has been defined by an Islamic heritage (Kokkinos et al., 2018).

3.1.2 Islamic Approaches to Social Work: Foundations and Contemporary Contributions

As the global profession of social work seeks to become more inclusive and locally grounded, scholars from the Islamic world have increasingly called for models that align with faith-based ethics, communal responsibility, and spiritual well-being. The wholesale transfer of Western social work models—rooted in secularism, individualism, and liberal humanism—has been critiqued by Muslim scholars as epistemologically and culturally incongruent with Islamic social systems (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003). These critiques are particularly relevant in Saudi Arabia, where Islamic principles are central to governance, education, and social service delivery (Al-Ma'arri, 2013; Al-Mutairi, 2020). Consequently, there is a growing movement to establish a distinctly Islamic paradigm of social work—one that is not merely adapted from the West, but grounded in local theological, legal, and ethical frameworks (Al-Krenawi, 2011; Al-Mutairi, 2020).

Islamic social thought rests on concepts such as zakat (almsgiving), waqf (endowment), sadaqah (voluntary charity), ‘adl (justice), rahmah (compassion), and takaful (mutual solidarity). These principles establish a moral obligation for collective care and social responsibility. Welfare in Islam is not the purview of the state alone, but a communal religious duty (fard kifāyah) aimed at preserving social cohesion and human dignity (Abu-Nimer, 2003). This contrasts with Western models where social welfare often emerges from secular legalism or neoliberal contractualism (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003). Social work, from an Islamic lens, thus involves both material support and spiritual guidance, reflecting an integrated view of the human being (insān) as composed of body, mind, and soul. This ontological framing underpins calls for practice models that incorporate religious counseling, family mediation informed by Shariah, and community development driven by Islamic ethical codes (Al-Mutairi, 2020; Al-Krenawi, 2011).

Islamic scholars and practitioners have voiced concerns about the cultural imperialism inherent in the global export of Western social work. Al-Krenawi and Graham (1999, 2000, 2003) argue that Western theories often pathologize behaviors that are normative within Islamic cultures—such as reliance on extended family, gender complementarity, and religious coping mechanisms. They critique the emphasis on individual autonomy and emotional disclosure common in Western therapeutic models, which may conflict with Islamic values of modesty, discretion, and collective welfare. Furthermore, the epistemological basis of many Western social work theories—drawn from Freud, Rogers, or behavioral psychology—conflicts with Islamic conceptions of human purpose and morality. For example, while mainstream Western social work may advocate for value neutrality and client self-determination, Islamic social work emphasizes moral accountability before God and aims to promote behavior aligned with the maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (the objectives of Islamic law), such as the protection of religion, family, intellect, and wealth (Zubair & Zubair, 2017;

Al-Mutairi, 2020).

In Saudi Arabia, social work as a profession has grown significantly over the past two decades, especially in areas like mental health, family services, and community development (Al-Ma'arri, 2013; Al-Krenawi, 2011). Yet the dominance of Western curriculum models in university programs has raised concerns about disconnects between education and cultural-religious context. A number of Saudi academics and professionals have called for a reform of social work education to include Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic literature on social solidarity, and historical case studies from Islamic civilization (Al-Ma'arri, 2013; Al-Mutairi, 2020). In Malaysia and Indonesia, similar initiatives have progressed further. Universities have introduced Islamically integrated social work degrees, combining standard competencies with Shariah studies, Islamic ethics, and practical engagement with Muslim communities (Habil, 2006, as cited in Al-Mutairi, 2020). These models serve as potential templates for developing contextually and theologically grounded social work frameworks in Saudi Arabia. Scholars such as Al-Krenawi (2011) have also advocated for an "Islamic model of social work" that blends spiritual well-being with psychosocial support, using tools such as Quranic counseling, collective supplication, and religiously appropriate interventions. These frameworks do not reject professional standards but seek to redefine them within a spiritually guided ethical system. For instance, ethical dilemmas in Western practice—such as confidentiality, same-sex relationships, or gender boundaries—require faith-sensitive responses when applied in Islamic settings (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Al-Mutairi, 2020).

Rather than viewing Islamic approaches as reactive or oppositional to Western models, many contemporary scholars emphasize constructive synthesis—developing a unique paradigm grounded in Islamic teachings but informed by global best practices (Al-Krenawi, 2011; Rothman, 2021; Hashmi & Patel, 2024). It is also important to acknowledge that many of the educators who

taught Western theories in Saudi universities may not have viewed them as inherently contradictory to Islamic values. Instead, some may have presented these theories in pedagogically flexible and reflective ways, allowing students to explore how Western ideas could be adapted or integrated into an Islamic framework (Ibrahim, 2017; Al-Ma'arri, 2013). This includes integrating taqwā (God-consciousness) as an internal compass for practitioners, viewing client empowerment not as value-neutral autonomy but as a means to fulfil moral, familial, and spiritual responsibilities, applying collective models of care such as ummah-based community welfare, and recognizing Islamic legal and ethical traditions as sources of professional knowledge and guidance (Al-Mutairi, 2020; Abu-Nimer, 2003). This emerging field offers a necessary contribution to global social work discourse, particularly for contexts where religion is not separate from public life but embedded in the very fabric of community, identity, and governance (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Al-Ma'arri, 2013).

3.1.3 Islamic Conceptions of Social Work and Human Psychology

While much of the contemporary literature focuses on Islamic frameworks for social care and ethical practice, it is equally important to consider how Islam conceives of the human being (insān), the self (nafs), and well-being (salāma), all of which shape how care, responsibility, and healing are understood. Islamic psychology (ʿilm al-nafs) offers a multidimensional view of human nature that integrates spiritual, moral, emotional, and physical dimensions. This understanding provides an alternative epistemological basis to Western psychological theories, many of which are rooted in secular individualism, materialism, or psychodynamic models (Haque, 2004; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011).

In the Islamic tradition, human beings are created with fitrah—an innate disposition toward

goodness, moral consciousness, and submission to God (Skinner, 2010). The soul is seen as a moral entity that struggles between competing desires: the lower self (nafs al-ammārah), the self-reproaching soul (nafs al-lawwāmah), and the tranquil soul (nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah), as described in the Qur'an. This view frames human development not merely in terms of individual self-actualisation, but as a journey of moral purification and nearness to God (tazkiyat al-nafs) (Haque, 2004). In this framework, social work is not only about solving psychosocial problems but guiding individuals and communities toward moral, relational, and spiritual well-being.

Key concepts such as rahmah (compassion), ʿadl (justice), amanah (trust), and niyyah (intention) shape interpersonal ethics and influence social interventions. For example, the practice of care is not driven solely by contractual obligations but by divine accountability and the pursuit of maslahah (public benefit). Helping the vulnerable is seen as both a spiritual duty and an expression of faith, grounded in numerous Qur'anic injunctions and Prophetic traditions (Yusuf, 2012; Khan, 2019). This moral framework requires social workers to embody values such as humility, sincerity, and social responsibility in ways that may diverge from secular codes of practice.

Moreover, in contrast to dominant Western models that prioritise individual autonomy and personal choice, Islamic models of well-being are rooted in relational ethics. The family, extended kinship structures, and the broader ummah (community) are central to individual identity and care networks. Mental health and social issues are therefore interpreted not only as internal psychological problems but as relational or spiritual imbalances that require holistic intervention (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Haque, 2004).

This conceptualisation has direct implications for professional practice. Social workers in Islamic contexts may draw on religious texts, spiritual mentorship, or communal rituals as part of their

intervention strategies. The therapist-client relationship, for example, may include religious language, moral advice, or spiritual support alongside traditional psychosocial techniques (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011). Such approaches are not merely culturally sensitive—they represent a different ontology of the person, healing, and society.

Understanding these Islamic conceptions of human nature and well-being is essential for analysing how Saudi social workers evaluate, adapt, or resist Western theories in practice. It also provides a richer interpretive lens for studying decision-making, ethics, and the internal processes by which practitioners reconcile imported theories with deeply rooted religious frameworks.

3.1.3 Islamic Perspectives and Social Work Practice

The Islamic worldview significantly shapes social values, ethical frameworks, and approaches to human well-being in Saudi Arabia. Unlike secular Western paradigms, Islamic belief is integrated into all aspects of life, including education, family, and social welfare. This religious and cultural context presents both a challenge and an opportunity for social workers trained in or exposed to Western theories.

At the core of Islamic thought is the belief in tawheed (the oneness of God), which affirms divine authority over all aspects of existence. Human beings are created with fitrah (a natural inclination toward goodness and belief in God) and are seen as moral agents accountable for their actions (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2011). Concepts such as qadr (divine will or predestination), sabr (patience), shukr (gratitude), and tazkiyah (spiritual purification) play a central role in Islamic understandings of coping, psychological health, and personal growth (Badri, 1979; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

Islamic psychology (ilm al-nafs) offers a holistic view of the human being, encompassing the nafs (self or soul), qalb (heart), aql (intellect), and ruh (spirit) (Rothman, 2021). This contrasts with dominant Western models such as psychoanalysis, behaviourism, or crisis intervention theory, which often approach human problems from secular, individualistic, or clinical standpoints. While Western theories prioritize autonomy and self-determination, Islamic frameworks emphasize spiritual accountability, divine guidance, and the well-being of the collective (Yusuf, 2013; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

For example, psychoanalytic theory may focus on unconscious conflict and early childhood experience, but in an Islamic framework, distress may also arise from spiritual disconnection or ethical dilemmas involving religious duties (Badri, 2013). Crisis intervention models may emphasize rational problem-solving or behavioural techniques, whereas Islamic practices may rely on prayer, reflection, community support, and submission to God's will (Al-Mutairi, 2015). Similarly, Western family support models may emphasize individual empowerment, while Islamic family systems are deeply influenced by values of hierarchy, respect, and collective duty (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

These foundational religious values influence both how practitioners perceive clients and how clients respond to professional support. Many Saudi social workers report a need to either adapt or selectively use Western theories that align with Islamic principles. This process of integration or indigenization remains underexplored in the literature (Haque, 2004; Ahmad, 2018), and it forms the central focus of this study.

3.1.4 Social Work Theories of Interpersonal Practice

Within the social work curriculum at UQU and in most social work programs in Saudi Arabia, specific topics are offered which cover a range of theoretical perspectives on the models or paradigms that

are most helpful to social workers when they are engaging with clients and offering help. These topics usually come under titles such as “Theories of Social Work” or “Interpersonal Practice” or “Casework” or “Social Work with Individual, Families and Groups”, and they are the topics, which most directly teach the student skills or tools for decision-making and problem solving around interpersonal practice with client systems. In the years 2004 to 2019 there was a consistent and limited selection of approaches taught in the units of study relating to social work theories that were presented to the social work students at UQU. The specific content offered in such topics will be identified in the next chapter but the theoretical perspectives they advocate will be reviewed and summarised in this section to identify the background perspectives and theories that social work graduates from the years 2004 to 2019 would have studied and might be implementing in their work.

The curriculum at UQU, which covered the subject matter around “Interpersonal Practice”, drew on a selected range of theoretical models and approaches commonly used in western schools of social work. These approaches aimed to provide students with what might also be called interpersonal practice or counselling skills or social work treatment (Turner, 2017).

Foundational courses first introduced students to the values of professional practice such as confidentiality and the importance of establishing a relationship of trust with the client (Biestek, 1978a*;* Ferguson, Warwick, Disney, Leigh, Cooner, & Beddoe, 2020)**.** In the descriptions of a how a relationship of mutual benefit was to be established with a client, it was often stated that respect for the client was essential, including respect for their right to self-determination (Biestek*,* 1978b*).* More specifically this included the individual’s right to choose their own destiny, to make their own choices and to develop to their full potential (Saleeby, 2006, Gitterman & Germain, 2008). Right from the beginning of foundational social work texts, the approaches and models that were being

discussed largely adhered to the western views of a focus on the individual in the helping process (Turner, 1996; Perlman, 1957; Thompson & Stepney; 2016, Payne, 2021; Howe & Hill; 2024). Advocacy, self-help, independence and self-reliance were all part of the goal of social work interventions (Garvin & Seabury, 1997; Saleeby, 2006; Gitterman & Germain 2008).

Students progressed to casework theories such as Violand's "Family Casework Diagnosis" (1965) where a model of study diagnosis and treatment was outlined where the social worker used aspects of psychoanalytic theory to understand the client's situation and offer insight into their problems. Models based on psychoanalytic theory were called "psycho-social models" in social work and had a tradition in the west of going back to one of the first published social workers, Mary Richmond. (Richmond, 1917; 1922). This mainstream approach in social work was represented by such seminal authors as Gordon Hamilton, Lucile Austin, Annette Garrett and Charlotte Towle (Hamilton, 1951, Austin; 1956, Towle; 1969, Garrett; 1970). One of the key characteristics of the psycho-social models which has made a lasting contribution to social work practice has been the importance of understanding the client's underlying (often unconscious) motives and emotions as well as responding to the client's "presenting" problem (Hollis, 1972; Payne, 2021). The psychoanalytic model was widely taught in the years 2004 to 2019 at UQU with an emphasis on study, diagnosis and treatment as recommended in the psychoanalytic literature (Stamm, 1959; Hollis,1972; Strean, 1996; Woods & Robinson; 1996; Payne, 2021).

Another related approach presented to students at UQU was "Crisis Intervention" introduced by Naomi Golan (1978; Lindemann, 1979; 1995; Aguilera & Messick, 1982; Aguilera, 1998; Regehr, 2011, 2018; Mirabito, 2017) which explains the normal reactions to various points of crisis in people's lives and how helping clients to emerge successfully from such a situation develops inner strength that can be called upon in future difficult episodes. Crisis intervention theory seeks to

address the psychological challenges that the affected people are facing, and it provides a short-term treatment model. Developed by Eric Lindeman and Naomi Golan (Caplan, 1961; Lindemann, 1995; Golan, 1998) it seeks to intervene as a remedy during the crisis. Since it is an emergency-based approach, the processes of data collection, assessment, and intervention, all take place at one time - i.e. during the initial encounter as close as possible to the point of crisis. Here again is a strong reliance on psychoanalytic theory with the traditional three steps central to the helping process which were: first "Data Collection" to investigate and understand the nature of the crisis, second "Assessment" to determine the level of stress, anxiety, and trauma and third "Intervention" where the social worker helps the client to come out of the state of anxiety and negativity through providing emotional and environmental first aid.

But the UQU curriculum was not wholly reliant on psychoanalytic theory, and it also included in the curriculum material on the Functional Approach to Casework (Taft, 1962) which had arisen as a reaction against the strong influence of psychoanalytic theory in social work. The Functional School was built on the psychological foundations of Otto Rank, and the most relevant concepts were the importance of the "will" of the client and the central role of the relationship between the worker and client and the context in which human interactions were enacted and discussed (Rank, 1936).

Another theoretical perspective presented to students, also in contrast to psychoanalytic theory, was "The Task Centered Approach" (Reid & Epstein, 1972; Reid, 1975) which outlined a clear step-by-step approach for working with the clients by giving them concrete tasks to complete and supporting their development at gaining mastery over such tasks, leading to more independence. Coulshed & Orme 's "Task-centred Practice" (1998) is a later adaptation of a prescriptive approach reliant on the social workers' analytic skills to identify the existing problem and make suggestions for improvement (Epstein, 1980).

Such social work theoretical models are part of a more behavioural approach to issues and problems presented by clients where the worker seeks to examine and understand issues with reference to the environment or social milieu. The focus of a more behavioural approach is on the external stimuli or factors that are driving a person in a certain direction creating a negative mindset and negative reinforcement such as living in an environment considered dangerous or obnoxious i.e. exposed to gambling or drugs (Coulshed & Orme, 1998; Mansour, Shehadeh & Mansour, 2020). These approaches still rely on the process of "Data Collection" - taken from observational tools or through a questionnaire, "Assessment" – a fine-tuned analysis of the data to decide on a remedy and "Intervention" - the last stage, where the client is helped to create a redirection and often environmental change to aid recover (Germain & Gitterman, 1980, 2008).

Family intervention models of social work were also introduced to students within Interpersonal Practice topics where family members are seen as the target for Intervention as well as the individual client (Ackerman, 1958; Voiland, 1962; Carter, & McGoldrick, 1988; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Walsh & McGoldrick 2023). Initial Data Collection is often conducted through an interview or a questionnaire, while Assessment leads to an understanding of the issues resulting in a plan for recovery and in the Intervention phase. A therapeutic remedy is carried out with the family members together (Almunsif & Mohammad, 2004; Constable, & Lee, 2015; Van Hook, 2019). The Johnson Model (Loneck, Garrett, & Banks, 1996) and the Systematic Model of family social work (Burnham, 1986; Dallos, R. & Draper, R. 2010) are two models that are commonly taught at UQU. The former is a model based on confrontation to respond to drug and/or alcohol addiction. (Stanton, 2004). The systematic model focuses on family dynamics, culture, and ambiance and it advocates that it has a higher chance of recovery with less fear of relapse (Dallos, R. & Draper, R. 2010).

During the years 2004 to 2019 this section of the Literature Review outlines the dominant

theoretical perspectives that were included in the curriculum at UQU. Material such as case studies were also presented to the students for discussion and analysis and specific context related material such as school or health social work also brought related information to the students' attention. But in general, when social work theories of interpersonal approaches were presented to students in the part of the curriculum that taught them how to carry out interventions and make decisions, the above perspectives were dominant.

It is relevant to note a few general observations about the theoretical material discussed here because of the pervasive positioning found in the traditional western approaches to helping. There is a strong reliance on intellectual assessment and the development of a plan to follow the assessment. The client or family system is seen as capable of changing through the direction and assistance of a helping person who understands the problem. Individual commitment and desire for change is paramount and clients are encouraged towards self-development. Even within a family context and when working with the family as a unit, the goal is to restore an equilibrium which benefits each family member individually. What is not included for example in any of these approaches is concern for the religious or spiritual side of the individual client or the need to sacrifice one's needs for the greater good of the family or community – concerns that would be in the foreground for both social work practitioners and their clients in a Saudi Arabia professional context.

There are more current trends in western social work theory which lean more in this direction such as Existential Social Work (Krill, 2017; Thompson, 2017)) or Diana Coholic who has written about Spirituality in Social Work (Coholic, 2012, 2017) but such fewer mainstream approaches were not a part of the curriculum at UQU. Instead, the focus has been largely on the traditional process of data collection, analysis and intervention.

Of particular interest to this research is the degree to which graduates who had received this traditionally western approach to social work practice, utilise the theoretical approaches in the reality of their working life within an Islamic society with a different value base. Did they find a way to adapt what they had learned to fit their current situations? Or did they rely on their own culture and religion to provide a source of understanding of their role leading to a guide and rationale for their decision-making and actions?

3.1.5 Application of Theory to Practice & Decision Making

The Social work literature has long asserted the importance of the application of theory to practice to effectively respond to clients' needs and demands (Simon, 1994; Lam, 2004; Gentle-Genitty; Chen, Karikari; & Barnett, 2014). It is crucial for social work practitioners to gain theoretical knowledge because theory can serve as an anchoring framework and a conceptual screen for case assessment, causal explanation, intervention planning, and outcome evaluation. As Simon (1994) states, "not only are social workers expected to be informed about relevant theories, but they must apply these theories to practice so that unfavourable conditions in our society can be ameliorated" (p. 317). Simon insists that social work theory constitutes a conceptual frame that anchors and structures relationships among kinds of knowledge crucial for social work (Mohammad et al., 2018; Muncy & Vitell, 1992).

Many social work authors **(**Turner, 1996, 2017; Garvin, & Seabury 1997; Thompson, & Stepney, 2016; Payne, 2020; Teater, 2020; Payne, 2021; Hölscher, Hugman, & McAuliffe, 2023; Howe, & Hill, 2024; McDermott, 2024) have written about the value of theory application in practice indicating that in general theory helps to: (1) explains clients' situations and predicts their behaviours; (2) provides a starting point for social workers; (3) helps social workers to have an organised plan to their work

and reduces the wandering that can happen in practice; (4) offers social workers a clear framework in a chaotic situation and provides accountability to their work; (5) provides social workers with a perspective to conceptualise and address clients' problems with appropriate interventions; and (6) identifies knowledge gaps regarding practice.

At the same time, there also exist some debate in social work about theory-free practice, and theory-driven practice, the former position holding that social work is a craft and not merely a technical pursuit. One leading scholar advocating this view is Bruce Thyer (2001) whose well known article, *What is the role of theory in research on social work practice*, stated that most etiological theories and intervention theories were wrong, and that it was neither essential nor necessarily desirable for social work practice to be theoretically driven. Thyer (2001) argues that it can be a waste of time for social work educators to teach theory for practice because they do not know how to do a good job of teaching theory. He espouses that most theories in social work are taught incorrectly, and are invalid, which may lead to ineffective methods.

In addition, when applying theory to practice, social work students (and likely practitioners) often lack the ability to identify, understand, and use relevant theories to their work with clients (Boisen & Syers, 2004). Although most studies related to theory are focussed on practitioners. Fox & Horder (2014) explored the role of theory in practice from the student's perspective and found that as the receivers and users of social work theory, social work students considered theory a complicated and pluralistic concept. They had difficulty in choosing relevant and applicable theories to solve practical cases but tried to be flexible in the process of theory application, avoiding dogmatism and mechanism when applying theory to practice (Gentle-Genitty; Chen; Karikari & Barnett, 2014, p. 46).

In general, however, most social work educators would agree with Lam's statement (2004) that "not

only are social workers expected to be informed about relevant theories, but they must apply these theories to practice so that unfavourable conditions in our society can be ameliorated" (p. 317). It is relevant to note that the instructional focus of UQU's social work curriculum was on the transmission of theory as a critical tool for competent social work practice.

Imbedded in discussions of the value for social work of theoretical knowledge is the direct effect on decision-making that theories provide through their interpretation of situations and guidelines for interventions. One of the most important studies relevant to this proposed research was conducted by Hsu (2006) in which he examined the existence of implicit knowledge from a cognitive science perspective and explored how it influences the clinical decision-making process in social work practice. The issue of what factors influence decision-making and whether practitioners are aware of these factors is a central theme of this proposed research. Hsu carried out his investigation by conducting an experiment which compared the difference of implicit memory usage between inexperienced practitioners and experienced practitioners to probe whether experience influenced the decision-making process. The participants were asked to provide two case-records and to write down all the relevant factual information and then to answer assessment questions which included the diagnosis of a client's situation/problem and a proper intervention plan. When discussing the finding Hsu reported, "Based on the findings, the ability to memorize information is not significant; instead, a well-developed tag system that is able to link the situation to proper experience is more important for practitioners to make useful diagnoses" (Hsu, 2006, p. 205-206).

Other authors have also been interested in how social workers make decisions in their everyday work often under the pressures of stressful client situations (Featherston et al, 2019; Zoë, 2016; David, 2017; Rujla & Ruth, 2001). It is also quite common to find discussions about the importance of theory to aid in decisions as applied to specific populations and specific fields of practice rather

than generalised to social work as a whole. Although specific in nature, such studies do indicate the importance of this theme of theory influencing decision-making in social work (Hartford, 1972; Karen, Addie, & Monique, 2014; Munford, Nash, & O'Donoghue, 2005; Langer & Lietz, 2015; Autumn, 2018).

In reviewing the literature that is most relevant for the proposed research several research projects have attempted to gain participants' perspectives on how their chosen theories were used or applied in real-life situations using case studies. For example, Irizarry, Marlowe, Hallahan & Bull (2015) asked experienced social work practitioners to respond to a case-scenario through the lens of their stated social justice perspective. The analysis focussed on whether the theoretical perspective of the workers influenced their actions. Although the very experienced practitioners in the study attributed everything they did to their social justice commitment they could not clearly articulate how it influenced their actions (Irizarry, Marlowe, Hallahan & Bull, 2015). However, the use of a case scenario as the conduit for discussion was found to be a useful tool for initiating reflection on practice.

Using case studies in social work educational settings has traditionally been used to simulate real social work situations and Wolfer, & Scales (2006) in their book *Decision cases for advanced social work practice: Thinking like a social worker* the authors depict actual situations across a variety of practice settings - individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities to stimulate in-depth class discussions, where students decide on the central problem, the recommended intervention and the relevant theoretical perspective.

O'Connor, & Leonard (2014) did an exploratory, qualitative study to examine practitioner perspectives on factors that influence decision making in children and families in their social work

practice. They found that decision-making incorporated multi-layered negotiations, application of professional judgement and interpretation of knowledge and evidence. Taking place within legal, policy and ethical frameworks, decision-making operated at key interfaces between practitioners and managers within and across disciplines, between agencies and courts of law (O'Connor & Leonard, 2014, p. 1806).

O'Sullivan (2011) found that making decisions about needs, risks and services was a central dimension in most areas of social work practice. As such decision-making appeared to underpin assessments, interventions and collaborative inter-agency working, often within emotionally fraught and complex contexts (O'Sullivan, 2011).

Gibbons & Gray (2002) were interested in the role of practice experience in relation to decision-making. They emphatically stated that:

> Even though it is highly debatable whether experience could be the foundation of practice decision-making and whether it constitutes the professional knowledge in social work, the fact that the decision-making process of social work practitioners is influenced by practice experience is without dispute (p. 276).

This long-standing interest in the social work literature about how theory is applied and its role in addressing the many decisions facing social workers, speaks to the importance of examining the Saudi Arabian workers to gain their perspectives on the factors that influence their interpersonal interactions with clients. Essential questions about how they apply theory to their practice, the degree to which experience impacts their work or what informal knowledge they might be using in assessments and interventions is critical to understanding their practice and the expediency of their education. It is certainly possible that new insights may emerge.

Studies have found that formal knowledge may not play as important a role in real-life decision-making as people have previously thought when analysing the validity and reliability of practice judgment. Professionals utilise experience as well as (if not more than) formal knowledge to make their decisions (Udin et al., 2022, p76).

If Saudi Arabian practitioners, whose social work education was western in orientation, are using other knowledge or cultural understandings it is relevant for educators to better understand such factors.

Studies of social work practice knowledge on a philosophical level claim that practitioners may use knowledge outside formal knowledge to perform daily practice. However, the questions pertaining to what kind of information practitioners use and how they acquire such abilities still remain unanswered (Qasim et al., 2022, p 45).

The literature discussed in this section of the literature review was examined in detail because the social workers who participated in this research studied interpersonal practise theories and approaches when they were social work students from 2004, 2018, the curriculum. Since that point in time at UQU has incorporated more current theories from the 70s and 80s.

The late 1970s and 1980s marked a pivotal moment in the reconfiguration of Western social work theory and practice. Radical anti-capitalist criticisms revealed that economic structures and class power dynamics are fundamental to various client challenges, prompting the profession to extend its focus beyond individual pathology to encompass poverty, inequality, and social policy issues. Feminist research raised awareness of gender and patriarchy, urging social workers to recognise and confront the marginalisation and disempowerment of women (both as clients and professionals) within society and service institutions. Simultaneously, anti-racist contributions challenged the

profession with evidence of racial injustice, necessitating practices that actively reject racism and appreciate the cultural qualities of communities of colour. These important viewpoints did not remain peripheral; they transformed social work education, were formalised in professional standards, and led to the development of lasting methodologies such as anti-oppressive practice that continue to influence modern social work. The era also yielded seminal texts – including Bailey & Brake's Radical Social Work (1975), Dominelli's Anti-Racist Social Work (1988), and Dominelli & McLeod's Feminist Social Work (1989) – which delineated the theoretical frameworks and practical aspirations that would inform a more progressive, justice-focused social work practice. Through the incorporation of anti-capitalist, feminist, and anti-racist perspectives, the social work profession in the UK, North America, and beyond experienced a significant transformation in the late 20th century, confronting its complicity in perpetuating the status quo and reconstituting itself as a catalyst for social change. The legacy of the radical and feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s is manifest in the profession's (at least aspirational) dedication to diversity, equality, and social justice as fundamental values—an outcome of the scholars, activists, and practitioners who urged social work to broaden its theoretical and practical scope from the intrapersonal to the structural, "personal-political" sphere.

3.1.6 Indigenisation and Decolonisation of Social Work: Global Contexts

In recent decades, there has been growing recognition that the uncritical transplantation of Western social work models into non-Western contexts risks reproducing epistemic colonialism and cultural dissonance. A significant body of literature has emerged around the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work, particularly in countries like Canada, Australia, and China, where imported frameworks have been re-evaluated and reshaped to reflect local worldviews. In Canada, Indigenous scholars and practitioners have argued for social work education and practice that

centres Indigenous knowledge systems, relational ethics, and collective healing, rather than Eurocentric individualism (Sinclair, 2004; Hart, 2009). Similar calls have been made in Australia, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars advocate for a sovereign, culturally grounded practice that challenges both historical and institutional oppression (Briskman, 2007; Green, 2002). Meanwhile, in China, scholars have critiqued the wholesale adoption of U.S.-style casework models and promoted a "Sinicised" approach rooted in Confucian ethics, social harmony, and community-based interventions (Leung, 2003; Wong, 2008). These global movements underscore the importance of developing social work approaches that are not only contextually relevant but also critically engaged with power, culture, and history. Such perspectives offer valuable insights for the development of a culturally responsive and ethically grounded social work practice in Saudi Arabia, where professional models must also negotiate unique religious, familial, and socio-political dynamics.

As social work has globalized, there has been increasing critique of the uncritical export of Western (especially American) models of social work education and practice. In response, scholars and practitioners in various national contexts have advocated for indigenisation—the process of adapting social work to local cultural values and practices—and decolonisation, which goes further to interrogate and resist the colonial epistemologies embedded in mainstream social work. This shift has been especially visible in countries like Canada, Australia, and China, where the limitations of imported social work paradigms have been challenged and replaced with contextually grounded alternatives.

In Canada, decolonial social work practice has emerged in direct response to the ongoing harms of colonialism, particularly among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Scholars such as Frederick W. Hart, Raven Sinclair, Cindy Blackstock, and Jeffrey Hewitt have critiqued the imposition of

Western casework models on Indigenous communities, which often replicate paternalistic and assimilationist practices. Sinclair (2004) argues that true Indigenous social work must not only include cultural content but must centre Indigenous worldviews, healing practices, and community-led models. This includes concepts like relational accountability, the use of storytelling in practice, and a collective rather than individualistic orientation to wellbeing. Educationally, some Canadian institutions have created Indigenous social work programs—such as the University of Manitoba's Northern Social Work Program and First Nations University of Canada—which embed Indigenous epistemologies into curriculum and pedagogy. This effort is part of a broader movement toward "two-eyed seeing," which values both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing.

Australia has seen parallel debates, particularly in response to the legacy of the Stolen Generations and the marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The term decolonising social work is used by Indigenous Australian scholars such as Sue Green, Linda Briskman, and Bindi Bennett, who argue that cultural competence alone is insufficient unless it is accompanied by structural and epistemic change. Green (2002) emphasizes that decolonising social work in Australia must involve reclaiming Indigenous ways of helping and healing, recognizing the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, and redistributing power in practice and education. Some universities now offer Indigenous-led units or courses in social work programs, such as "Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" at institutions like Charles Darwin University and the University of Sydney. There are also growing calls for Indigenous-designed and -delivered services, grounded in concepts like Country, kinship, and holistic well-being.

In China, the rehabilitation of social work after the 1980s saw the widespread adoption of US-based models, particularly in universities that had partnered with North American schools of social

work. However, Chinese scholars soon raised concerns that Western individualism and psychotherapy-oriented practice models did not align with Confucian collectivist values, family systems, or local social structures. Prominent Chinese social work academics, such as Leung Tse-Fong, Huang Guan, and Wong Hung, have advocated for the Sinicisation of social work. This includes integrating Confucian ethics, community-based intervention, and collective responsibility; developing practice methods that suit the danwei (work unit), rural–urban divide, and social governance structures; and emphasizing social harmony over conflict or critical intervention models. This approach reflects a broader effort to balance modern professionalization with traditional Chinese values. Social work in China is increasingly framed as a tool for social stability and harmonious development, rather than radical social transformation—a marked contrast to Western critical social work.

The literature from these contexts reveals the importance of moving beyond wholesale importation of Western models and instead developing culturally grounded, politically aware, and community-informed approaches. The indigenisation of social work emphasizes respect for local traditions, relationality, and cultural norms, while decolonisation demands a critical examination of the power structures embedded in professional knowledge and practice. These global experiences offer valuable insights for reimagining social work in Saudi Arabia, where social, religious, and familial structures differ significantly from those assumed in Western paradigms.

3.2 Summary

This chapter provides an examination of the literature around the origins, evolution, and challenges of social work as a profession as it evolved from a Western foundation and increased its global expansion, while still maintaining western concepts, philosophies and values. Despite the spread of

western models globally, there has been growing criticism of their applicability in diverse cultural settings. The chapter explores the literature around the complexities of adapting western social work theories to non-western contexts, with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia and it highlights the perspective in the literature that there is a need for indigenisation of social work practices to ensure they resonate with the cultural and societal values of the communities they serve.

Additionally, the chapter reviews key theoretical models within social work education, particularly those related to interpersonal practice, which were being taught in the Bachelor of Social Work degree at UQU university during the years 2004 to 2019. It underscores the importance of theory in guiding social work practice, while also acknowledging the debates around the applicability and effectiveness of theory-driven practice in social work generally and most especially in diverse cultural contexts.

The literature also points to the significance of Islamic principles in shaping social work thinking and practice in Saudi Arabia—such as communal responsibility (fard kifayah), compassion (rahmah), trust (amanah), and spiritual accountability. These religious and ethical foundations, rooted in the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, create a distinct conceptual environment that differs markedly from the individualist, secular assumptions underpinning many Western social work theories.

Overall, this chapter sets the stage for the subsequent research of this thesis, which aims to explore how Saudi social workers integrate western theories into their practice and the extent to which these theories influence their decision-making in a culturally uniquely Islamic environment. The literature reviewed raises concerns around western-based social work theories and perspectives being transported to non-western countries and identifies the need for culturally relevant social work education that aligns with the local context rather than relying solely on Western paradigms.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

4. Introduction

This chapter looks at the methodology used in the study on the impact of a western-based social work curriculum on decision-making in an Islamic state. It describes the actions taken to investigate a research problem and to establish the validity and reliability of the study. This chapter also provides a detailed description of the research design, data collection instruments, population, and method of data analysis. The objective of this section is to explain the rationale behind the procedures and techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse information. The results of this procedure can be applied to understanding the research problem and answering the research questions posed at the outset of the study:

- What factors influence decision-making?
- How aware are the social workers of drawing on or being influenced by any theoretical perspectives they study at university?
- Does practicing within an Islamic agency and society influence decision-making?

4.1 Methodology

To answer the research questions, a mixed method was employed using both a survey instrument and personal interviews with participants. In this study, the quantitative research design incorporated a deductive a approach which was used to obtain descriptive and statistical information and the reported experiences of professional social workers about the impact that their western-based social work curriculum program might have had on their social work practice. The qualitative information helped to better understand the complexity and nuances of experiences of

current social workers who studied social work in Saudi Arabia through the use and analysis of data that included interview conversations and observations. This type of information helped to explore phenomena that were difficult to quantify and to gain insights into the participants' subjective experiences and perspectives (Kothari, 2004a). In the quantitative survey component, a deductive approach was followed. In the qualitative component, using personal interviews, an inductive approach was followed. Mertens (2019) notes that:

"Transformative methodology generally involves the use of mixed methods, i.e. the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study in order to capture the full complexity of a phenomenon. Mixed methods are used to address power differentials in the stakeholder groups by providing multiple avenues for data collection that are culturally responsive" (p. xii).

This perspective aligns with the aims of my research. The mixed methods design was employed to ensure cultural responsiveness and to capture both broad contextual patterns (through the quantitative component) and deeper, more nuanced insights (through qualitative interviews). The quantitative phase allowed for a form of content analysis, identifying key trends and perceptions across a wider sample, while the qualitative phase explored participants' lived experiences, offering critical reflections on the applicability of Western social work frameworks in the Saudi context.

This approach was chosen intentionally to give voice to local practitioners and to highlight the tensions between imported theoretical models and culturally rooted practices.

4.1.1 Quantitative Approach

A deductive approach was followed in the quantitative component of the study to outline the variation in age, gender, length of time as a practitioner to see if there were any correlations

between these factors and the types of approaches undertaken.

4.1.2 Qualitative Approach

This inductive research followed an interpretivist research philosophy. Interpretivism is a research philosophy that seeks to understand and interpret social phenomena from the perspective of the individual actors involved. It assumes that social reality is constructed through the meanings and interpretations that people give to their experiences, and that these meanings and interpretations are subjective and context-dependent (Goddard & Melville, 2004). In terms of ontology, interpretivism assumes that there is no objective reality "out there" that exists independently of human consciousness. Instead, social reality is seen as a social construction that is created and maintained through human interaction and interpretation. In other words, reality is what people make of it. For epistemology, interpretivism assumes that knowledge is not something that can be discovered or observed objectively, but rather something that is constructed through human interpretation and understanding. This means that knowledge is context-dependent and subjective, and that it is shaped by the social and cultural norms and values of the society in which it is produced.

The utilisation of interpretivism as a research philosophy in this research was a highly appropriate approach due to its enabling participants to articulate their distinct individual viewpoints to acquire their subjective understanding of how the teaching of a professional curriculum program based on a western theory and philosophy impact and affect their decision-making.

Consequently, the adoption of interpretivism as the research philosophy in this study has exerted a pronounced influence on the methods employed for collecting qualitative data. The researcher structured and guided the interview whereby participants were allowed to provide their individual

perspectives and interpretation of the discussed scenarios.

The methodology for examining and interpreting participants' responses was phenomenology. Phenomenology was particularly well-suited for this study because it sought to understand the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals in a specific cultural context. It was based on the importance of understanding the meaning of participants' viewpoints and the meaning to them of their social work education when they practiced their profession and faced many difficult discussions around decision making (Kothari, 2004). By using phenomenology, the research was able to explore the ways in which social workers in Saudi Arabia interpreted and understood their professional roles and responsibilities within the Islamic framework and context of the practice settings (Kothari, 2004b). It allowed for a deeper exploration of how the western theories presented to them in their social work curriculum impacted their decision-making in the real world of work. The focus was on understanding the individual experiences, rationale and interpretations of the participants as they carried out their everyday professional functions.

4.2 Research Design

Given the need to gather a broad range of data for the study in order to investigate the impact of western pedagogy, theory and philosophy on decision-making of social work graduates who work within an Islamic framework and society in Saudi Arabia, a mixed-methods research design was used. Mixed-methods research design is a research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study (Johnson et al., 2007). This design enabled the researcher to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative information.

Quantitative data seeks to measure and quantify data through the collection and analysis of numerical data. Quantitative research is often used to identify patterns and trends in large datasets

and to test hypotheses (Daniel & Sam, 2011). The qualitative information helped to better understand the complexity and nuances of experiences of current social workers who studied social work in Saudi Arabia through the use and analysis of data that included interview conversations. This type of information helped to explore phenomena that were difficult to quantify and to gain insights into the participants' subjective experiences and perspectives (Kothari, 2004a). The qualitative research design in this study was used to obtain in-depth information about the experiences of social workers who studied a western-based curriculum program and are currently working in government agencies operating within an Islamic framework.

The mixed method was deemed appropriate as it allowed the study to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem by providing a more complete picture of the phenomena under investigation (Bhattacharyya, 2009). This approach led to more robust and nuanced findings and provided a more detailed interpretation and understanding of the research question.

4.3 Target Population and Sample

The target population for this study was social workers who studied social work in Saudi Arabia where the curriculum was based on western theories and who were now employed as professionals delivering their services in the Islamic society in Saudi Arabia. This meant that focus was on social workers who graduated between 2004 and 2019 – the years when the curriculum was heavily influenced by a Western social work curriculum. The majority of These participants were primarily young female graduates whose career trajectory was aligned with becoming practicing social workers. The initial sample was social workers who were directly employed in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in Makkah region. The sample was expanded to include social

workers who worked for social agencies and social service providers in other areas of Saudi Arabia, but which were also under the supervision of the Ministry.

As this was a mixed-methods study, the sample size was determined separately for the quantitative and qualitative data collection. For the quantitative survey, a sample size of 100 participants was the aim in order to provide a sample size that allowed for a credible analysis. The survey was distributed to social workers who were currently working in social agencies and service providers in Saudi Arabia in the Makkah region.

For the personal interviews comprising the qualitative component of the research, a small sample size of five six participants was the aim to ensure that detailed and in-depth data could be collected. These participants were also social workers who were currently working in social agencies and service providers in Saudi Arabia in the Makkah region and who had previously filled out the quantitative survey. Participants in the personal interviews self-selected after completing the survey by indicating their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, respectively. The first data collection method was a self-administered survey which was distributed to a large sample of social workers who had studied social work in Saudi Arabia and who were currently employed as professionals in government departments delivering social work services in Saudi Arabia while the questionnaire is added to Appendix 4.

The survey was designed to gather quantitative data related to participants' social work education, personal and employment background, and professional perspective. The data obtained from the

questionnaires was analysed using descriptive statistics.

The second data collection method was through interviewing five participants who graduated between 2004 and 2019 and who had indicated their willingness to participate online via zoom. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (Gupta & Gupta, 2022) designed to elicit responses related to the social workers' evaluation of the Western social work theories they had studied and their current experiences as professionals delivering social work services in Saudi Arabia.

To ensure cultural and contextual relevance, the interview guide and accompanying case scenarios were developed with the input of a Saudi social work student who had completed a social work degree in Australia. This individual was familiar with both the Saudi/Islamic cultural context and Western academic frameworks, which helped shape interview questions that reflected both theoretical knowledge and local practice realities. The case scenarios used were based on common situations encountered during field placements and professional practice within the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, where most participants were employed. Before conducting the main interviews, the guide and scenarios were reviewed through a pilot phase to ensure clarity and appropriateness, and all feedback from the pilot was considered, with necessary changes incorporated accordingly (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Willig, 2013).

Each interview was conducted with care to build rapport and establish mutual respect. The researcher introduced herself clearly, explained the purpose of the study and the participant's role, and allowed space for open and honest reflection. Several participants expressed appreciation for the topic and the opportunity to contribute, with some offering additional support if needed. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated, and analysed thematically.

The data collected through surveys and interviews was complemented by secondary sources. These included a review of academic textbooks and resources used in social work education at Umm Al-Qura University (UQU) during the years the participants studied, as well as relevant university publications and websites. Secondary data provided contextual information and a broader understanding of social work education in Saudi Arabia, particularly during the years 2004 to 2019.

4.5 Instrument, Reliability and Validity

To ensure research validity the research questions and methodology were aligned with the research objectives. The study was conducted in a consistent manner, and the data collection process was standardized in order to ensure dependability and reliability. Besides the use of established research tools and techniques, phenomenological and thematic analysis also helped ensure research quality (Noor, 2008).

4.5.1 Quantitative data

The survey instrument was developed using a modified survey instrument previously used by Khalid Bargawi who conducted a comparative study of social work-educated and non-social work-educated professionals in Saudi Arabia (Bargawi, 2002). This Bargawi instrument was designed to measure personal, educational, and employment backgrounds, as well as professional perspectives of social work professionals. The questionnaire that Bargawi used consisted of various types of questions, including multiple-choice, open-ended, and rating scale questions which were aligned closely to the focus of this current research and adapted easily to fit into the survey which was sent out to social workers in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development Branch in Makkah Region.

Included in the qualitative survey of this current research were questions about theoretical

perspectives of the respondents and their decision-making in practice situations. Certain questions are identical e.g. “when making professional decisions related to the client, I analyse the current information and data to determine the method of professional intervention with them”. Other questions are similar with a slightly altered wording e.g. “which professional intervention approach would you prefer to use”? Some other questions have been developed specifically to respond to the research questions specified in this study e.g., “do you think the professional intervention approaches you studied were relevant to your work”? This adaptation in the use of survey questions helped ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of western theories on social work professional practices and decision-making in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to the modified version of the Bargawi survey, the current researcher also incorporated feedback from a supervisory panel consisting of three experts in social work, teaching, and Islamic backgrounds to ensure the validity of the questionnaire.

The researcher also included items based on her knowledge of teaching social work at the University of Um Al-Qura (UQU), where she obtained a social work undergraduate and graduate degrees as well as a Master of Social Work degree in Australia. Additionally, the researcher translated the questionnaire into Arabic, the native language of the participants.

A pilot study was conducted first with a social worker who currently resides in Australia and who had studied social work in both Saudi Arabia and Australia. The survey was then also completed by three social workers who studied social work at three different universities in Saudi Arabia to provide feed-back about the relevance of the questions. Suggestions from these pilot studies, which largely related to the length of the questions, were incorporated into the final survey and contributed to face validity.

To ensure research reliability, data gathered by the quantitative survey contributed to the development of the interview questions, especially the information related to the use of social work theory on practice decisions. The questionnaire by Bargawi (2002) which was adapted for this current study was based on an earlier questionnaire by Cnaan and Rothman (1986) which has global reliability.

The additional questions added in this current study related to the respondents' application of their theoretical social work practice theoretical approaches as taught in their education. Initially closed-ended questions were asked about commonly taught western social work frameworks. Later open-ended questions asked respondents if they applied these theories in practice especially when making decisions. In personal interviews, which took place with a small number of respondents who agreed to talk with this researcher, it was possible to probe deeper into the issues of when and how western theories were employed or not in practice. Both the closed-ended and open-ended question laid the foundation for further exploration in the personal interviews.

The qualitative interviews primarily used case scenarios as the main discussion tool. Each case scenario represented realistic situations faced by Saudi social workers and was designed to prompt participants to reflect on how they would apply theoretical knowledge, professional ethics, and cultural or religious values in practice. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions, which encouraged participants to share their views freely and in depth. These questions were shaped by the earlier questionnaire responses, particularly insights gained from the open-ended items. The design of both the interviews and the case scenarios was therefore informed by the survey findings and by the pilot interview, which helped ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and culturally appropriate.

4.6 Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis for this study involved several steps. Firstly, the demographic information gathered from the questionnaire was analysed to provide a basic profile of employed social workers in the Makkah region of Saudi Arabia. This information about social workers in the Makkah area of Saudi Arabia is not readily available and therefore provides a useful profile of the characteristics of this group of employed social workers. A careful examination of the answers supplied by respondents to the survey led to the possibility of some factors being highly related to other variables. To examine any statistical significance between these factors, a series of chi-square tests were applied, for example, to explore the relationship between years of experience and the extent to which respondents identified conflict between university study and professional practice.

Secondly, individual interviews were recorded and transcribed in Arabic and then translated into English. The responses of participants were reviewed carefully to identify commonalities and variations related to age, experience, or level of education. Thirdly, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, their frequency, and their strength. Finally, an interpretive analysis using phenomenology was conducted to illuminate participants' responses and to explore how social work decisions are made in the workplace, including the use of social work theoretical frameworks or other sources of influence such as religious beliefs, deeply held convictions, or social attitudes. This analysis helped answer the research questions and provided insights into social work practice in Saudi Arabia.

The thematic analysis followed the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which provides a theoretically flexible yet systematic framework for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. This method "seeks to theorise the sociocultural contexts and

structural conditions that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). It goes beyond surface meaning but does not claim to truly "know" what participants are thinking. Instead, it identifies broad patterns across the dataset while retaining the individual voice of participants. The site of analysis is the individual as indicative of the collective, meaning that each interview was treated as both unique and representative of shared professional experiences.

Thematic analysis was therefore used to capture the main ideas and concepts expressed by participants in their own words. Quotes selected from individual interviews were used to represent themes that were common across the dataset. The analysis process began with familiarisation, in which the researcher read and re-read the transcripts while noting early impressions. The second phase involved generating initial codes by systematically identifying interesting and meaningful features across the data. During the third phase, these codes were collated into potential themes, grouping related ideas together. The fourth phase required reviewing and refining these themes to ensure that they accurately reflected the data as a whole. Finally, the fifth phase involved defining and naming the themes, clarifying their scope, and producing an analytic narrative that represented the overall story told by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

In this study, thematic analysis went beyond simple description. It sought to understand how participants made sense of their professional realities as social workers operating within an Islamic cultural context influenced by Western theories. The approach was particularly appropriate for this research, which adopted an interpretivist and phenomenological orientation aimed at understanding subjective experience rather than producing generalisable findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytic process. The researcher critically reflected on her dual positionality as a Saudi social-work academic educated in both Western and Islamic contexts, recognising how this background might influence interpretation (Berger, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2019). This ongoing reflexive awareness helped to minimise interpretive bias and ensured that the participants' perspectives were represented accurately, respectfully, and within their cultural frame of reference.

In summary, these combined analytical approaches ensured that both numerical trends and personal experiences were examined in depth, providing a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the research data.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for all aspects of this research was gained from Flinders University Human Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University (Appendix 2). The study took into consideration various ethical underpinnings, including informed consent, voluntary participation, do no harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and only assessing relevant components. To ensure that the participants were fully informed about the research being conducted, informed consent was obtained from each participant before they took part in the study. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the potential risks and benefits of participating. They were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences (Ørngreen & Levinsen, 2017).

Voluntary participation was also emphasised in the study. Participants were free to withdraw their participation at any time without negatively impacting their involvement. No pressure was placed on those who chose not to continue, and explanations were not required. Any potential risks to

participants were carefully considered, and appropriate support or referrals were provided for any participants who experienced emotional discomfort or distress.

Confidentiality and anonymity were critical ethical considerations that were taken into account in this research. Participants' personal information was kept confidential and only accessible to the research team. Any information that could have potentially identified the participants was removed from the data to ensure anonymity.

Additionally, the researcher ensured that reports excluded any identifying information as well as any published documents or articles. Lastly, the study only assessed relevant components that were of relevance to the research being conducted (Kothari, 2004b). The researcher remained focused on the evaluation of the data gathered and its purpose. The researcher also ensured that the questions asked during the individual interviews were relevant to the study and not harmful to the participants.

In summary, the ethical framework of this study extended beyond institutional compliance to encompass a broader commitment to cultural responsiveness, reflexivity, and participant dignity. These principles guided every stage of the research—from recruitment and data collection through analysis and reporting—thereby ensuring methodological integrity and ethical accountability.

4.8 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used for the study on the impact of a western-based social work curriculum on decision-making in an Islamic context. A mixed-method research design was used, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather a broad range of data. A deductive approach was employed to establish basic demographic information on

social workers who studied social work in Saudi Arabia where the curriculum was based on Western theories and who were now employed as professionals delivering their services in the Islamic society in Saudi Arabia. A phenomenological research approach was employed to help understand the subjective experiences and interpretations of social workers in Saudi Arabia working within an Islamic context and framework.

An inductive approach was used to provide a more complete picture of the phenomena under investigation and to capture the complexity and diversity of the experiences and views of the participants. The aim was to generate new ideas and concepts based on specific observations and data.

This chapter discussed the methodology, the research design, data collection instruments, population, and method of data analysis. The data analysis methods involved demographic analysis on the quantitative data, and then a thematic analysis on the qualitative data using a phenomenological approach. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, doing no harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and only assessing relevant components. Participants were fully informed about the study, had the option to withdraw, and their personal information was kept confidential and anonymous. The study focused on relevant components to the research question and sought to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5. Introduction

This chapter focused the findings of the study on a detailed analysis of the quantitative data, with a particular emphasis on identifying the characteristics of the respondents and the factors they name as influencing their social work practice. A selection of factors will be examined for significant relationships. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an overview of the interpretation of the quantitative research.

5.1. Respondents' Demographic data

5.1.1 Gender

The responses to the survey showed that 62% of the respondents were female, while 37% were male. This indicates that the highest numbers of participants were between 35 and 44 of age in years, with the majority of social work professionals being in their mid-career stage and having a substantial level of experience and expertise in the field.

Table 1. Gender of respondents

Gender	**Number of responses**
Female	57
Male	34
No response	4
Total	95

5.1.2 Age

In terms of the age distribution of the survey respondents, 14% percent of the respondents were ages 25–34; 44% were between 35–44; 35% were between 45–54, and 7% of the respondents were over 55.

Table 2. Age of respondents

Age group	**Number of responses**
25 - 34	13
35 - 44	42
45 - 54	33
55 +	7
No response	0
Total	95

5.1.3 Marital Status

Regarding marital status, most participants were married (66%). The distribution of respondents' years of experience was fairly equal across age categories.

Table 3. Marital status of respondents

Marital Status	**Number of responses**
Married	60
Single/Single	19
Divorced	9
Widower	5
No response	2
Total	95

5.1.4 Educational Background and years of work

Responses to questions about their education showed that 78% of the participants had a social work qualification, with 59% holding a Bachelor of Social Work degree and 14% specialising in the family and childhood field of practice. In terms of client populations, 52% of participants reported working with diverse client groups, including variations in cultural, ethnic, social, religious, and educational backgrounds. A substantial number of respondents (56%) graduated between 2004 and 2019, suggesting a mix of experienced and recently graduated professionals as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Educational background of respondents

Social work qualification	**Number of responses**
Bachelor's degree in social work	49
Higher Diploma in Social Work	4
Master's degree in social work	10
Doctorate in Social Work	1
No degree in Social Work but a degree in another specialty.	18
No response	13
Total	95

Table 5. Post-high school educational institutions

Educational institution	**Number of responses**

King Abdulaziz University	22
Umm al Qura University	2
University of Tabuk	1
King Saud University	2
Qassim University	1
Western Michigan University, Gryphon Place	1
University in Jeddah	2
College	1
University of Jeddah, Female Branch of education	1
Not stated	28
Faculty of education	1
No response	33
Total	95

Table 6. Social work educational specialisation

Major	**Number of responses**
No subspecialty	37
Family and childhood & care for the young	18
Elderly	4
Medical Social Work, disability, rehabilitation	10
Mental Health	1
School	3
Community Development	3
Organisation and administration in social work	3
Social Planning	1
Sociology	1
General practice	1

Events	4
Search	3
Total	95

Table 7. Non-social work qualifications

Specialisation	**Number of responses**
Sociology	14
Psychology	3
Engineering	1
Bachelor of Kindergarten	1
Management	1
Geography	1
Higher Diploma Family Monitoring	1
Public Relations	1

Total	23

Table 8. Study outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Study inside or outside Kingdom	**Number of responses**
No	87
Yes	5
No response	3
Total	95

Table 9. Years of social work employment

Number of years	**Number of responses**
Less than a year	3
1 – 5 years	21
6 – 10 years	19
11 – 20 years	26

21 + years	21
Blank	5
Total	95

5.2 Summary of demographic data

The survey, encompassing 95 participants with a 32% response rate out of 300 invitees, reflects a diverse demographic profile of social workers in Saudi Arabia. Predominantly female (60%), participants span various age groups, with a concentration in the 35-44 range (44%). Marital status is diverse, with a majority being married (63%), and English is considered the second language for the majority (66%). The educational background showcases attendance at a variety of institutions, with King Abdulaziz University being the most frequent choice. Notably, 78% of participants possess qualifications in social work, primarily at the bachelor's level, indicating a well-qualified local workforce, with only 5% having studied outside Saudi Arabia. The fact that a high percentage of respondents were trained locally suggests a strong domestic educational framework supporting the social work profession.

The primary fields of work include disability, social development, social security, and juvenile care and a balanced approach to administrative and direct client engagement. The diversity in client interactions highlights the broad scope and adaptability required in social work practice.

Table 10. Social work qualifications by Gender

	Degree	**Degree**	**Degree**	**Degree**	**No Degree**	**Blank**	
Gender	Bachelor's degree in social work	Higher Diploma in Social Work	Master's degree in social work	Doctorate in Social Work	Did not hold social work degree	Did not report degree	Grand Total
Female	33	2	6		9	7	57
Male	14	1	4	1	8	6	34
Total	47	3	10	1	17	13	91

5.3 Respondents' work-related attitudes, beliefs and practices

Social work respondents demonstrated the global values advocated by the social work profession in their responses. The majority of respondents, 96%, believed that it is necessary to contribute to positive elements in clients' lives and that their client should be treated with dignity and respect, demonstrating a strong consensus on the importance of maintaining dignity and respect in client interactions. Only a small number, four, remain neutral, indicating that very few social workers are indifferent or unsure about this value as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Believe clients should be treated with dignity and respect.

Clients should be treated with dignity and respect	**Number of responses**
Agree	91
Neutral	4
Total	95

A significant majority (78 out of 95) expressed belief in the client's right to self-determination emphasising the importance placed on empowering clients to make their own decisions. Some respondents (15) are neutral, while a minimal number (2) disagree, suggesting that there is some, albeit limited, uncertainty or disagreement about the extent to which clients should have autonomy in their decision-making. One respondent commented in the open-ended section of the survey, **"**As a social worker, I do not have the right to make decisions, but rather to clarify to the client and the patient that the decision is his/hers" (Survey respondent #4).

Table 12. Belief in client's right to self-determination

Belief in self-determination	**Number of responses**

Agree	78
Neutral	15
Disagree	2
Total	95

Ninety-four percent of respondents felt it was important to stay flexible and change plans if clients' situations changed and to teach clients to find their own solutions with their own capabilities. Social workers were prepared with backup plans in response to changes in their clients' situations. A large majority (89 out of 95) agree that they have backup plans, indicating a high level of preparedness and proactive planning in their practice. A small number of respondents (4) are neutral, while only two disagree, highlighting that most social workers feel equipped to handle unforeseen changes in their clients' circumstances.

Table 13. Change plans when clients' situation changes

Flexibility around client plans	**Number of responses**
Agree	89
Neutral	4
Disagree	2

Total	95

Seveny six per cent of respondents indicated that they would create self-help groups, when possible, in their work situation indicating the importance workers placed on strengthening clients assisting each other.

Table 14. Create self-help groups among clients.

Would create self-help groups	**Number of responses**
Agree	72
neutral	16
Disagree	5
No response	2
Total	95

Most social workers reported that they constantly evaluated their work (88%) and 95% used current information to make professional decisions.

Table 15. Social Workers constantly evaluate their professional work.

Constantly evaluate	**Number of**

their work	responses
Agree	84
neutral	10
Disagree	1
Total	95

Social workers require frequent engagement with other institutions and organisations in the community and 88% of respondents said they planned jointly in their work with other institutions.

Table 16. Jointly planned interventions with other institutions

Joint planning	Number of responses
Agree	84
Neutral	11
Total	95

The study aims to understand the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of social workers in their professional roles to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the practice of social work. The findings from these tables reveal a strong commitment among social workers to key professional values such as dignity, respect, and client autonomy. Additionally, the high level of

preparedness with backup plans indicates a proactive approach to managing client needs and unforeseen changes, which are essential for effective social work practice. The common working practices of social work are reflected in the descriptions of their professional tasks and attitudes such as evaluating their practice, creating self-help groups and belief in the client's right to self-determination. These attitudes and values are consistent with the International Federation of Social Workers' code of ethics (Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles).

5.4 Respondents' views on their social work education

The researcher was particularly interested in the use of social work theories as taught in university on decision-making around client issues. Out of 95 respondents, 93% reported using practice approaches studied in academia, and 91% found these intervention approaches relevant to their work. However, when asked if their theories influenced their interactions with clients, 22% indicated that their studies did not significantly influence their actions, and 20% felt a conflict between their work and university studies.

Table 17. Use of social work approaches studied in academia.

Use of approaches	**Number of responses**
Yes	88
No	5
No response	2
Total	95

One respondent commented that the “work environment and its culture are completely different from the study environment.” Another said that “what we studied was based on societies other than the society in which we practice our work,” while another wrote, “social work varies from one society to another.”

Notably, 91% of respondents indicated that their own practical knowledge influenced their interactions with clients. In relation to other influences on their social work interactions, 68% of respondents felt that their religious beliefs influenced their interactions with clients, either strongly (42%) or slightly (26%).

Table 18. Use of occupational intervention taught in academia.

Used occupational approaches	**Number of responses**
Yes	80
No	12
No response	3
Total	95

There was a range of different intervention models indicated by respondents on the survey, reflecting diversity in practice preferences. A majority of participants indicated that intervention approaches from their education were utilised, as evidenced by responses to multiple questions

within the survey.

Table 19. Contributing to the positive elements in clients' lives

Contribute to positive elements with clients	**Number of responses**
Agree	91
Neutral	3
Disagree	1
Total	95

Table 20. Providing client data to decision makers and administrators

Provide data	**Number of responses**
Agree	84
Neutral	8
Disagree	3
Total	**95**

Table 21. Help clients find their own solutions.

Help clients to find their own solutions	**Number of responses**
Agree	89
Neutral	5
Blank	1
Total	**95**

5.5 Factors of Significance

In analysing the demographic data and the attitudes and beliefs of the respondents, a Chi-Square test was conducted to determine if any demographic factors significantly influenced social workers' decision-making. The following table shows the factors that were investigated further. The significance level used to determine influence was set at 0.05.

The following table shows the Chi-Square Results, with the significance of various factors determined by conducting a Chi-Square test to analyse the relationship between the independent variables (such as years of work, age, work experience, marital status, and social work qualification) and the dependent variables (like influence of religious beliefs, own life experiences, education on

interaction with clients, and belief in the importance of creating self-help groups).

Once significant relationships were identified, a further examination was made of each of the independent variables to understand the direction and nature of these relationships.

Table 22. Factors of Significance

*Shows significant relationship

	Independent Variable	**Dependent Variable**	**P** **(p<0.05)**
1	Years of work	Influence of religious beliefs on interaction with clients	$X^2(2, N = 90) = 36.57$, $p = .000$*.
2	Years of work	Influence of own life experiences on interaction with clients	$X^2(2, N = 90) = 44.86$, $p = .000$*.
3	Years of work	Influence of education on interaction with clients	$X^2(2, N = 90) = 15.80$, $p = .045$*.
4	Age	Influence of religious beliefs on interaction with clients	$X^2(2, N = 95) = 15.85$, $p = .015$*.
5	Age	Influence of own life experiences on interaction with clients	$X^2(2, N = 95) = 19.45$, $p = .003$*.
6	Work experience	Believe in the importance of creating	$X^2(2, N = 88) = 15.68$,

		self-help groups	p = .047*
7	Marital Status	Influence of religious beliefs on interaction with clients	$X^2(2, N = 93) = 15.85$, p = .015*.
8	Social work qualification	Believe in the client's right to self-determination	$X^2(2, N = 82) = 45.15$, p = .000*.

This table presents the results of Chi-Square tests that were conducted to explore the relationships between various independent variables and dependent variables. The level of significance used for these tests was p = .05.

5.5.1 Interpretation of Association

5.5.1.1 Years of Work and Influence of Religious Beliefs on Interaction with Clients

- **Chi-Square Value:** X^2 (2, N = 90) = 36.57
- **p-value:** .000

Interpretation: There was a significant relationship between years of work experience and the influence of religious beliefs on social workers' interactions with clients.

The results indicate that younger or recent graduate social workers tend to believe that religious belief has a greater impact on their interactions with clients. Therefore, the more experienced social workers become, the less religious belief plays a role in their interactions with clients. It is possible that as social workers gain more experience, they become more adept at separating their personal religious beliefs from their interactions with clients. They may develop a heightened self-awareness and consciously strive to provide unbiased and professional support. Additionally, with increased

experience, social workers may rely more on their accumulated knowledge and practical skills, which could overshadow the influence of religious beliefs. This shift towards a more realistic and evidence-based approach could contribute to the diminishing impact of religious beliefs on their interactions with clients. Overall, it seems that professional growth and experience play a significant role in shaping social workers' perspectives and practices.

5.5.1.2 Years of Work and Influence of Own Life Experiences on Interaction with Clients

- **Chi-Square Value:** $X^2(2, N = 90) = 44.86$
- **p-value:** .000

Interpretation: There was a significant relationship between years of work and the influence of personal experience on social workers' interactions with clients. The influence of personal experiences on social workers' interactions with clients decreases with experience. Therefore, recent graduates and younger, less experienced social workers seem to be more impacted by their own personal experiences. As social workers gain more experience, they become better at separating their own personal experiences from their interactions. They develop the ability to keep their personal experiences at bay and rely more on their accumulated work experience, which they believe is effective. On the other hand, younger social workers and recent graduates may not have built up that extensive work experience yet, so they tend to rely more on their own personal experiences, which have a greater influence on their interactions with clients. So, it seems that the more experienced social workers become, the less their own personal experiences impact on their interactions, while younger ones still rely more on their own experiences.

5.5.1.3 Years of Work and Influence of Education on Interaction with Clients

- **Chi-Square Value:** $X^2(2, N = 90) = 15.80$

- **p-value:** .045

Interpretation: There was a significant relationship between years of work experience and the influence of education on social workers' interactions with clients. As social workers gain more years of work experience, the impact of the theories they have studied becomes stronger. This indicates that the knowledge and understanding acquired through studying theories significantly shapes how social workers engage with their clients. Perhaps the less experienced, although they learned the theories theoretically, still do not have confidence in their use of lubricity. They need to reinforce this through actual work experience.

5.5.1.4 Age and Influence of Religious Beliefs on Interaction with Clients

- **Chi-Square Value:** $X^2(2, N = 95) = 15.85$
- **p-value:** .015

Interpretation: There is a significant relationship between the age of social workers and the influence of their religious beliefs on client interactions. This might suggest that social workers of different ages incorporate their religious beliefs differently in their professional practice.

5.5.1.5 Age and Influence of Own Life Experiences on Interaction with Clients

- **Chi-Square Value:** $X^2(2, N = 95) = 19.45$
- **p-value:** .003

Interpretation: The analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between age and the influence of their own life experiences on interaction with clients. As social workers advance in age, there is a decrease in the influence of their own life experience on their interactions. This may be attributed to the accumulation of professional work experience, which leads older social workers to

rely more on their expertise rather than their own life experience when engaging with clients. Therefore, the findings indicate a significant association between age and the influence of their own life experiences demonstrating that older social workers exhibit a diminished impact of their own life experiences s on their interactions with clients.

5.5.1.6 Work Experience and Belief in the Importance of Creating Self-Help Groups

- **Chi-Square Value:** $X^2(2, N = 88) = 15.68$
- **p-value:** .047

Interpretation: There was a significant relationship between work experience and the belief in the importance of creating self-help groups. The data suggests that as social workers gain more experience, they may recognise the value and effectiveness of self-help groups in empowering clients and fostering a supportive community environment. This finding highlights the importance of experience in shaping social workers' approaches to client empowerment and group facilitation.

5.5.1.7 Marital Status and Influence of Religious Beliefs on Interaction with Clients

- **Chi-Square Value:** $X^2(2, N = 93) = 15.85$
- **p-value:** .015

Interpretation: There was a significant relationship between marital status and the influence of religious beliefs on social workers' interactions with clients. The correlation between these two variables indicates a strong positive relationship. This indicates that married social workers reported a stronger reliance on religious principles and that marital status of social workers plays a significant role in shaping how their religious beliefs impact their interactions with clients. It is intriguing to observe the interconnectedness of these two variables in this context.

5.5.1.8 Social Work Qualification and Belief in the Client's Right to Self-Determination

- **Chi-Square Value:** X^2 (2, N = 82) = 45.15
- **p-value:** .000

Interpretation: This significance suggests a correlation between social work qualification and the belief in the client's right to self-determination and this is not surprising given the centrality of this principle in social work education. Fresh graduates and individuals without a social work degree tend to exhibit a higher likelihood of agreeing with the statement. However, as social workers pursue higher degrees such as a master's or PhD, there is a shift towards more varied opinions, including disagreements. Among participants with a bachelor's degree, a majority agreed with the statement, while for master's degree holders, there was a higher rate of agreement but also a few instances of disagreement. Notably, individuals without a social work qualification displayed no disagreements. Therefore, it appears that the level of education and qualification in social work may influence perspectives on client self-determination. It is interesting that the group of people who do not have a social work qualification, but who have been working for social workers for many years have likely observed and adopted the professional value of self-determination around clients' own decisions.

5.6 Survey responses from open-ended questions

At the end of the survey, respondents had the opportunity to provide additional comments on various aspects of their professional practice. These open-ended questions allowed for personal reflections and elaborations beyond the structured survey questions. The general trend from these responses indicated that many social workers valued the practical application of their education and experience in shaping their interactions with clients.

For instance, several respondents highlighted how their real-world experiences helped them better understand and implement theoretical concepts learned during their education. Some noted that practical experience provided them with confidence in applying theories and interventions, which they found challenging during their initial years.

In terms of significant factors, some open-ended responses echoed the findings from the Chi-Square tests. For example, the impact of experience on the use of self-help groups was reflected in comments from social workers who noted that their increasing years in the field led them to recognise the benefits of such groups more clearly.

Overall, the open-ended responses provided valuable insights into the practical realities of social work practice and further emphasised the complex interplay between education, experience, and personal beliefs in shaping professional interactions with clients.

Participants were also asked for suggestions to make the social work curriculum more aligned with the realities of professional practice. They provided a range of responses including the following:

- Focus on practical skills in the field and focus on scientific methods in treatment.
- The theoretical teaching method is not useful for practical applications.
- The curricula should be taught in a practical and applied way.
- Apply the curriculum in light of the actual work processes.
- Increase the percentage of field training.
- Engage participation of social service providers in the developing the curriculum.

The responses to the open-ended questions added personal depth to the more structured answers to the other questions on the questionnaire. These more subjective responses were helpful in designing the questions for the in-depth interviews in the qualitative section of this study as will be

discussed in the next chapter.

5.7 Discussion of Findings

The findings from both the survey data and Chi-square analyses offer valuable insights into the landscape of social work in Saudi Arabia and reflects a diverse demographic profile of social workers in Saudi Arabia.

The data suggests a significant impact of education and practical knowledge on social workers' interactions. Respondents attribute a strong influence on the theories and practical knowledge gained during their studies, with a majority asserting that these factors strongly affect their professional interactions. Notably, a small number of respondents perceive a conflict between university studies and real-world practice, indicating potential gaps in the applicability of academic training.

Individual open-ended comments from respondents offer nuanced insights, emphasising challenges in implementing learned techniques, variations in institutional constraints, and suggestions for curriculum enhancement. A substantial number of respondents graduated between 2004 and 2019, suggesting a mix of experienced and recently graduated professionals. Furthermore, the survey sheds light on the commitment of social workers to fundamental principles, with a high consensus on treating clients with dignity and respecting their right to self-determination. The strong influence of academic theories and practical knowledge on professional interactions underscores the importance of educational preparation in shaping the perspectives and practices of social workers.

At the same time, the acknowledgment of conflicts between university studies and real-world practice by 20% of respondents highlights potential areas for improvement in bridging the gap between academic training and the complex realities of professional settings. The individual open-

ended comments provided by respondents on the survey illustrated the nuanced perspectives on these challenges, emphasising the need for more practical skills, relevance to local societal issues, and collaboration between educators and practitioners.

The findings, encompassing the demographic, educational, and professional aspects of practice provide valuable insights for refining educational programs and improving the alignment between theoretical knowledge and on-the-ground practice in the field of social work in Saudi Arabia.

The Chi-square analyses reveal significant associations between years of work and various aspects of social work practice. Notably, religious beliefs, ideas based on personal experiences, and theoretical influences demonstrate statistically significant connections with work experience. These associations underscore the nuanced interplay between personal attributes, professional development, and the dynamics of client interactions. The analysis revealed noteworthy associations between several variables.

5.7.1 Awareness and Application of Theoretical Perspectives

A key observation in this study is the varying levels of awareness among social workers regarding their application of theoretical perspectives in practice. The findings reveal a three-stage process:

1. **Acknowledgment**: Social workers claim to use theoretical frameworks in practice.
2. **Articulation**: Many struggle to identify specific theories or concepts they apply.
3. **Evidence in Practice**: Despite this, descriptions of their work demonstrate implicit use of theoretical principles.

Although participants had difficulty explicitly recalling theoretical models, their practice aligned with

theoretical principles. This confirms existing literature that suggests social workers may subconsciously apply theories without conscious acknowledgment. Furthermore, the research extends prior studies by demonstrating that theoretical frameworks are actively used even when not explicitly named. This challenges the assumption that non-western contexts reject western social work theories; rather, practitioners in Islamic agencies adapt and incorporate these frameworks within their own worldview.

While social workers recognise the value of education in shaping professional perspectives, some voiced concerns about the applicability of their university training to real-world scenarios. Many emphasised the need for improvements in the curriculum, particularly by increasing the use of local case studies and focusing on practical applications to enhance retention and effectiveness.

5.7.2 The Role of Islamic Agency and Society in Decision-Making

Participants emphasised that working within an Islamic agency provided a comfortable environment that enabled them to integrate religious values without restriction. Another notable finding was the agency support for community expectations of professional practice. Social workers often act as intermediaries between clients and societal norms, addressing sensitive issues such as family dynamics, gender roles, and social justice within an Islamic framework. While this role can be complex, practitioners generally felt supported by their agencies in upholding ethical and culturally appropriate interventions.

Social workers did not perceive any conflict between their religious values and professional theories; instead, they experienced a seamless synergy between personal faith, agency policies, and professional responsibilities. Religion functions as an integral element of their work, influencing interactions with clients, ethical considerations, and overall decision-making processes.

Unlike western discourse that often highlights potential conflicts between social work principles and religious frameworks (Furman, Benson, Grimwood, & Canda,2004), this study found no such tension. Rather, the findings challenge previous research by demonstrating that western theoretical models can be effectively adapted within an Islamic cultural context. Instead of rejecting these frameworks, social workers naturally integrated them into their practice without resistance.

An additional observation was the relationship between marital status and religious influence in practice. Married social workers reported a stronger reliance on religious principles compared to their single counterparts. Moreover, married participants emphasised that working within an Islamic agency provided a comfortable environment that enabled them to integrate religious values without restriction.

5.7.3 Influence of Various Factors on Decision-Making in Social Work

The findings indicate that social work decision-making in Islamic agencies is shaped by an interplay of multiple influences, notably religious beliefs, agency policies, professional experience, and theoretical knowledge. The role of religion is particularly pronounced, as it permeates all aspects of practice, seamlessly integrating with professional identity rather than existing as an external influence. Social workers in this study naturally incorporated religious values into their decision-making processes.

Professional experience emerged as a significant factor influencing decision-making, particularly in cases where theoretical knowledge was not explicitly recalled. The findings also suggest that social workers' personal experiences impact their decision-making in the early stages of their careers, while more experienced practitioners rely increasingly on structured frameworks learned through education. Notably, the influence of religious beliefs on decision-making tends to diminish with

experience, suggesting that professionals develop a more balanced approach between faith-based principles and professional standards over time.

Practicing within an Islamic agency and society significantly influences decision-making. Social workers did not perceive any conflict between their religious values and professional theories; instead, they experienced a seamless synergy between personal faith, agency policies, and professional responsibilities. Religion functions as an integral element of their work, influencing interactions with clients, ethical considerations, and overall decision-making processes. Unlike western discourse that often highlights potential conflicts between social work principles and religious frameworks (Furman et Ai.,2004), this study found no such tension. Rather, the findings challenge previous research by demonstrating that western theoretical models can be effectively adapted within an Islamic cultural context. Instead of rejecting these frameworks, social workers naturally integrated them into their practice without resistance. Additionally, agency policies and organisational frameworks provide consistent guidance that influence workers' professional choices, ensuring decisions are aligned with institutional expectations and legal frameworks.

By synthesising the findings in this way, a more comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the study emerges. The discussion explores how social workers make decisions, the extent to which they draw upon theoretical perspectives learned in university, and how working within an Islamic agency and society influences their professional practice. Throughout the analysis, relevant themes such as professional experience, religious and cultural integration, and the practical application of social work theories are interwoven to highlight the complexity of decision-making in this context. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about the adaptability of social work frameworks in non-western societies, offering new perspectives on the balance between theoretical knowledge and culturally embedded practice.

The study also highlights that while theoretical knowledge from university education remains relevant, its practical application to decision making varies based on experience and contextual factors. Less experienced social workers tend to rely more on personal experiences, whereas those with greater professional exposure integrate both theoretical knowledge and institutional frameworks into their practice.

Additionally, external factors such as government regulations, cultural expectations, and institutional policies shape social work decision making within Islamic agencies. Practitioners must navigate a system where societal norms, legal constraints, and ethical considerations intersect. The ability to make ethical decisions while aligning with both professional standards and religious values is essential. Social workers in this study demonstrated that their professional decisions are deeply intertwined with religious teachings, but rather than perceiving this as a conflict, they viewed it as an integrated and harmonious process that strengthens their practice.

5.7.4 Social Work Education

The findings suggest that curriculum development in social work education could be enhanced by incorporating more locally-relevant case studies, increasing field training opportunities, and strengthening connections between theoretical instruction and practical application. Future research may further explore the adaptability of social work theories across different cultural and religious contexts, as well as the evolving role of religious influences as social workers gain more professional experience. Ultimately, this study provides insights into the complex interplay of theoretical knowledge, religious values, and professional practice, emphasising the need for social work education and policy to acknowledge and support culturally embedded professional frameworks.

A key observation in this study is the varying levels of awareness among social workers regarding their application of theoretical perspectives in practice. The findings reveal a three-stage process, where social workers first claim to use theoretical frameworks in practice, then struggle to identify specific theories or concepts they apply and finally provide evidence in practice that implicitly demonstrates their use of theoretical principles. Although participants had difficulty explicitly recalling theoretical models, their practice aligned with theoretical principles. This confirms existing literature that suggests social workers may subconsciously apply theories without conscious acknowledgment. Furthermore, the research extends prior studies by demonstrating that theoretical frameworks are actively used even when not explicitly named. This challenges the assumption that non-western contexts reject western social work theories; rather, practitioners in Islamic agencies adapt and incorporate these frameworks within their own worldview.

While social workers recognise the value of education in shaping professional perspectives, some voiced concerns about the applicability of their university training to real-world scenarios. Many emphasised the need for improvements in the curriculum, particularly by increasing the use of local case studies and focusing on practical applications to enhance retention and effectiveness. The study suggests that strengthening the connection between theoretical instruction and field-based learning can improve practitioners' ability to recall and apply social work theories effectively.

The findings suggest that universities should incorporate case studies reflecting local cultural and religious contexts to enhance theoretical relevance, strengthen the link between theoretical instruction and practical application to help social work students articulate their use of theory more effectively, and increase field training opportunities and applied learning components to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and professional practice. Incorporating structured reflection exercises and mentorship programs could help students transition more effectively into professional

roles.

5.7.5 Summary

This research provides new insights into the integration of theoretical perspectives, religious values, and professional identity in Islamic social work agencies. The findings challenge assumptions about the incompatibility of western social work theories in non-western contexts by demonstrating that these theories can be successfully adapted and incorporated within an Islamic framework. The seamless synergy between personal, professional, and religious identities in social work practice is a key contribution of this study to the field. Furthermore, the study highlights areas for improvement in educational and professional training, particularly in addressing the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Emphasising local case studies, increasing field training opportunities, and enhancing professional development initiatives can improve the preparedness of social workers. Finally, this research underscores the importance of experience and professional growth in shaping social workers' decision-making processes, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the profession in the Saudi Arabian context.

By exploring the impact of religious beliefs, professional experience, and institutional policies on social work decision-making, this study provides valuable insights for educators, practitioners, and policymakers. The integration of western theoretical models within Islamic practice suggests a promising direction for continued adaptation and innovation in the field of social work.

The study highlights areas for improvement in educational and professional training, particularly in addressing the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Finally, this research underscores the importance of experience and professional growth.

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of the quantitative data. The findings offer a comprehensive understanding of the social work landscape in Saudi Arabia indicating that experience and professional growth play pivotal roles in shaping social workers' approaches to client interactions and highlighting significant associations between years of work, age, and key professional beliefs and practices. The survey results identified areas for improvement in aligning academic training with real-world practice, emphasising the need for more practical skills, relevance to local societal issues, and collaboration between educators and practitioners in curriculum development.

In the next chapter, the qualitative aspect of the thesis involving personal interviews with five social workers will be presented to explore these associations further to better identify the underlying reasons behind these findings. Through listening to the five participants' discussions of their work and their use of theory and other factors which influence their decision-making examining, deeper insights were gained into how social workers' experiences and backgrounds influence their professional practices and interactions with clients which help build a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to effective and ethical social work practice in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER SIX: PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH FIVE SOCIAL WORKERS

6. Introduction

In this chapter, the five interviews that were conducted following the general social work survey are presented in summarised form to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the perspectives, reasoning processes, and professional reflections of practising social workers in Saudi Arabia. These interviews served as a qualitative extension of the survey findings, allowing participants to articulate their experiences, interpretations, and decision-making approaches in their own words. A description of the interviewees, along with relevant background characteristics, is provided to contextualise their contributions, and the process of engaging them in the interviews is also outlined.

This chapter presents detailed narrative summaries of the five interviews, each constructed to retain the integrity, cultural tone, and professional insight conveyed by the social workers, without reproducing the interviews in full or relying on verbatim dialogue. This summarised approach enables the chapter to focus clearly on the meaning and significance of participants' accounts while maintaining coherence and readability.

A content analysis of all five interviews was subsequently undertaken, and the themes that emerged from this analysis are discussed separately in Chapter Seven. That chapter explores the conceptual, cultural, and professional patterns that appeared across participants' accounts, linking these findings to the broader research questions and existing literature. The current chapter, therefore, is limited to presenting the interview material itself through structured summaries,

preserving the chronological and contextual flow of each participant's reflections.

The narrative summaries aim to reflect not only what participants said but also how they expressed their views—including tone, emphasis, and culturally embedded expressions that shaped their interpretations of practice. The interviews offered rich and often deeply personal insights into the realities of social work practice in Saudi Arabia, particularly in relation to working with vulnerable client groups, navigating institutional expectations, and translating academic knowledge into practical decision-making.

Through this chapter, the reader is offered an opportunity to appreciate how the social workers engaged with the case scenarios, the principles they drew upon, the practical reasoning they applied, and the professional values that informed their intervention choices. These insights were essential for understanding how theoretical knowledge, personal conviction, institutional policy, cultural norms, and accumulated experience intersect to shape social work practice within the local context.

6.1 The interview process

At the end of the general survey of social work practitioners, a request was made for volunteers who had studied social work between 2004 and 2019 to participate in an individual interview, and five social workers agreed to take part. Two male practitioners initially expressed interest but did not proceed with scheduling; therefore, the final interview group consisted of five female practitioners who met the inclusion criteria and were available during the data-collection period.

Prior to the interviews, all participants signed informed consent forms and were provided with four hypothetical case scenarios commonly encountered by social workers employed in government or government-supervised social agencies. These scenarios were selected to reflect

realistic and ethically complex situations involving children, families, and vulnerable individuals—mirroring the types of cases practitioners routinely handle in their professional environments. Participants were asked to select two scenarios and consider how they would respond if they were the social worker assigned to the case. These scenario choices formed the basis of in-depth discussion during the interview.

All interviews were conducted online via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours, providing sufficient time for participants to express their views, reflect on case complexities, and discuss the reasoning behind their decisions. Participants spoke openly and with evident commitment to supporting the aims of the research. Many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their professional experiences in a structured way, and several indicated a willingness to contribute to future studies on similar topics.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' native language, to allow for unrestricted expression and to ensure cultural nuance and linguistic precision when discussing sensitive casework situations. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in Arabic. A complete translation into English was then carried out by the researcher in order for the thesis supervisors to have a copy of the transcripts. While the initial translation adhered closely to the original wording, adjustments were made where necessary to clarify contextual meaning, preserve cultural expression, and convey participants' intended messages accurately.

The demographic and professional background details of the five participants are provided below to contextualise their responses, illustrate the diversity of practice experience represented, and support later interpretation in Chapter Seven. To uphold confidentiality, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym.

Participant 1: Haneen

Haneen has seven years of professional experience, is married, and holds a bachelor's degree in social work. Her background reflects a strong foundation in direct practice and provides insight into the perspectives of relatively early-career practitioners navigating contemporary institutional environments in Saudi Arabia.

Participant 2: Nadia

Nadia is a single practitioner with more than 25 years of professional experience and holds a bachelor's degree. Her long professional history offers depth, continuity, and a reflective perspective shaped by witnessing multiple structural, administrative, and cultural changes across the social services sector over several decades.

Participant 3: Mona

Mona, who is married and has over 45 years of experience in social work, also holds a bachelor's degree. As the most senior participant, her career spans a period of substantial national development in social policy and service provision, giving her a particularly comprehensive and historically grounded viewpoint.

Participant 4: Naiema

With a master's degree and over 35 years of experience, Naiema brings a blend of advanced academic training and extensive practical experience. Her insights reflect a combination of theoretical knowledge, supervisory practice, and long-term engagement with government institutions.

Participant 5: Bodoor

Also holding a master's degree and with more than 35 years of professional experience, Bodoor contributes a rich perspective shaped by work in multiple institutional contexts, including orphan

care, foster family follow-up, and disability services. Her experience across distinct service fields provides valuable comparative insight into varied client groups and organisational structures.

6.2 Summaries of the Interviews

The interviews with the above five social workers varied in length as some participants were more verbose than others and some appeared to want to prolong the interview and continue sharing their thoughts and opinions. The interviews succinctly convey the attitudes, beliefs, approaches and rationale of these social workers towards their practice and their own words communicate the ethos of their practice world. The five interviewees were asked to discuss two case studies selected from the following case scenarios.

Case Scenario 1: Maryam in Foster Care

A 15 years old girl 'Maryam' has lived with her foster care parents since she was 9 months of age. In one of the regular check-up visits, her foster mother told you, as the social worker, that Maryam had knocked her foster dad over (a man in his 60s) because she was angry at him for not allowing her to go out with her friends. Increasingly the foster mother felt that Maryam had been getting frustrated and angry with her foster parents over discipline.

The foster mother reluctantly told the social worker about Maryam's recent behaviours because she loved her very much and she was worried that Maryam might be taken from her.

Case Scenario 2: Child support assessment for Ahlam

Two years ago, an unmarried woman 'Ahlam' gave birth to a baby, although this was against her culture norms. She receives a government subsidy to support and raise her young child but has come back to see you, the government social worker, because she has had given birth to another child. As you were having a conversation with her, she said to you in a rude tone, "Just give me the

money to raise my children". You don't like the fact that she is bringing children to the world without caring about their future as they won't know their family and they will struggle for the rest of their life.

Case Scenario 3: Placement for Mona

You are the social worker assigned to help 'Mona' a 17-year-old girl who was caught by the police attending an illegal party with unrelated males and females in attendance. There was also some evidence of alcohol and possibly drug use. Maria said her school friend had invited her to the party and that she had no idea what was going to happen there. After an investigation of the situation and receiving a legal penalty Mona was released but her family refused to pick her up from the juvenile detention centre. They said she would need to be placed in a foster care facility.

Case Scenario 4: Should Sarah Remain in Foster Care?

You are meeting with a foster care couple with a 4-year-old child 'Sarah' in their care. The mother says that she is pregnant and happy to expand her family to include two children. Her husband asks if their fostered child can be given back because he doesn't have feelings towards Sarah any more since knowing he is having a child of his own. The mother says he has been putting pressure on her ask about returning the child but that she loves Sarah and is worried about her family adjusting to a new baby.

Summaries of the five interviews are presented in this chapter in order to demonstrate the richness and depth of thinking revealed by the interviewees. After reviewing all the transcripts, several themes were identified from the comments made by these five social workers and these themes are discussed in chapter seven and illustrated by quotations from the interviews.

6.3 Interview Summaries

6.3.1 Interview # 1: Naima

In the first scenario (#4), Naima responded to a case involving a four-year-old adopted girl, Sarah, whose adoptive mother had just announced her pregnancy. During the routine home visit, the father asked the social worker if it was possible to return the child to the residential nursery. This question formed the basis of Naima's discussion, and her response revealed the depth of her professional experience, her understanding of psychosocial needs, and the considerations she believed should guide decision-making in adoption-related cases.

Naima began by emphasising that even the existence of the father's question signalled a deep problem that needed to be addressed. For her, the very thought of returning the child was enough to indicate that the adoption placement was no longer safe, stable, or emotionally viable for Sarah. Naima observed that a parent who genuinely internalises the emotional bond of adoption would never consider relinquishing the child simply because a biological baby was on the way. She explained that adoption should be grounded in a strong sense of parental attachment, commitment, and responsibility; therefore, the father's question immediately raised concerns about his emotional investment in the girl. In her professional judgment, if a father could contemplate returning the child before the biological child was even born, the situation was likely to deteriorate after the birth, with risks of discrimination, favouritism, emotional withdrawal, and increased tension within the home.

Naima articulated that children in adoptive placements must receive full emotional, psychological, and social support, and that this can only occur when the adoptive parents perceive the child as their own. She repeatedly stressed that emotional bonding cannot be imposed; if the father harboured reservations, these would most likely manifest in forms of preference toward his

biological child, jealousy, or subtle mistreatment of Sarah. In her experience, such dynamics can cause adoptive children to suffer profound psychological harm, including feelings of rejection, insecurity, and emotional instability. She drew on multiple examples from her extensive professional background, recalling cases where children were returned to nurseries not due to external pressures but because the adoptive parents themselves had changed their attitudes or failed to develop a genuine sense of parental connection.

On this basis, Naima believed that the safest course of action was to remove Sarah from the family and return her to the nursery before further harm occurred. She argued that it would be better for Sarah to grow up in an environment where she shared a common identity with other children and received structured psychosocial support, rather than remain in a household where she might experience comparison, pressure, or emotional marginalisation. Naima acknowledged that returning to the nursery would itself be painful for the child, but she believed that with appropriate support from a multidisciplinary team—including social workers and psychologists—Sarah would be better positioned to regain emotional stability.

She also highlighted the importance of compassionate professional practice when working with orphans and adopted children. Naima explained that such children are often emotionally fragile, having already experienced early loss. As a result, they are highly sensitive to differences in treatment, tone, or affection. From her perspective, even subtle shifts in the father's behaviour, tone, or treatment would be easily detected by the child and could have long-term implications on her psychological well-being.

In reflecting on what influenced her decision-making in this case, Naima attributed her perspective to two main factors: her extensive professional experience and her understanding of the

psychological needs of adopted children. She emphasised that these insights had developed over decades of practice and direct exposure to numerous cases involving similar dynamics. She noted that her decisions also aligned with the social worker's responsibility to protect the child's best interests and ensure emotional security. Additionally, although she did not frame it as a formal theory, she implied that her practice was informed by a professional understanding of psychosocial development and the emotional needs of vulnerable children.

Naima also discussed the religious dimension that sometimes accompanies adoptive cases. She explained that many adoptive families in her experience draw on religious motivations when choosing to adopt, viewing the care of an orphan as a morally and spiritually meaningful act. While she appreciated this, she also highlighted that adopting for religious reward alone does not necessarily guarantee that parents are emotionally prepared for the full responsibilities of adoption. Naima reiterated that emotional readiness, not only spiritual motivation, must guide decision-making to safeguard the child's well-being.

Throughout her discussion of Scenario 1, Naima presented a concise but comprehensive rationale for her decision: the father's question revealed a lack of attachment and a potential for future harm; the mother might later be pressured; the child could suffer emotional trauma; and the stability of the family was at risk. Her conclusion reflected a position grounded in experience, ethical responsibility, and a child-centred understanding of adoption work.

In the second scenario (#2), Naima discussed the case of Ahlam, a young woman who had become pregnant outside of marriage and had approached the social worker seeking assistance. This scenario involved two separate issues: Ahlam's ongoing reliance on government support due to

previous pregnancies outside of marriage, and her confrontational manner when requesting additional assistance for her newborn. Naima's reflections on this case focused on issues of accountability, repeated behaviour, and the need to address underlying factors rather than simply providing financial aid.

Naima began by explaining that she would not support continuing financial assistance for Ahlam at this stage. She believed that offering unconditional support for repeated incidents of pregnancy outside marriage could unintentionally reinforce the behaviour, normalising it and weakening the client's sense of accountability. She explained that in her past experience, some individuals had learned to rely on government assistance without addressing the causes of their situation, which in turn perpetuated a cycle of dependency and repeated crises.

Her perspective was not punitive but based on the need to encourage behavioural change. Naima noted that Ahlam had received support previously, and therefore the continuation of financial assistance without intervention would, in her view, risk signalling that the behaviour carried no consequences. In Naima's judgment, the first step should be to suspend assistance until Ahlam engaged with therapeutic and guidance sessions designed to address the psychosocial and emotional factors contributing to her situation.

She emphasised that the aim of this approach was not to deny support but to help Ahlam develop a sense of responsibility, independence, and self-sufficiency.

Naima also reflected on Ahlam's behaviour during interactions with social workers. She noted that Ahlam had spoken rudely and demanded immediate service, which Naima attributed to her confidence and expectation that she would automatically be granted support. This dynamic, according to Naima, further reinforced the need to reassess the approach to assistance. For Naima,

addressing Ahlam's tone was less about discipline and more about encouraging her to understand that support must be accompanied by engagement, accountability, and cooperation.

She also acknowledged that clients like Ahlam often face complex personal, social, and psychological challenges, and therefore required holistic assessment rather than simplistic judgments. Naima stressed the importance of studying each case thoroughly, including visiting the client's home and examining the broader context surrounding their behaviour. She explained that some clients' actions may stem from emotional distress, mental health issues, fragile religious grounding, or adverse social circumstances. Therefore, she reiterated that a thorough assessment, including psychological evaluation when necessary, was essential before determining eligibility for support.

When discussing whether her judgment was influenced by religious or cultural norms, Naima clarified that she considered multiple factors, including humanitarian responsibility. While she acknowledged that pregnancy outside marriage conflicted with religious and social norms, she maintained that her decision-making was rooted in the practical realities of the case and in the professional responsibility of social workers to encourage behaviours that protect the long-term interests of both mother and child.

Naima also explained that decisions in such cases are guided by institutional procedures and multidisciplinary assessments. She stressed that social workers rarely make decisions in isolation; instead, they collaborate with psychologists, supervisors, and other professionals to develop comprehensive case plans.

In concluding her discussion of Scenario 2, Naima emphasised that stopping unconditional support was not to punish but to help the client reassess her situation and engage more constructively with available services. She placed significant weight on the need for therapeutic sessions, guidance, and

structured intervention to help Ahlam build a more stable future for herself and her children. For Naima, effective social work in such cases requires balancing empathy with accountability, ensuring that assistance does not inadvertently sustain patterns that place clients and their children at continued risk.

6.3.2 Interview # 2: Mona

In discussing the first scenario (#1), Mona began by outlining the procedural steps she would undertake upon receiving a report of behavioural concerns involving a 15-year-old adopted girl, Mariam, who allegedly pushed her 60-year-old adoptive father. Mona stressed that her initial action would involve meeting privately with the girl, separate from the adoptive mother, to obtain a clearer understanding of the situation. Before conducting any therapeutic engagement, Mona emphasised the importance of gathering all relevant background information, including the specifics of the incident, the nature of the relationship between the girl and her adoptive parents, and any recent changes in the family environment. She highlighted that such preparatory information was essential to avoid premature assumptions and to maintain a professional perspective grounded in evidence.

Mona explained that once she meets with the adolescent, her aim would be to explore the girl's internal thoughts, emotions, and perceptions regarding both parents. Because of her decade of experience working in orphanages, Mona noted that she often encounters adolescents grappling with issues of identity and belonging, including questioning parental authority because the parents are not biologically related to them. She explained that many adolescents in similar circumstances express sentiments such as: *"They are not my real parents. Why should they control me?"* Drawing on this recurring pattern in her practice, she suggested that Mariam may be experiencing similar

internal conflicts typical of adolescence, which can intensify feelings of defiance, resentment, or emotional withdrawal.

Regarding intervention, Mona reported that she would likely utilise cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as her primary approach, depending on the insights gathered during early conversations. She explained that CBT would allow her to help the girl examine her thoughts, challenge distorted beliefs, and modify emotional responses and behaviours accordingly. For Mona, CBT offered a structured, evidence-based method that could guide the adolescent toward reshaping the ideas contributing to her behavioural difficulties. Mona noted that this decision was not based solely on theoretical knowledge, but heavily informed by her professional experience. She repeatedly emphasised that her years of practice with adolescents in institutional care provided her with an intuitive understanding of the types of cognitive and emotional struggles that often arise in this age group.

When asked about the basis for choosing particular methods, Mona described her decision-making process as rooted in a combination of scientific practice, experience, and professional judgment. While acknowledging the value of formal education, she noted that she could not depend solely on academic learning or rely exclusively on experience. Instead, she stressed the importance of ongoing professional development, particularly in light of the evolving tools, assessments, and therapeutic strategies now available. She explained that contemporary practice involves new worksheets, standards, and updated therapeutic modalities, which must be incorporated into intervention plans to ensure that the support offered to clients remains relevant and effective.

Mona also commented on systemic developments within the Ministry regarding adoption practices. She explained that the Ministry now considers age-gap requirements when approving

adoptive families, an improvement she described as both necessary and beneficial. According to her, behavioural challenges often peak during adolescence, and older adoptive parents may struggle to navigate these complexities due to declining energy or limited understanding of adolescent developmental needs. She described cases where ageing adoptive parents felt overwhelmed or incapable of handling the responsibility, sometimes resulting in returning the child to institutional care. The newer age-gap requirement, in her view, created greater compatibility between the child and adoptive family.

Mona further emphasised that religion is a significant consideration when working with adoptive families. She stated that in many cases, especially when adoptive mothers are highly religious or guided strongly by faith-based values, she uses religious principles as an "entry point" to support them. For instance, when an adoptive mother expresses frustration or a desire to return the adopted child, Mona reminds her of the religious significance of fostering orphans, referencing traditional sayings such as the Prophet's declaration that *"The guardian of an orphan and I will be like these two in Paradise."* She uses this approach to strengthen the mother's resolve, emphasise the spiritual merit of adoption, and encourage continuity of care. She explained that her use of religious framing depends on the client's personality, beliefs, and emotional readiness, highlighting that her interventions must be tailored to each family's context.

Finally, Mona discussed the flexibility she has within her professional role. She noted that although she works within a system, she retains discretion in choosing therapeutic methods, referral pathways, and the duration of counselling. She also described scenarios where she referred adolescents to external counselling centres to preserve their privacy or because the client did not want internal staff to know about sensitive aspects of her personal life. She stated that such referrals were acceptable and supported by management, particularly when confidentiality or

rapport warranted involving external professionals. Overall, her approach to Mariam's case reflected a combination of structured therapeutic planning, experiential knowledge, and an understanding of adolescent development, framed within institutional and cultural realities.

In discussing the second scenario (#2), Mona described her professional response to Ahlam, a woman who had given birth to a second child outside of marriage and returned to request additional financial support. Mona explained that her initial step would be to document the case carefully, particularly the mother's behaviour, apparent attitudes, and level of accountability. She noted that the request form typically includes a section for the social worker's professional assessment, and she would use this space to recommend guidance or counselling sessions before determining eligibility for further support.

Mona expressed concern about the mother's behaviour, particularly the absence of remorse or acknowledgment of responsibility for her decisions, and the dismissive manner in which she addressed the social worker. Mona explained that this pattern may indicate a risk of repeated behaviour, suggesting that without intervention, the client may continue having children while relying solely on government financial assistance. Her role, therefore, would be to explore the underlying reasons behind the mother's actions and propose steps that address long-term stability for both the client and her children.

When asked what drives her decision-making in such cases, Mona was explicit that her guiding principle is personal conscience. She explained that even if two social workers are assigned the same case, one might easily approve the financial support and close the file, while she would not feel ethically comfortable doing so. For Mona, simply providing support without addressing the deeper issues would be inadequate and contrary to her sense of professional duty. She expressed that she feels compelled to intervene constructively, even if doing so requires additional work,

coordination, or difficult conversations. This sense of conscience, she stated, is fundamental to her approach and shapes how she reads between the lines to determine client needs and vulnerabilities.

Mona also explained that her decisions must consider personality differences among clients. She described that some clients respond well to reflective questioning, which may lead them to reconsider their choices or acknowledge possible consequences. For others who may be confrontational or resistant, Mona stated that she would refrain from challenging them directly and instead follow formal administrative procedures, documenting her concerns so that the case can be escalated through internal decision-making channels. This flexibility allows her to adapt her intervention to the individual while still ensuring that the child's welfare and the overall situation are fully assessed.

Religion also emerged as a factor in this scenario. Mona noted that when appropriate, she might remind clients of religious principles, particularly the value of moral responsibility, the significance of proper family formation, and the ethical obligations toward children. She emphasised that such reminders are used sensitively and selectively, depending on whether the client's personal values are aligned with religious motivations. Mona noted that religious framing is effective with many clients because it resonates with their worldview and can be more persuasive than purely scientific or procedural explanations.

Reflecting on her broader professional experience, Mona acknowledged that her academic education did not fully prepare her for working with individuals who have unclear identities or special circumstances, such as children in orphanages or families with complex social backgrounds. She explained that she initially struggled with this until the Ministry introduced specialised workshops and training programs addressing how to support individuals with special

circumstances, how to communicate difficult realities to children, and how to handle sensitive identity-related issues. Mona described these workshops as highly beneficial, enabling her to expand her skills and approach such cases with greater clarity.

Mona further noted that the Ministry has improved considerably over recent years, particularly after Vision 2030 reforms, which have encouraged professional development, enhanced organisational partnerships, and fostered a more supportive environment for social workers. She emphasised that the Ministry does not restrict the types of theories or methodologies that social workers may use, granting practitioners significant flexibility to act according to their professional judgment. She described being able to work with one client for up to twenty sessions if needed, without pressure to adhere to a rigid session limit. Mona stated that the authority granted by her workplace allows her to customise interventions, including using external consultants when necessary, especially when confidentiality or the client's comfort makes external referrals beneficial.

Overall, Mona's approach in the second scenario reflects a blend of professional discretion, ethical commitment, experiential insight, and sensitivity to client personality, community norms, and institutional structures. Her summary of practice demonstrates how she navigates complex cases by balancing procedural requirements, personal conscience, religious considerations, and the overarching aim of promoting long-term stability and wellbeing for the children and families she serves.

6.3.3 Interview # 3: Haneen

In discussing the first scenario (#1), Haneen focused on Maryam, a 15-year-old girl who had been adopted as an infant and who had recently pushed her elderly adoptive father, causing him harm.

Haneen began by explaining that her initial response as a social worker would be to undertake a systematic case analysis. By this she meant gathering information about Maryam, her adoptive parents, and the broader environment in which she lives, followed by collecting detailed information about the problem itself, diagnosing its underlying causes, and then determining appropriate interventions. For Haneen, this process involves not only looking at the immediate incident but also situating it within the adolescent developmental stage and the specific dynamics of this family.

Haneen highlighted two key contextual factors that shaped her thinking. First, Maryam is in adolescence, a period which she understands to involve heightened emotional sensitivity, anger, and frustration. Secondly, the adoptive parents are in their sixties, and Haneen considered it likely that they may not have sufficient understanding of adolescent development or contemporary approaches to managing teenage behaviour. In her view, this combination could help explain Maryam's aggressive reaction and the parents' difficulty in dealing with her behaviour.

From Haneen's perspective, intervention should therefore be directed both towards Maryam and towards her adoptive parents. She emphasised the need to increase the family's awareness of the adolescent stage, including the emotional and behavioural changes Maryam might be experiencing, and to help the parents understand what might trigger her anger and sense of injustice. At the same time, Haneen believed that Maryam herself needed support to become more aware of her behaviour, her feelings, and the deeper reasons for her anger, including the impact of her life circumstances and her status as an adopted child.

In practical terms, Haneen explained that she would work with "all of them": Maryam, the adoptive mother, the adoptive father, and the family unit together. She proposed holding discussions with each party individually and then facilitating group discussions to strengthen their

relationship and identify where “the defect” in their interaction lies. The aim of these collective sessions would be to clarify misunderstandings, address accumulated tensions, and support the family in developing more constructive ways of disciplining and communicating with Maryam.

When asked why she chose this approach rather than recommending the removal of Maryam from the adoptive family, Haneen explained that the length of time Maryam had already spent with this family was decisive. Maryam had lived with them for 15 years, since infancy, and Haneen regarded this as a strong reason to treat the situation as a potentially “passing problem” related to the life stage, rather than as a justification for returning her to the foster care institution. She suggested that there may be accumulated issues in the relationship, but that these should first be addressed through guidance, dialogue, and shared problem-solving.

However, Haneen also acknowledged that removal could still be considered as a last resort if, after attempts at collective guidance and intervention, both Maryam and the adoptive parents no longer wished to continue the relationship and requested that she return to the institution. In such a case, she would see returning the child as one of several proposed solutions, but only after attempts to resolve the situation had been made.

Reflecting on the basis for her decision-making, Haneen reported that her work experience played a greater role than her academic study. She argued that repeated exposure to similar scenarios over time has given her a clearer sense of which interventions to choose and in what sequence. Experience, she felt, enables a social worker to know where to begin—such as sitting first with the child, then with the mother, then with the father, and finally bringing them all together—and to draw on approaches that have previously been applied and found effective. By contrast, she felt that new graduates who had only studied social work in a theoretical way might not know where to start or what options are available. Nonetheless, she acknowledged that there is a difference

between what is learned in theory and what is practised, and that this difference becomes evident once a social worker begins working and repeatedly deals with real cases.

In the second scenario (#4), Haneen reflected on the case of Sarah, a four-year-old girl who had been adopted as a baby and whose adoptive mother was now pregnant. In this situation, the adoptive father expressed anxiety and asked whether it was possible to return Sarah to the orphanage, and the mother reported feeling under pressure from him to do so. Haneen was asked whether she believed the child should return to the institution given the father's tension and the possible impact on the child's environment.

Haneen explained that her initial approach would not be to recommend immediate return but to "broaden the father's view" and allow time for the situation to unfold. She indicated that she might wait until after the birth of the new baby to give the father an opportunity to adjust and to see how the family dynamics develop. At the same time, she would seek to understand the reasons behind his request, including whether they are primarily financial (for example, concern about the cost of raising two girls) or related to fear of responsibility.

In working with this family, Haneen stressed that she would not engage only with the father, but with both adoptive parents together, because "both are responsible for the decision they will make". She described a process in which she would invite them to articulate, in a structured way, the reasons why the mother wishes to keep the child and the reasons why the father wants, or does not want, to keep her. By placing these reasons side by side, she hoped to help the couple to see the situation more clearly, to understand each other's concerns, and to explore alternative options.

Haneen also indicated that she would draw on religious framing in her discussions, by reminding the parents of the spiritual dimension of sponsoring orphans and the reward they might receive

“from a religious perspective”. She saw this as part of her role in supporting them to reconsider the consequences of returning the child, not only in practical terms but also in light of their responsibilities before God.

When asked more directly about the principles underpinning her decision, Haneen emphasised that she could not decide on the parents’ behalf or impose her own judgement about whether Sarah should stay or be returned. She referred to what she had learned in her social work studies about client self-determination and acceptance, including the principle that “the client has the right to decide his own fate” and that the social worker should not make decisions for them. She explained that although personally she might think that returning a child after adoption is wrong, her professional role is not to reject the parents’ views if they ultimately decide they no longer wish to keep the child.

Accordingly, Haneen described her role as one of facilitating discussion, clarifying the reasons for hesitation, and helping the parents to understand the emotional and practical implications of their decision. If the father’s reaction is driven by fear of responsibility or anxiety about managing two children, she would aim to “calm down this fear” and help the mother to interpret his behaviour in this light. Only after this process of exploration, and if both parents still wished to return the child, would she accept that as one of the possible outcomes, consistent with the principles of client choice and the limits of her authority.

In summarising her reflections on both scenarios, Haneen reiterated that experience in practice has more influence on her interventions than academic study, particularly in knowing how to structure case analysis and how to initiate contact with different parties. At the same time, she recognised that her education had shaped her understanding of key professional values such as confidentiality, acceptance, and respect for client autonomy, and that these values continue to

inform how she deals with sensitive situations involving adopted children and their families. She also acknowledged that in her workplace there are specific agency procedures and case study forms that she is required to follow, and that these institutional frameworks guide the way she documents and studies cases, even as her experience and values shape her decisions within those boundaries.

6.3.4 Interview # 4: Nadia

In discussing the first scenario (#1), involving Mariam, a 15-year-old adopted girl who pushed her elderly adoptive father, Nadia offered a detailed account of how she would understand and intervene in this situation. Her approach began with situating the girl's behaviour within the developmental characteristics of adolescence. Nadia emphasised that while the behaviour was unquestionably unacceptable, it was not entirely unexpected for a girl of Mariam's age. She explained that adolescence typically carries emotional volatility, identity confusion, and heightened sensitivity to restrictions, especially when combined with the unique psychosocial pressures of being adopted.

Nadia's primary intervention would begin not with the girl, but with the family. She repeatedly stressed that in cases like Mariam's, "the basis is the family," meaning that her initial focus would be to assess the adoptive parents' capacity, understanding, and stability. According to her, working directly on Mariam's behaviour would be ineffective or even counterproductive if the family lacked the ability to support, contain, and regulate the teenager's behaviour. The adoptive parents' advanced age was also a significant consideration. Nadia highlighted that older parents may struggle physically and psychologically to manage the demands of adolescence, especially if this is their first experience raising a teenage child. She noted that some adoptive parents become excessively sympathetic or overly accommodating, which can unintentionally undermine their

authority and contribute to behavioural problems.

Her approach would begin with family therapy, which she identified as the essential first step. She would work to understand the family's dynamics, level of communication, and the parents' physical capacity and emotional readiness to handle adolescent behaviour. This would include evaluating whether they have support systems in place, whether they require psychological support, and whether they can realistically cope with the challenges of a teenager. She would also attempt to understand whether the family's difficulties stem from aging, illness, financial pressure, or emotional over-attachment, all of which could influence their capacity to respond appropriately to Mariam's actions.

Only after stabilising and understanding the family structure would Nadia shift to working directly with Mariam. Her plan for Mariam would involve behavioural therapy, communication work, and efforts to improve her social environment. She acknowledged that Mariam may be dealing with bullying, peer pressure, feelings of difference or exclusion, and internal conflict about her adoptive status. She believed these experiences might contribute to Mariam's inability to regulate her emotions or appreciate the efforts and sacrifices of her adoptive parents.

Nadia also stressed that Mariam's behavioural escalation could not be seen as a sudden or isolated action. Rather, she argued that "she didn't just wake up and push her father because he refused her request." In her view, an accumulation of unresolved tensions, unsuccessful attempts at negotiation, and prior expressions of frustration likely preceded the physical act. She explained that physical aggression does not occur unless the child subconsciously believes that the parent is unable or unwilling to resist, which points to deeper issues within the family dynamic.

Her assessment process would begin by meeting the mother first—within her own home—to understand the family's environment, health status, attitudes, and emotional capacities. She

emphasised that evaluating the household was essential because “there is no problem unless the house has a percentage of it.” She would meet the girl only after gaining a substantial understanding of the parents’ perspective, abilities, and limitations. According to Nadia, intervening prematurely with the girl without understanding the home environment would risk failure, damage rapport, and potentially worsen Mariam’s defensiveness.

If the situation escalated or if the parents demonstrated an inability to manage the situation safely, Nadia acknowledged that temporary removal of the girl might be one of several options. However, she framed removal not as a punishment but as a means to stabilise the situation, create space for both parties to emotionally reset, and prevent further harm.

Throughout her explanation, Nadia consistently grounded her decisions in a scientific and structured approach to practice. She insisted that her work must follow “the scientific method from A to Z,” including assessment, analysis of behavioural motives, and avoidance of personal, moral, or emotional judgment. She emphasised that she never allows her personal beliefs, opinions, or feelings to influence her treatment of a client. Instead, she approaches cases through established professional procedures, institutional guidelines, and evidence-based methods, always treating clients with dignity and neutrality.

In this scenario, Nadia demonstrated a careful balance between recognising the emotional realities of adoption and adolescence, and adhering to professional principles. She reflected a worldview where behaviour is understood through contextual and developmental factors rather than moral shortcomings. Her approach represented a structured, layered intervention beginning with family stability, emotional containment, and then behavioural modification.

Before concluding the first scenario, Nadia reiterated the importance of ensuring that interventions are based on a comprehensive understanding of the problem’s origins. She stated

that she would not intervene until she was confident that she understood at least half of the problem's causes, describing the process as similar to removing an infected tooth: addressing the superficial symptoms without treating the underlying issue achieves nothing. Her insistence on identifying the root cause, including the motive behind behaviour, reflects her commitment to professional depth and thoroughness.

In the second scenario (#3), Nadia examined the case of Mona, a teenage girl who was arrested at an unregulated mixed party involving alcohol. Her family refused to take her back due to feelings of shame and humiliation, leaving Mona in the custody of authorities and the care of social workers. Nadia explained that although both Mona and Mariam were adolescents, the nature of their problems differed fundamentally, requiring different interventions.

For Nadia, the central issue in Mona's case was not a family systems deficiency, as in Mariam's case, but rather a deficit in the girl's cognitive understanding and judgment. She described Mona as someone who lacked the ability to evaluate situations properly, distinguish right from wrong, or foresee the consequences of her decisions. Her involvement in the party was attributed to "ignorance," peer influence, and a lack of awareness rather than malice or defiance. According to Nadia, Mona was led astray by peers due to underdeveloped decision-making abilities and an inability to recognise harmful environments.

Nadia made it clear that her work would therefore begin directly with Mona, rather than the family. Since the problem originated from Mona's misjudgment rather than a dysfunctional home environment, the intervention must target her cognitive processes. She emphasised the need for cognitive-focused work, including modifying Mona's perception of peers, developing awareness of consequences, and teaching her how to evaluate relationships and situations. She explained that Mona's difficulty in judging people correctly and following peers without understanding risks

indicated a deeper cognitive gap that needed structured therapeutic work.

She also explained that immediate intervention with Mona's family would be inappropriate and ineffective. The parents' refusal to receive her was rooted in shock, anger, and shame, and attempting to force reconciliation prematurely could worsen the situation. Nadia insisted that "the family needs time" to cool down emotionally and process the situation. It would only be after Mona demonstrated personal growth, behavioural changes, and evidence of responsibility that the family might be receptive to reconnecting with her.

She described how improvements in Mona's behaviour could gradually influence the family's willingness to engage. Examples she gave included Mona showing improved judgment, participating in awareness programs or training activities within institutional care, or displaying an understanding of the consequences of her previous actions. Only once Mona demonstrated stability and insight would Nadia consider facilitating family dialogue.

Throughout her explanation, Nadia returned repeatedly to the concept of identifying and working from the true focus of the problem. She compared ineffective interventions to dental cleaning on a tooth with internal decay—treating the outer layer without addressing the internal issue. In Mona's case, the "internal issue" was her limited cognitive development and lack of awareness, not familial trauma. Therefore, Nadia insisted that interventions must begin with the source of the problem rather than its outward symptoms.

Nadia also highlighted the importance of using a scientific, organised, and systematic approach in her work. She portrayed her decisions as grounded in professional training, institutional procedures, and adherence to legal and ethical frameworks. She maintained that personal judgments, emotions, or religious views could not dictate professional decisions within official practice settings, though she acknowledged that outside formal practice, religious guidance may

be a natural part of conversations in society. Within the institutional framework, however, her interventions must remain strictly structured and evidence-based.

In describing the institutional context, Nadia explained that she is bound by organisational systems, circular directives, and national regulations. Her work is governed by laws and procedures that dictate what types of interventions are permissible. This includes the prohibition of actions that contradict religious or legal frameworks in Saudi Arabia, reinforcing her position that scientific practice and ethical guidelines form the core of her decision-making.

As the scenario concluded, Nadia noted that in Mona's case, the long-term aim would be gradual reintegration with her family once emotional equilibrium is restored and behavioural improvements are evident. She stated that immediate reconciliation would undermine the credibility of interventions and fail to prevent recurrence of the same behaviour. Allowing time, space, and structured development is crucial before addressing family reunification.

Finally, when asked whether her academic studies influenced her decisions, Nadia stated that education, scientific training, and institutional systems directly shaped every aspect of her practice. She emphasised that high professionalism required adherence to scientific methods, structured interventions, and avoidance of personal or emotional biases. Her practice was a blend of formal education, procedural requirements, and ethical responsibility to maintain objectivity.

6.3.5 Interview # 5: Bodoor

In discussing the first scenario (#1), Bodoor drew on her extensive experience working with orphans and adoptive families to describe how she would respond to the case of Maryam, a 15-year-old girl who had been adopted at nine months of age and who pushed her 60-year-old foster father when he refused to let her go out with friends. From the outset, she was clear that, as a

social worker, her primary role would be to *solve* the problem rather than to escalate it, and that the removal of the girl from her adoptive family would be considered only as a last resort in situations of serious risk or clear harm.

Bodoor explained that in her practice she begins by looking at the family as a whole rather than focusing only on the immediate incident. She would therefore first explore the family's circumstances and functioning: how the family is coping, the quality of the relationship between the adoptive parents and the girl, and the broader context in which the conflict occurred. She emphasised that her initial response would be to visit the home, speak with the adoptive parents, and assess whether this was an isolated incident or part of a pattern of behaviour.

She stressed repeatedly that immediately removing the girl from the family would be neither appropriate nor justified in a situation such as this. The girl has lived with the family since infancy and has been raised and nurtured by them; therefore, she is deeply embedded in the family system. From Bodoor's perspective, suddenly "saying take her away" would be psychologically damaging both for the girl and for the adoptive parents. She described the emotional impact of abrupt removal as "sad" and unnecessary when the underlying conflict could be understood in light of adolescence and addressed through support and guidance.

Bodoor explicitly normalised the behaviour as part of adolescence rather than something unique to adoption. She pointed out that similar conflicts occur in biological families and that tension, defiance, and even episodes of anger are common in this age group. In her view, the central issue is not that Maryam is an adopted child but that she is a teenager whose behaviour reflects the challenges of this developmental stage. She therefore understood the pushing incident as serious but *comprehensible* given Maryam's age and the pressures she may be experiencing.

On this basis, her proposed intervention would be multi-layered. First, she would talk to the

adoptive mother to understand how she interprets Maryam's behaviour, whether this is the first time such an incident has occurred, and what may have led to this escalation. She would explore possible triggers and look for broader patterns: whether the girl has recently become more "tough," whether there have been conflicts over boundaries, or whether the parents' responses may be contributing to the tension.

Secondly, Bodoor would meet privately with Maryam to hear her perspective. She would ask why Maryam pushed her father, what she was feeling at the time, and how she sees her relationship with her parents. She would gently remind her that she has been part of this family for many years and that the parents have raised and cared for her. In doing so, she would be trying to help Maryam reflect on her actions and their consequences without humiliating or shaming her.

In addition to individual conversations with mother and daughter, Bodoor described using joint meetings as part of her practice. She often brings the family members together, sometimes with the involvement of a supervisor or more senior staff member, to facilitate communication, clarify misunderstandings, and adjust expectations. She stressed that, in her experience, some adoptive parents either know very little about adolescent development or have limited educational resources and therefore may feel overwhelmed when their child begins to push boundaries. In such cases, a key part of her work is psychoeducation — explaining the characteristics of adolescence, the emotional turbulence of this period, and the need for both firmness and empathy.

She would also consider whether the adoptive parents are either too strict or too lenient, as she has seen both extremes contribute to conflict. If they have been "too easy" with Maryam, spoiling her or failing to set clear limits, she would encourage them to become appropriately firm. Conversely, if they are overly harsh or rigid, she would advise them to relax some of the pressure,

reminding them that the girl needs to feel loved and secure, not just controlled. In both cases, she emphasised the importance of conveying to Maryam that she is loved and regarded as their daughter, even when her behaviour is problematic.

Bodoor's reflections were heavily informed by her accumulated professional experience with adoptive families. She explained that she visits such families every week, conducts follow-up checks, and frequently meets adoptive mothers who come to the office saying they are "tired" and threatening to send the girl back. In these situations, she typically reminds them of the many years the child has lived with them and of the moral and spiritual *reward* of caring for an orphan. She appeals to their sense of responsibility and to their religious understanding of fostering as a virtuous act, asking whether it is reasonable to give up this reward "in a moment" of difficulty.

Religion and cultural context are thus important reference points in her reasoning. When adoptive parents become overwhelmed, she reminds them of the religious value of caring for orphans and of the impact that rejection would have on the girl's psychological state. At the same time, she draws on cultural expectations around respect, family loyalty, and appropriate behaviour, helping parents and child to understand how their actions are perceived in Saudi society.

In terms of concrete strategies with Maryam, Bodoor described using both supportive and disciplinary measures. If the girl repeatedly goes out without permission or ignores family rules, she might recommend temporarily suspending the financial allowance she receives through the support card, explaining to Maryam that privileges are linked to responsible behaviour. She stressed, however, that such sanctions are used not as punishment for its own sake but as a way of helping the girl understand limits and the importance of respecting her parents. After a period of time, if Maryam shows regret and apologises, the allowance can be restored, often formalised through a written pledge that she will not repeat the behaviour.

Throughout her discussion of this first scenario, Bodoor repeatedly highlighted the importance of *experience* in shaping her judgment. Years of working with orphans and adoptive families have taught her that orphans have particular emotional vulnerabilities and a specific "psychology" which must be handled with care. She explained that many orphans have a tendency to say, "I made a mistake, so what?" and that confronting them harshly or making them feel "broken" can exacerbate their sense of difference and pain. She therefore sees it as essential to speak with them in a way that avoids humiliation, supports their dignity, and acknowledges their complex feelings about their identity and family situation.

She also reflected on how her knowledge of orphan psychology is rooted not in formal theory but in practice. While she had studied theories during her academic training, she felt that, in this area, the theories were "on one side" and real practice with families on another. She noted that some theories she encountered in her master's studies — for example, in relation to violence against women — were very useful in describing family dynamics, but she did not find specific theoretical models to guide her work with orphans and adoptive families. In this field, it was her direct, day-to-day involvement with children and families that shaped her approach far more than written theory.

In summary, in responding to Maryam's case, Bodoor would prioritise maintaining the child within her adoptive family, working intensively with both parents and daughter to understand the adolescent context of the incident, to adjust parenting strategies, and to support Maryam's emotional needs. Removal from the family would only be contemplated if there were clear evidence of serious harm or persistent inability to care, and even then would be framed as a last resort after all other avenues had been exhausted.

In the second scenario (#2), Bodoor considered the case of Ahlam, a woman who had given birth

to a child outside marriage and received financial support for that child, then returned a year later with a second child born in similar circumstances, asking for further assistance. The way Ahlam spoke to the social worker was described as inappropriate and dismissive, as if the worker should "just do her job" and secure the financial benefit, without any sense of responsibility for the children's future or the implications of her actions.

Bodoor explained that, in her institutional context, cases such as Ahlam's are managed within a structured framework. Typically, the mother receives financial support for the *first* child born outside of marriage, accompanied by guidance and counselling about the seriousness of her situation and her responsibilities as a parent. The social worker will normally speak with her about the significance of what has happened, often "approaching her from a religious standpoint," reminding her that she has committed a serious mistake and encouraging her to reconsider her choices.

However, if the woman has additional children in similar circumstances, the policy is that only one child will receive financial support, irrespective of how many subsequent births occur. Bodoor noted that she had encountered cases where a woman had six children from different fathers yet still received support for only one child. This policy context shapes the way she responds to Ahlam's request for additional assistance.

Beyond the question of eligibility for financial benefits, Bodoor stressed that ongoing *follow-up* is central to how the agency works with what they term "birth mothers." These women are monitored by social workers through periodic visits (for example, every three or six months), and their caregiving is assessed much like that of adoptive mothers. During these follow-up visits, social workers provide education and guidance, advising the mother on how to care for the child and correcting any problematic practices observed in the home. If there are signs of neglect or

abuse — such as neighbours complaining that the child is left outside unattended — the social worker can recommend that the child be removed and placed in foster care, even if the mother is the biological parent.

In Ahlam's case, therefore, Bodoor's response would not be driven by her personal feelings about having children outside marriage, but by a combination of professional duty, policy guidelines, and concern for the children's welfare. She made it clear that even if she strongly disagrees with the mother's choices or feels discomfort about her attitude, she still considers it her responsibility to carry out her role "to the fullest" and to provide the best possible service. She emphasised that what she feels "inside" is separate from her professional conduct; she does not allow personal judgement to interfere with the quality of the assistance she provides.

At the same time, Bodoor acknowledged that her reactions are not purely technical or detached. She located part of her motivation in a "purely human" sense of sympathy, particularly for the young women and children involved in such cases. She explained that these girls make her feel sad and that she cannot ignore their situation; her empathy for them, combined with her professional identity, leads her to treat them with patience and understanding even when they speak harshly or behave in ways that might be seen as offensive. She allows some leeway in how they address her, within limits, because she recognises the pressure they are under.

When asked what drives this empathetic response, she suggested that it arises from her awareness of how difficult their circumstances are and her hope that, over time, they will "wake up" and start to understand their children better and care for them more appropriately. She is conscious that these women may feel pressure from all directions — from family, society, institutions, and their own guilt — and she does not want to become "another source of pressure" that pushes them into hopelessness. Instead, she aims to support them in small ways that may

eventually lead to change, while still upholding professional boundaries and institutional standards.

As with Maryam's case, experience again emerged as a central factor in shaping her approach. Years of working with birth mothers, orphans and adoptive families have shown her that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient to handle the complexity of such cases. She acknowledged directly that what she studied in university "was not reality" and that her academic preparation did not equip her fully for the emotional and practical demands of working in an orphanage or with foster and birth families.

She described how, as a recent graduate assigned to an orphanage, she initially found the work overwhelming. She was suddenly expected to assume multiple roles—"father, mother, and teacher"—for children of different ages, taking them to school, supervising them, disciplining them, and providing emotional support. She struggled with the tension between wanting to be kind and fearing being too strict with orphans, constantly worrying about whether she might be unjust or harsh in God's eyes. She reflected on how religious awareness was deeply intertwined with her practice: when she had to be firm or impose consequences, she would recall the Qur'anic injunction "As for the orphan, do not oppress him" and pray for forgiveness if she felt she had been too severe.

One powerful example she gave concerned a girl with a slow learning disorder, which none of the staff initially recognised. Because Bodoor had not studied these specific learning difficulties, she treated the girl as if she was simply careless and needed more pressure to study. She constantly urged her to memorise, monitored her homework, and even enlisted others in pushing her to work harder. Only after consulting an external psychiatrist and discovering that the girl had a documented slow learning disorder did she realise that her expectations had been unrealistic and

that her approach had unintentionally contributed to the child's distress, to the point that the girl began pulling her own hair. This experience profoundly affected Bodoor and reinforced her sense of the gap between theoretical training and the realities of practice.

From that point onwards, she invested more in her own development, seeking external expertise, adjusting expectations, and accommodating the girl's needs through modified schooling. She learned that her role as a social worker sometimes required referring clients to external specialists or psychologists, particularly when her own training did not provide sufficient tools. She also came to see that institutional curricula for social work in Saudi Arabia had not, in her experience, adequately covered working with orphans and integrated education, leaving practitioners to "teach themselves" and learn through trial and error.

In summarising her approach to Ahlam and similar cases, Bodoor presented a picture of a practitioner who is simultaneously guided by institutional policy, professional ethics, religious consciousness, and human compassion. She does not allow personal disapproval to dictate access to support, but she also does not simply process requests mechanically. Instead, she tries to combine careful follow-up, educational guidance, and, where necessary, protective interventions with a deep awareness of the emotional realities of both mothers and children.

Taken together, her responses to the two scenarios show a consistent pattern. Whether dealing with an adolescent adoptive child who pushed her father or a birth mother seeking repeated financial support after children born outside marriage, Bodoor frames her decisions in relation to:

- a strong commitment to maintaining children's stability in family settings wherever possible
- an emphasis on gradual, multi-step interventions before considering removal

- a practice shaped more by accumulated experience and contextual judgement than by direct application of abstract theories
- an ongoing negotiation between professional duty, religious values, and human empathy.

While she acknowledges a considerable gap between academic preparation and real-world practice, she portrays this gap as something she has learned to bridge through years of direct work with orphans, adoptive families, and birth mothers, drawing on both her professional role and her moral and religious convictions in navigating complex and sensitive cases.

6.4 Researcher Reflection on the interview Experience

Throughout the process of conducting the five interviews, the researcher found the experience to be far richer, more insightful, and more personally meaningful than initially anticipated. Although the interviews were conducted online due to COVID-related constraints, rather than face-to-face as originally planned, this shift did not diminish the depth or authenticity of the conversations. Instead, the online format unexpectedly created an atmosphere of openness that allowed participants to speak freely, reflect deeply, and engage thoughtfully with the questions. What stood out most strongly was the willingness of every social worker to share—not only their professional experiences but also their personal reflections, uncertainties, and convictions. Several participants expressed genuine enthusiasm for the research topic, emphasising its value and relevance to social work practice in Saudi Arabia, while one participant explicitly stated that she would gladly participate in future studies. Their engagement demonstrated a level of commitment to the profession and to the advancement of knowledge far beyond what had been expected. It was remarkable how naturally they drew upon their academic background, their understanding of theories, and their accumulated professional experience; this allowed them to articulate their

decision-making processes with clarity and confidence. Importantly, what emerged from the interviews aligned closely with the themes identified in the questionnaire, yet the interviews offered significantly more depth, nuance, and context. The participants not only confirmed many of the patterns found in the quantitative data but also expanded on them, highlighting the complexities, tensions, and realities of practice that cannot be fully captured through survey responses alone. As a researcher, this process was a moment of learning, appreciation, and professional growth. The participants' honesty, generosity, and willingness to contribute reinforced the significance of this study and demonstrated how deeply social workers value opportunities to reflect on their practice and enhance the field. The interviews, therefore, were not merely a data-collection exercise, but a meaningful encounter that enriched the research and offered insights that only emerge through human connection and professional dialogue.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter summaries of the interviews with five social work staff were included to convey the careful consideration that the participants gave to the researcher's questions. The answers they provided offered deep understanding of the way social workers thought about their work and education and the factors which assisted them in making judgements and taking actions. The societal and cultural influences on their thinking as well as the incorporation of values and approaches form their social work education were obvious. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

7. Introduction

In this chapter an analysis was made of the personal interviews to examine how they related to the research questions. This was carried out through a content analysis of the interviews where themes that reflected the impact of their social work education, their rationale for work approaches, their work values, the influences on their decision-making and their view of social work practices were identified. Based on the recorded words of the participants seven key themes that encapsulate the realities and complexities of social work as experienced by the participants were identified. These themes were:

- fundamental values instilled in education
- acquisition of skills through education
- adaptability and use of various theories
- influence of agency policies and procedures
- importance of experience
- difference between social work practice and education
- role of communication and collaboration.

These themes depict a comprehensive understanding of the detailed intricacies experienced by the participants in their practice and the challenges they encounter in bridging the gap between theory and practice in their daily work. The rationale for their intervention, their understanding of client situations, their core competencies and their guiding principles emerge from their comments and are reflected in the themes which are then illustrated by quotations from the interviewees.

7.1 Themes Emerging from the Interviews

7.1.1 Theme #1: Fundamental Values installed in Education

The interviews underscored the importance of values instilled through social work education, such as confidentiality and ethical decision-making, which guide practitioners in their daily work. The illustration of this theme was found in comments from the social workers who were interviewed, as for example when Nadia reported, “I have to deal with the scientific method from A to Z and accept the client as he is.” Haneen also felt the same when she added, “Look first of all, I can't decide on a client’s behalf. And I can't make any decision on their behalf. We learned that the client has the right to decide his own fate.” Nadia also added, “I never include my personal opinions in the report. I am not coming to judge her as a person.” Bodoor also felt that, “Even if she talks to me angrily, on the contrary I ignore this thing completely and appreciate her feeling in that situation.” Bodoor commented on her role, “My role is my duty, and my duty towards her (the client) is to do it as perfectly as it can be done” and Haneen added her opinion that, “The values instilled during my education guide my practice every day." Naiema spoke about the ethics she learned in her education, "Ethical considerations from my studies are always at the forefront of my decision-making” and Bodoor expressed a similar feeling when she said, “But my role is my duty, and my duty towards her is to do it as perfectly as it can be done.” Interestingly Naiema expressed an appreciation and respect for the value of gaining knowledge and continuing professional education when she stated, “When I want to solve a problem, I have to l look at its causes. For me knowledge requires improving and practice.”

All of these comments illustrate the values and beginning principles of social work practice as would have been taught during the social work educational process. They were instilled into the social workers who were interviewed and they clearly and easily were able to express how they

had incorporated the values and ethics of their social work education into their current professional practice. These values were not experienced as abstract or detached; but instead participants consistently linked them to a broader cultural and religious worldview, which is explored further in this thesis.

7.1.2 Theme # 2: Acquisition of Skills Through Education

Social workers noted that their education provided foundational skills in case analysis, problem-solving, and decision-making and that these skills were adapted, enhanced and refined through actual practice. These foundational skills were regarded as a starting point that was later adapted, strengthened, and refined through ongoing practice.

As Haneen noted: “My education provided a solid foundation for analysing cases and making informed decisions.” Similarly, Bodoor highlighted the importance of academic training in developing practical abilities, explaining that “problem-solving skills were definitely honed during my academic years.”

Participants also emphasised the importance of adopting a systematic and scientific approach to practice. Mona expressed this directly when she explained: “I must deal with cases in a scientific way.” Haneen detailed this procedure, stating: “The first thing I’m going to do is case analysis. After that, I will also collect information about the problem, diagnose it and in the end, take what treatment we can use to solve the problem.” For Nadia, the ability to identify underlying motivations was central: “I must know the motive behind the behaviour. She didn’t come to you so that you could evaluate her behaviour.”

The emphasis on a systematic, scientific methodology was reiterated during the interviews. Nadia

insisted that “first of all (in social work) is studying. All will be done with a scientific approach away from any personal whims and personal vision. Any work that is not organised is not based on a scientific base and has no references or limits.” Likewise, Naiema correlated education with professional responsibility, explaining: “Social workers investigate the situation. We investigate the situation and visit the client’s residence. We investigate the cause of her behaviour.”

At the same time, participants acknowledged that skills developed through education had to be continually reinforced through professional experience and training. As Naiema summarised: “Ongoing professional development as well as practical experience are necessary to bridge the gap between theory and practice in social work.”

In summary, the interviews demonstrated that social work education provided a strong foundation in core professional skills such as case analysis, problem-solving, and scientific approaches to decision-making. These abilities were described as both cultivated through academic study and continually refined through practice, ensuring that theory and experience complemented each other in the development of competent practitioners. Participants did not describe these skills as “foreign” but as adaptable tools readily absorbed into local practice.

7.1.3 Theme # 3: Adaptability and Use of Various Theories

The flexibility to use different theories and methodologies based on each specific case and the client's needs was another theme. Participants highlighted the importance of adapting their approach to suit individual situations.

The interviews consistently revealed that flexibility and adaptability were regarded as central to effective social work practice. Participants highlighted the importance of drawing on a range of

theories, methodologies, and approaches, depending on the circumstances and the psychosocial needs of the client. This adaptability was presented as a professional strength that allowed social workers to tailor interventions and respond to complex and changing contexts. Nadia expressed this view clearly: “Based on emerging problems, I will determine what theory I can use.” Similarly, Haneen linked theory to the dynamics of dialogue, stating: “Based on the discussion, you will determine which procedure you will be using.”

Several participants stressed the utilisation of diverse theoretical perspectives. Bodoor noted simply: “We use various approaches,” thereafter noted, “there were some theories that described the case and its stages.” Nadia also further emphasised the link between practice and theory, saying: “And in the end, as an intervention to solve problems, I mean sure we will build on theories and studies.”

Flexibility was also linked to the professional authority and the discretion that social workers exercised in practice. As Naiema indicated: “I mean, as a specialist, I have specific tasks, but from the story of the sessions, I have the authority to use any methodology or test papers that apply.” Likewise, she acknowledged the importance of targeted techniques, adding: “Specialised approaches help in addressing issues effectively.” This adaptability was seen as especially important in relation to working with young people. For example, Bodoor observed: “Teenagers require a different approach, considering their developmental stage and emotional needs.”

Participants provided concrete illustrations of the various methods they utilised. Nadia articulated her preference for systemic and behavioural interventions, stating: “The first thing I will do is family therapy. I must work with the family,” and further adding: “We start behavioural therapy with the girl.” She also indicated the role of group settings, saying: “We could do group therapy.” Mona similarly reinforced the flexible application of theory to individual requirements, asserting: “Based

on emerging problems, I will determine what theory I can use with the girl and start my counselling therapy sessions with her."

Taken together, these reflections illustrate that adaptation and the application of multiple theories were fundamental to participants' professional identity. The ability to choose from diverse approaches, including family therapy, behavioural therapy, or group interventions, was consistently linked to meeting client needs effectively. Overall, the participants described adaptability as a hallmark of competent practice, where theory, methodology, and client context intersect to shape meaningful interventions.

7.1.4 Theme #4: Influence of Agency Policies and Procedures

Agency policies and procedures were found to significantly shape social work practice. Participants discussed how these guidelines and protocols influence their approach to case management and decision-making but also how they could be restrictive in some situations.

The interviews highlighted the significant influence that agency policies and procedures have on the daily practice of social workers. Participants consistently described how institutional processes, and organisational frameworks shape the way they manage cases and make professional decisions. For many, these policies provided a structure that organised practice, even when they were potentially restrictive.

Haneen described this influence clearly, stating: "Agency policies heavily dictate our approach to cases." Similarly, Naiema recognised both the necessity and limitations of these structures: "Sometimes, the procedures can be restrictive, but they provide a necessary framework."

Participants often associated their practice decisions directly with the institutional regulations

guiding the way they operate. Nadia expressed this sense of restraint when she explained: “I mean in the end you are an employee anywhere. This procedure may not be allowed for me in the institution.” Haneen recounted her early experience in the field in relation to these requirements: “When I started working, there was a specific intervention we needed to follow. The people in charge want us to study the case this way. I followed the case study form (the procedure).” These reflections illustrate how agency expectations and official requirements influence the study and documentation of cases, allowing minimal scope for variation.

Participants indicated that agency policies affected both their documentation and their decision-making priorities. Bodoor articulated the institutional emphasis on preserving family stability, stating: “Maintaining a child’s stability and resolving issues within the family context is prioritised here over immediate removal.” This illustrates that policies not only influences processes but also guides the priorities and choice of interventions.

The binding nature of institutional frameworks was likewise underscored regarding the hierarchy of authority and control. Nadia articulated this clearly by stating: “The organised work system you must adhere to such as in The Law of the Regulation of Circular Directive Order or Directive from a Direct Manager.” Similarly, Naiema explained how her independence was constrained by the system: “My decision is entirely determined by the procedures we are following.” This reflects how professional judgment, while important, was often mediated through official frameworks.

Participants also articulated how agency procedures structured escalation processes. As Bodoor declared: “If that fails, I will involve the supervisor.” This highlights that even when social workers took the lead in case management, decision-making frequently involved greater supervision, emphasising the influence of agency protocols on both practice and accountability.

In conclusion, the interviews revealed that agency policies and procedures were seen as both necessary and constraining. On one hand, they provided a clear framework for managing cases, promoting consistency, and ensuring compliance with organisational standards. On the other hand, participants recognised that these procedures could restrict autonomy and limit flexibility in practice. Overall, agency rules were described as a dominant force in shaping professional behaviour, and ensuring the duty of case to their clients, influencing not only how social workers carried out interventions but also the values and priorities which guide their decisions.

7.1.5 Theme # 5: Importance of Experience

Experience emerged as a crucial factor of central importance in developing effective social work practices. Participants emphasised that practical experience shaped their approach to social work, significantly enhancing their ability to handle complex cases and often influenced their choice of interventions and strategies.

Participants consistently emphasised that while education provides a foundation, it is through actual exposure to cases that social workers gain the skills, confidence, and judgment necessary for effective interventions. Experience was consistently seen as a crucial element that enhanced decision-making, informed actions, and offered insights unattainable by academic research alone. Mona articulated this thought succinctly when she stated: “Experience is invaluable; it imparts nuances that textbooks cannot encompass.” Participants frequently contrasted academic knowledge with practical experience, emphasising that schooling alone was inadequate for managing the complexity of real-life situations. Haneen observed, “There is a difference between practising social work once and practising it twice,” highlighting the growth and learning that accumulate over time. Bodoor similarly articulated that experience enhances both competence and confidence, stating:

“Each case handled adds to your confidence and skill level. Of course, experience plays a very important role.” This recurrence among narratives emphasises the participants' view that practical involvement was a crucial element in cultivating expertise.

For some, the sheer exposure to varied cases was seen as invaluable. Naiema contemplated on this breadth of practice when she stated: “Look, since I have been exposed to many things, I saw many cases.” This continual exposure was deemed essential for equipping social workers to handle the variety of situations they would face.

In this context, academic knowledge was often described as secondary to lived experience. Haneen asserted: “Work experience has more influence than academic studies,” a sentiment echoed by Mona, who repeated the same observation: “Work experience has more influence than academic studies.”

Participants also discussed the risks of insufficient experience, particularly for new practitioners. Haneen reflected on this challenge, explaining: “A social worker who hasn’t practised social work and has no experience might not know where to start or might not know possible solutions.” This lack in experience was perceived as a challenge to confident and efficient decision-making, underscoring the fact that practice is the most powerful instructor.

In terms of interventions, participants clearly connected experience with the ability to make informed choices. Bodoor stated, “Experience plays a role because with experience, you know which interventions you will follow.” articulated her belief that, “Look, in fact, that I think experience plays the most role.” This repeated affirmation of experience as the most decisive factor demonstrates the consensus among practitioners that time in the field outweighs theoretical preparation.

Finally, participants emphasised that experience was particularly important in dealing with sensitive populations, such as adolescents. Haneen made this connection explicit when she explained: “Experience and understanding of adolescent behavior guide the decision-making processes.” This illustrates the opinion that experience not only builds general confidence but also provides specialised insights for working with particular client groups.

In conclusion, the interviews revealed that experience was perceived as the paramount factor in effective social work practice. Although schooling offered a theoretical framework, participants consistently highlighted that true competency was cultivated through case management, experiential exposure, and the practical application of abilities in real-world scenarios. Experience was described as invaluable, as a teacher beyond textbooks, and as the ultimate guide for choosing interventions, building confidence, and refining judgment. Overall, participants presented experience not as supplementary but as central, positioning it above academic study as the decisive factor in professional growth.

7.1.6 Theme # 6: Difference Between Social Work Practice and Education

One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was the significant gap between social work education and actual practice. Participants noted that real-life scenarios are often more complex and nuanced compared to what is taught in academic settings.

The need for ongoing development and adaptation after graduation was also emphasised. Mona explained that professional growth required constant effort beyond the initial education: “I can’t stay where I am on my knowledge and experience. For me knowledge requires improving and practice. I can’t depend on my experience only without working on developing intervention mechanisms. Other participants echoed this sentiment in different ways. Haneen stressed: “There’s

a significant gap between what we learned in school and what we face in the field." Similarly, Bodoor reflected on the differences between study and practice: "Because learning in theory is different from learning in reality. Reading a book is totally different from reality. I hadn't studied this and there was nothing in our books about this." Mona reinforced this view, observing: "Real-life cases are much more complex than the examples we studied."

Finally, the absence of integration between theory and practice was emphasised as a critical issue. Bodoor articulated this disjunction by stating: "I mean, you know, all the theories that we studied are on one side and the experience and dealing with families are on the other side. I don't feel that there is much link to education." This statement illustrates how, for some participants, academic preparation and professional practice existed in two separate spheres, with little overlap.

In conclusion, the interviews revealed that participants recognised a substantial disparity between social work education and practical application. They articulated that theory inadequately encapsulates the intricacies of practice, that graduates are occasionally ill-equipped for the reality of their initial placements, and that ongoing growth is essential to reconcile this disparity. While schooling established a crucial theoretical foundation, the participants consistently underscored that practical application necessitated flexibility, adaptation, and continuous learning that transcended classroom instruction.

For most participants, this integration of practice and education was directly influenced by their religious worldview, a dimension that will be explored further in Section 7.3.

7.1.7 Theme # 7: Role of Communication and Collaboration

Effective communication and collaboration with clients and other stakeholders were highlighted as

essential components of successful social work practice. Participants stressed the need for clear and open dialogue to achieve positive outcomes including resolution of conflicts and building and strengthening relationships.

Participants constantly emphasised that open communication, active engagement, and collaborative efforts with clients, families, and other professionals were regarded not simply as incidental skills but as essential for attaining beneficial outcomes and a fundamental basis for establishing connections, resolving issues, and ensuring client stability. Haneen emphasised this significance by stating, “We can have group discussions to strengthen their relationship.” This underscores the utilisation of structured discourse as a tool to foster understanding and create stronger connections within families.

Participants defined collaboration as vital for conflict resolution and for incorporating the viewpoints of all parties. Mona articulated this succinctly by asserting: “Understanding and talking to all the parties is crucial in resolving conflicts.” This reflects that communication entails not only offering guidance but also actively listening to other perspectives and fostering an equitable resolution. The capacity for effective communication was consequently closely associated with social workers' ability to function as mediators and problem-solvers in challenging circumstances.

Alongside individual communication abilities, interdisciplinary teamwork was emphasised as a vital element. Naiema elucidated that collaborative decision-making among specialists provided more thorough and effective results: “The social worker and psychologist then propose solutions based on their comprehension of the problem. They must reach a consensus and an agreement.” This example underscores the idea that no single professional holds all the answers; rather, it is through collaborative practice and shared responsibility that effective interventions are achieved.

The role of communication and collaboration also extended to broader priorities in social work practice. For instance, Bodoor emphasised that agency and family communication were both central in maintaining stability for children: “Resolving issues within the family and maintaining the child’s stability and context is prioritised over immediate removal.” This reflects how dialogue and collaboration were used to pursue solutions that protected children’s welfare while simultaneously supporting family unity.

The participants collectively defined communication and teamwork as essential to their work. They saw these procedures as essential for enhancing relationships, resolving issues, and collaborating efficiently with other professions. Communication was always regarded as the basis for attaining favourable outcomes, whether through family group talks, direct dialogue to resolve conflicts, or interdisciplinary collaboration with coworkers.

In conclusion, the interviews emphasised that communication and collaboration are vital elements of effective social work practice. Honest and open communication was deemed essential for conflict resolution, client stability, and the enhancement of relationships, while cooperation with colleagues facilitated more comprehensive and effective interventions. Participants characterised communication and collaboration not as ancillary skills but as fundamental principles that defined and upheld effective social work practice.

7.2 Reflection on the themes

The qualitative interviews with five social workers provided in-depth insights into their experiences and perspectives on social work practice, particularly in the context of adoption and dealing with adolescents. Across the interviews, a recurring refrain was the gap between the theoretical knowledge acquired during academic study and the practical realities faced in the field. Participants

consistently emphasised that real-world scenarios are far more complex than what is taught in academic settings, necessitating a high degree of adaptability and reliance on practical experience.

The social workers highlighted the importance of experience in developing effective practices, noting that hands-on experience significantly enhances their ability to handle complex cases and make informed decisions. They also pointed out that agency policies and procedures heavily influence their approach to case management, sometimes providing necessary frameworks but also posing restrictions. Fundamental values instilled through education, such as confidentiality, acceptance, non-judgmental attitudes, and ethical decision-making, were identified as central to their practice, guiding them in their daily interactions with clients.

Communication and collaboration were emphasised as essential components of successful social work practice. Participants noted the need for open and clear dialogue with clients and other stakeholders to achieve positive outcomes. They also identified specific challenges associated with working with adolescents, stressing the need for specialised approaches to address their unique developmental and emotional needs.

Personal and professional experiences were found to significantly shape the social workers' approaches, often influencing their choice of interventions and strategies. The flexibility to use different theories and methodologies based on the case and the client's needs was highlighted, with participants stressing the importance of adapting their approach to suit individual cases.

The participants who were interviewed worked with adoptive families and adolescents and in their interactions the social workers prioritised resolving issues through communication and understanding rather than immediate removal of the child. They emphasised the importance of maintaining the child's stability and addressing problems within the family context whenever

possible. Experience and understanding of adolescent behavior played a crucial role in their decision-making processes, as did the need to educate and support adoptive parents in dealing with the challenges of raising adopted children.

Overall, the interviews revealed a nuanced understanding of the complexities of social work practice, underscoring the need for practical experience, effective communication, and adaptability in dealing with diverse and challenging cases. The social workers' insights highlighted the critical role of experience and ongoing professional development in bridging the gap between theory and practice in the field of social work.

7.3 Influence of Religion

Although not identified as a theme it emerged from the interviews that the social workers who were interviewed had a deep connection to their religion and that their thinking about their role and actions was influenced by their identification with their religious beliefs. This affinity was so integral to their personal thoughts and understanding of the world that the importance and impact it had on their social work practice could easily be overlooked. In all five of the interviewees there was some overt indication of a referencing point that social workers used in their own thinking and understanding of situations and responses to client encounters.

As an initial greeting in all the interviews, the social workers made comments to the researchers such as “Peace and mercy of God be upon you”; “God be upon you” “God be with you” and “Peace be up you.” This is of course a normal and culturally acceptable greeting, but it also brings to the foreground of consciousness the personal and direct ease that the social workers feel in expressing religious thoughts. This familiarity is carried into their work and many of their comments display the effortlessness with which they bring religion into discussion with their clients, often reminding the

client of a religious duty or reward.

In speaking with adoptive parents who are considering relinquishing their adoptive child, the worker states, “I can also advise them about sponsoring orphans and the gain that they might take from a religious perspective.” (Haneen)

Mona says of an adoptive mother, **“**I would sit with her and talk to her from the side of religion. You see, the Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace says, ‘The guardian of the orphan and I, will be like these two in Paradise’“. (‘Like these two’ – means as close as two fingers). Neiema shares this view, “I am aware of what our religion teaches about the reward for adopting and caring for an orphan.”

Neiema questions the motive of her client in choosing to adopt a child saying, “She could have a very feeble religious motive, you know. It is all fear of God. I mean.” On the other hand, she acknowledges that parents may want to adopt a child to for a personal religious benefit. “The religious side is the basis for why some of the clients who want to adopt a child. Say they want to adopt a child for God's sake……. They know that adopting orphans is a big reward from God.”

Badoor also directly brings religious thinking into her advice to her client who is struggling with a rebellious teenage, adopted daughter’s behaviour when she says, “I remind her of the religious aspect and the effect of this on the psychology of the adoptive child. She has a role as an authority.”

Mona says she can use religion as an “entry point” for a discission about the clients’ beliefs. “Sometimes we use it as an entrance for the parents. I mean, sometimes the adoptive mother you are working with can be driven by emotions and doesn't understand in a scientific way. So, I feel that she is religious; she tends more towards religion, and her convictions also tend more towards religion, so I use this as an entry to the discussion about her beliefs based on religion.”

Nadia is clear and expressive in explaining how she works with an adoptive father who wants to

relinquish his adopted daughter by telling him directly, “You are violating the law and Sharia at the same time.” She explains “All my talk is at the level of our institutions and Saudi Arabia is our country. I seek refuge in God from what I say.”

Badoor also talks about her social work within the orphanage, and she reflects on her work there from a religious perspective. “When I am strict (in the orphanage), I am afraid of God because they are orphans ‘As for the orphan, do not oppress him.’ (Qur'an, 30:9) Then I reached a stage where I said, ’God forgive me’.”

These examples are related to work in the child welfare field of practice where the social workers who were interviewed are located and this is an area of work that is emotionally laden. But the lack of self-consciousness about bringing comments about God and religion into conversations with clients is highly likely to be indicative of a strongly held view of the world which is deeply embedded within an Islamic society, to which both the clients and social workers belong. This is not surprising, but it provides insight into one of the research questions relating to whether or not social workers feel a conflict between the western social work theories they learned in their education and working in Islamic based institutions in an Islamic society. It appears that they do not feel conflict as will discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

7.4 Linking Questionnaire and Interviews Findings

The survey findings provided key insights into the social workers' demographics, education, and professional challenges, particularly the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. It showed that three quarters of respondents had social work qualifications, predominantly at the bachelor's level which underscores the professionalisation of social work in Saudi Arabia. This aligns with global standards where formal education in social work is deemed essential for practice (NASW, 2017). The dominance of graduates from King Abdulaziz University in

the survey and in the interviews, highlights the institution's pivotal role in shaping the social work landscape in the country.

To delve deeper into the results of the survey, personal interviews were conducted. These interviews allowed participants to elaborate on the issues identified in the questionnaire. The questionnaire had revealed that only a fifth of respondents felt their academic studies did not greatly influence their practice, while a fifth also indicated a conflict between their work and university studies. These themes were further explored in the interviews, where interview participants discussed the limitations imposed by agency policies and the need for practical experience to bridge the gap between theory and practice. They commented that "the institutions in which we work determine the type of professional intervention" and "what we studied was based on societies other than the society in which we practice our work." These comments pointed to a gap between academic training and real-world social work practice.

Even so, almost all of the survey respondents said they used social work approaches they had studied in academia with only a fifth highlighting a gap between academic training and practical application because they felt that their studies did not greatly influence their actions, The personal interviews reflected aspects of this sentiment with Haneen stating, "My education provided a solid foundation for analysing cases and making informed decisions," and Boodor adding, "Problem-solving skills were definitely honed during my academic years." Both Mona and Haneen felt there was a gap between academic training and practical application**,** "There's a significant gap between what we learned in school and what we face in the field" (Haneen) and Mona pointed out that "real-life cases are much more complex than the examples we studied."

In the interviews participants discussed the influence of agency policies on their practice reflecting

the procedural importance of institutional frameworks. Haneen stated, "Agency policies heavily dictate our approach to cases."

The importance of practical experience was a recurring theme in both the questionnaire and interviews. The survey highlighted that most respondents felt their own practical knowledge influenced their interactions with clients. This was reinforced in the interviews, where Mona stated, "Experience is invaluable; it teaches you nuances that textbooks can't cover," and Bodoor emphasised that "each case handled adds to your confidence and skill level."

Communication and collaboration were also identified as essential components of successful social work practice. The questionnaire showed that most respondents believed in treating clients with dignity and respect, and felt it was important to stay flexible and adapt to clients' changing situations. In the interviews, Haneen highlighted the need for effective communication with clients and stakeholders, while Mona underscored the importance of open dialogue in resolving conflicts.

The qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into specific challenges, such as working with adolescents and adoptive families. Haneen and Bodoor stressed the need for specialised approaches to address the unique developmental and emotional needs of adolescents. They also emphasised the importance of maintaining the child's stability and resolving issues within the family context, aligning with the questionnaire's finding that social workers prioritise treating clients with dignity and supporting their right to self-determination.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data reveals a comprehensive understanding of the social work landscape in Saudi Arabia. Both data sets highlight the significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, emphasising the need for adaptability and practical experience in social work practice. Agency policies play a dual role in providing necessary

frameworks but also imposing restrictions, affecting social workers' autonomy and decision-making processes.

7.5 Summary

Chapter Seven describes the results of the personal interviews conducted with five social workers to capture a deeper understanding of the difference between theoretical learning in social work and its implementation in practice. The participants' comments were grouped into seven themes which underscored the critical role of experience, effective communication, and ongoing professional development in bridging the gap between theory and practice. A thought-provoking finding which emerged subtly from the interviews was how the social workers' religious grounding and identify permeated their thinking and actions. One of the distinct advantages of this qualitative aspect of the research is the way in which this factor emerged and was observed which will be further discussed in Chapter Eight.

Together, these findings reveal how Saudi social workers negotiated education, practice, and values in distinctive ways that contrast with much of the existing literature; Chapter Eight develops these insights further by drawing out their wider conclusions and implications for education, practice, and global debates on indigenisation.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8. Introduction

This chapter brings together the findings of the study and situates them within broader debates in social work. It revisits the research questions, presents the overall conclusions, and highlights the unique contributions of the study to knowledge and practice. It also identifies the limitations of the research, provides recommendations for social work education and practice in Saudi Arabia, and suggests directions for future research.

8.1 Discussion

The research of this thesis examined the impact of Western social work education on decision-making among Saudi Arabian social workers within an Islamic context. Specifically, it investigated factors such as educational and professional, religious beliefs, and cultural influences that shaped decision-making.

In general, social workers who participated in the research clearly indicated the factors that influenced their decision making. One of the most important factors was the influence of their social work education. They clearly displayed the values endemic to the social work profession which they had been taught in their education such as respect for their clients, and the importance of a relationship based on trust and a non-judgmental attitude. This finding is in accord with previous publications. (NASW, 2021; Payne, 2021).

Another factor that helps explain the integration of Western theories into Saudi social work practice is the role of educators during the formative years of the discipline. The early teachers of social work

were themselves trained in Western models and likely embraced these frameworks as authoritative. Consequently, when they taught students, Western theories were likely presented as the legitimate and “professional” foundation of social work. At the same time, students studying social work were also engaged in Islamic studies, which may have contributed to their ability to adapt and integrate social work approaches into their own religious frameworks and understanding.

They all displayed an analytical approach to their practice which involved some form of assessment and planning before stating their interventions, a way of ‘thinking before acting’ which is taught in social work education. In terms of identifying specific theoretical frameworks, they only infrequently identified a particular theory, which is similar to previous studies of social worker practitioners (Kvarfordt & Sheridan, 2007; Ferguson et al., 2020).At the same time the interventions the participants employed in their work and the rationale they provided for their actions, often reflected a particular theoretical perspective. Even years after their social work education, there remained a strong imprint from their professional instruction.

This finding indicates that education left a lasting legacy, shaping not only values but also ways of approaching problems in practice. While participants did not always use theoretical language, their methods reflected theoretical thinking embedded in their training. This suggests that Western theories, even when not explicitly named, left subtle but enduring imprints that were reinterpreted and utilised within the participants’ social work settings. These observations invite broader reflection on how different societies engage with external knowledge systems. The experience of Saudi practitioners reveals that the relationship between Western theory and local practice is not one of simple adoption or rejection, but of reinterpretation shaped by history, culture, and faith.

This comparison highlights the need to situate debates on decolonization within their specific historical and geopolitical contexts. While in some societies Western frameworks carry the weight of colonial imposition and generate conflict, in others — such as Saudi Arabia — they can be selectively borrowed and reinterpreted without undermining cultural identity. Recognizing these differences enriches the global conversation by showing that decolonization is not a singular path but a context-dependent process, shaped by historical experience as much as by professional practice.

In addition to their social work education were their personal and professional experiences which lent a depth of understanding and insight into their social work practice. Continuous professional experience had a strong and noticeable impact on their ability to make judgements about situations and respond quickly. For this reason, they stressed the importance of the practical (placement) component of the social work program and the need for more case studies based on typical practice situations in social work in Saudi Arabia (Bogo, 2015; Howe & Hill, 2024).

This emphasis on practice placements highlights an important gap in Saudi education. While theory was influential, it was in combination with hands-on experience that participants felt truly competent. In this way, education and practice were not oppositional but complementary, reinforcing the argument that adaptation of Western models worked best when supported by localised training experiences.

The detailed interviews demonstrated the pervasiveness of the connection participants felt between their faith and their professional practice. This seamless integration of religion and practice represents a unique feature of Saudi social work. In contrast to Western contexts, where professional ethics often emphasise avoiding the introduction of personal faith into practice (NASW, 2021), Saudi

practitioners did not describe religion as external to their role. Instead, it operated as a natural foundation for their professional identity. This seamless integration reflected a process of natural adaptation — a form of 'Islamising' practice — rather than conflict.

An exploration of why these social workers did not appear to feel or express any conflict between their social work professional activities, and their religious views is one of the most significant conclusions of this study. The social workers, through survey and interview, expressed an integrated identity between their religious and professional identities. A lack of conflict may be due to the synergies around every aspect of their lives. They were born into and have lived within an Islamic society and worked in Islamic government agencies, so their self-concept is clearly expressed within this view of the world. In their social work education, they were taught Western social work theories but in general these approaches seem to have been incorporated in their existing world view and utilised without conflict.

This conclusion adds a new lens to the indigenisation and decolonisation debate. Much of the literature has highlighted conflict between Western frameworks and non-Western contexts, especially in colonised societies where foreign theories were imposed (Midgley, 1981; Kreitzer, 2012; Sewpaul, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, however, the absence of colonisation meant that local religious and cultural identity remained secure. As a result, participants were able to appropriate Western knowledge without perceiving it as an imposition. Instead, they described a process of confident adaptation — what might be described as “Islamicising” theories — which stands in contrast to narratives of resistance or rejection. This is an important contribution because it demonstrates that indigenisation is not only about opposing Western dominance but can also take the form of organic, everyday adaptation rooted in strong cultural identity.

In examining the social work curriculum at the time of their study it can also be noted that there were additional subjects of study besides those of social work intervention theories, which were related to Islamic studies. Such concurrent teaching reinforced the position of social work practice as being delivered and enacted within an Islamic framework and society. In addition, all the social work educators were local Saudi Arabia citizens and positioned their teaching of theories from within a cultural framework that was similar to that of the students.

This finding illustrates how curriculum design and teaching practices reinforced the integration of Western theories into an Islamic worldview. Because the educators were local and the teaching of religion was embedded alongside social work content, students encountered Western theories not in opposition to but in harmony with Islamic studies. This created a unique learning environment that helped normalise the adaptation process.

The Western social work intervention theories were experienced by the social workers who were interviewed as flexible and adaptable to the circumstances of their practice and personal world with little conflict. In contrast to previous research that found Western theories to be inadequate for application in non-Western cultures (Ibrahim, 2017; Brown, 2022; Mahmoud, 2022), this research noted the flexibility of the social work intervention theories to allow contextual application. This interpretation differs from previous research that tended to identify the need for a greater cultural adjustment by the host culture to bridge the gap between Western social work theories and non-Western approaches (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001). This framework positions Saudi Arabia as an important case study in global social work, which demonstrates a different outcome: successful contextual application without perceived tension that highlights incompatibility and conflict. Thus the discourse on decolonisation is expanded by showing that indigenisation can also mean borrowing and reshaping, not only resisting or discarding these findings therefore contribute a more

nuanced understanding of indigenisation — not as rejection, but as adaptive integration shaped by local confidence.

8.2 Limitations of the research

This research was limited by being conducted in only one context where social work is practiced in Saudi Arabia, namely The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, even though almost 100 workers answered the survey. As background to the social work theoretical studies that participants received, only one university social work curriculum was examined and only a small number of graduates of that university were given personal interviews. Therefore, the findings from this research cannot be generalised to any other situation or social work practice.

In addition, the reliance on retrospective self-reports means that participants were reflecting on their past education and professional experiences, which may have been shaped by memory or current professional positions. The qualitative component included only six participants, all female, which restricts the diversity of voices and makes it difficult to capture the perspectives of male social workers or those working in different regions of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the research did not extend to non-governmental organisations or private practice, which are also emerging sites of social work activity in Saudi Arabia. Another limitation is that because the study examined only one university's curriculum, it therefore may not reflect variations in social work education across other institutions in the country. Finally, while the findings highlight important themes, they represent an exploratory picture rather than a definitive account and should be interpreted with caution.

8.3 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Social work educational programs develop case studies that reflect real-world scenarios relevant to social work practice based in Islamic agencies Saudi Arabian such as were developed and used in this research.
- The curricula be taught in practical and applied way and considering actual social work agency practice.
- Practicing social workers be invited as speakers into the classroom to share their practice.
- Social workers be available as mentors for newer less experienced social workers in view of the fact that more experienced social workers relied on their practice experience in decision-making.
- Islamic agencies formalise the integration of theory and practice through continuous professional development programs focused around relevant and localized case studies.

In addition, universities should consider strengthening the link between classroom teaching and field placements, ensuring that students are exposed to practice scenarios that reflect the complexities of Saudi society. Professional bodies could also develop guidelines that make explicit the ways in which Islamic values can be integrated with social work principles, thereby providing a clearer framework for both students and practitioners. Furthermore, partnerships between universities and government agencies could help ensure that curricula remain aligned with practice needs, while agency-based reflective workshops would allow practitioners to continually refine their integration of theory and practice.

A final reflection arising from this study concerns the ongoing balance between adaptation and authenticity. As Saudi social work continues to evolve, maintaining alignment between Islamic values and global professional standards will remain central. The findings suggest that true indigenisation is not a static achievement but a continual process of reinterpretation and dialogue

between cultures.

8.5 Future Research

Future research could explore the application of social work theories in other non-western cultures. Comparative studies in other non-western contexts, such as China or Africa, could examine whether similar adaptations of western theories occur in different cultural and religious settings. A similar project to this research might be designed and carried out in Saudi Arabia with different government Ministries and with social workers situated in NGOs. Interesting future research could be conducted with focus groups to explore further the impact of the workers' religious beliefs and practices on their social work. In future research social work educators could be interviewed to explore their perspectives on the applicability of the social work intervention theories for their students' future practice. In light of the findings of this research it would worthwhile exploring whether Islamic social workers in non-Islamic agencies experience the same seamless integration of religious values into practice. Investigation into the relationship between years of experience and the influence of religious beliefs might provide deeper insights into professional growth and value adaptation.

Further research could also examine the role of gender, comparing how male and female practitioners articulate the integration of religion, culture, and Western theories. Longitudinal studies following graduates across their careers would help clarify how the influence of education, religion, and experience evolve over time. Policy-focused research could explore how national social policies either support or limit the integration of Western models into local frameworks. In addition, cross-national studies comparing Saudi Arabia with other non-colonised Islamic contexts (e.g., Oman, Iran) could test whether the same pattern of "natural adaptation" without conflict is evident elsewhere. Such studies would extend the contribution of this thesis by situating Saudi social work

more firmly in global debates about indigenisation and decolonisation.

In concluding this research, the author would like to express her gratitude to the social workers in Saudi Arabia who took time out of their busy schedule to answer the survey questions or participate in an interview with me. The findings revealed many insightful and somewhat unanticipated answers to the questions around how workers incorporated their western social work educational experiences into their current practice in an Islamic-based agency setting. Future research can hopefully extend and expand on these initial considerations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Introductory Survey Email

Introductory email:

"My name is Nouf Barasayn and I am a lecturer at Um ALQura University. I am also a PhD student at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia where I am undertaking research as part of my degree. As a lecturer in social work, I have become interested in how to improve the content of the curriculum to make it more relevant to the actual work carried out by social workers in our country.

I am contacting you to ask if you would be willing to become a participant in my research project whose aim is to better understand the functions and decisions of social workers in Saudi Arabia. The project is explained in more detail in the enclosed Information Sheet.

Participation in the research involves filling out a questionnaire about your work background and practice. The questionnaire should only take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your participation in the survey is totally voluntary but it will provide helpful information for this project. All information and data collected will remain confidential and will not be passed on to any third parties including your manager.

If you are willing to fill out a questionnaire please indicate by emailing me at bara0056@flinders.edu.au with your contact details and I will email you back a copy of the questionnaire together with a consent form to participate in the research.

Thank you for contributing to my research and also to a better understanding of social work in Saudi Arabia".

Signed:

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval

24 January 2022

HUMAN ETHICS LOW RISK PANEL APPROVAL NOTICE

Dear Ms. Nouf Barasayn,

The below proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application and its attachments.

Project No: 4582

Project Title: The impacts of Western pedagogy and theories: Application to professional social work practice in Saudi Arabia.

Primary Researcher: Ms. Nouf Barasayn

Approval Date: 24/01/2022

Expiry Date: 31/03/2023

Please note: *Due to the current COVID-19 situation, researchers are strongly advised to develop a research design that aligns with the University's COVID-19 research protocol involving human studies. Where possible, avoid face-to-face testing and consider rescheduling face-to-face testing or undertaking alternative distance/online data or interview collection means. For further information, please go to https://staff.flinders.edu.au/coronavirus- information/research-updates.*

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

Participant Documentation

Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

- all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and

formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.

- the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialing codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.

Annual Progress / Final Reports

In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018)* an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the approval anniversary date for the duration of the ethics approval using the HREC Annual/Final Report Form available online via the ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety system.

Please note that no data collection can be undertaken after the ethics approval expiry date listed at the top of this notice. If data is collected after expiry, it will not be covered in terms of ethics. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that annual progress reports are submitted on time; and that no data is collected after ethics has expired.

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please either submit (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request (using the HREC Modification Form).

For student projects, the Low Risk Panel recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, assessed and finalised. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend that additional data be collected from participants.

Modifications to Project

Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include• change of project title;

- change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, researchers and supervisors) • changes to research objectives;
- changes to research protocol;
- changes to participant recruitment methods;

- changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
- changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
- changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes to information / documents to be given to potential participants;
- changes to research tools (e.g., survey, interview questions, focus group questions etc); • extensions of time (i.e. to extend the period of ethics approval past current expiry date).

To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please submit a Modification Request Form available online via the ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety system. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee on at human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

Human Ethics Low Risk Panel
Research Development and Support
human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Flinders University

Sturt Road, Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042 GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, 5001

http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/researcher-support/ebi/human-ethics/human-ethics_home.cfm

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Associate Professor Julie Clark,

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Associate Professor Noore Siddiquee
College of Business, Government & Law

Associate Professor Carol Irizarry
Full Academic Status
College of Education, Psychology

Sturt Road
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CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

Participant Information sheet

Application of knowledge to the decisions and functions of social work practice in Saudi Arabia

Researcher
Mrs Nouf Barasayn
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Tel: 0882013911

Supervisor(s)
Associate Professor Julie Clark,
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Associate Professor Noore Siddiquee
College of Business, Government & Law

Associate Professor Carol Irizarry
Full Academic Status
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Description of the study
This research is part of the project which aims to understand the functions and decisions of employees working as social workers in Saudi Arabia This project will investigate how they utilise ideas, concepts and principles when they are faced with the reality of practice and decision-making in their work context. This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

What is the purpose of the study?
The proposed research is aimed at the identifying experiences of social workers and those in social work roles in Saudi Arabia who are now employed as professionals delivering their services in the state of Saudi Arabia. It will try to answer the question of how decisions are made in the field and what knowledge is utilized to inform the social work practice.

Do I have to take part?
It is entirely up to you to decide. If you choose to complete the questionnaire and/or participate in an individual interview, you will be asked to complete an online consent form to confirm that you have agreed to take part in this study. You will only be able to take part if you have completed this consent form.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you are happy to take part in the study after reading this information sheet, please respond to my email at *bara0056@flinders.edu.au* with your contact information. You will be emailed a consent form and a questionnaire. Your email address will be held for the purposes of communication before and during the distribution of the questionnaire or the interview but this will not be passed on to any third parties: it will be encrypted (see below) and kept securely in a password-protected folder at Flinders University for the purposes of the research and will only be accessible to the researchers.

You will be asked on the questionnaire the years of your university graduation and depending on that answer you may asked if you would agree to an individual interview. If you agree you will be contacted with a suggested date and time. The interview would take ½ an hour.

What will I be asked to do?
You are invited to fill out a questionnaire and if you are offered an interview you can indicate your agreement to also participate in an individual interview. In that more in-depth conversation, the researcher will ask a few questions regarding your views about a scenario of a typical social work situation where a decision is needed in order to offer social work help. Participation is entirely voluntary.

Any interview discussion will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. Once recorded, the discussion will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a

computer file.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?
The sharing of your experiences will enable you to express both positive and negative experiences you have encountered during your professional practice. The questionnaire will provide valuable data about the background and work particulars of Saudi Arabian social workers. The views and opinions that are provided will help to improve the teaching of social work and making it more relevant to the society in which it is practiced.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?
Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?
We do not need to keep your name and you will be anonymous in any reporting of the data. Any identifying information will be removed from the questionnaire or interview transcripts and your comments will not be linked directly to you. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to relevant researchers.

- If you are interviewed, your individual interview will be audio-recorded and I will later type this up, with all identifying information removed. The audio-recording may be listened to by the researcher supervisors.
- Transcripts (typed copies of any interviews) will be kept electronically for five years on a password protected and encrypted computer.
- An anonymised transcript will be seen by researcher and her supervisors.
- Once the research is completed (this is anticipated to be by March 2023), electronic copies of the transcript will be stored securely for five years on the university network until the point of secure disposal.
- If, during the discussion, I am concerned that you or somebody else is at risk of harm, I will have to break confidentiality to inform my supervisors and seek advice. However, I would discuss this fully with you at the time.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?
The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study, however, given the nature of the project, some participants could experience emotional discomfort. If any emotional discomfort is experienced, please contact the National Centre for Mental Health Promotion that can be accessed free of charge by all participants at info@ncmh.org.sa or on 920033360. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher. There will be no effect of either participation or non-participation in this study on any aspect of your professional practice or career.

How do I agree to participate?
Participation is voluntary. You may answer ‘no comment’ or refuse to answer any questions on the questionnaire, and if interviewed you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form will be sent to you with the questionnaire if you indicate

you are interested in participating. After completing the questionnaire and depending on the year of your university graduation, you may be asked if you would agree to an individual interview as well. If you agree you will be asked to sign a consent form agreeing to the personal interview.

Any questions please contact me at *bara0056@flinders.edu.au*.

Recognition of contribution time costs
No monetary compensation of any kind (direct or indirect) is not going to be provided in exchange of your participation or time.

Data Storage
Email addresses will be stored during the period that the research is being carried out in order to send a summary final report via email to all participants when the project is completed. The names attached to these email addresses will not be connected in any way to the statements made by participants. All emails addresses will be destroyed after the final summary report is sent to participants.

The information collected will be stored securely on a password protected computer and/or Flinders University server throughout the study. Any identifiable data will be de-identified for data storage purposes unless indicated otherwise. All data will be securely transferred to and stored at Flinders University for five years after publication of the results. Following the required data storage period, all data will be securely destroyed according to university protocols.

All the data from this research will stored at Flinders University.

How will I receive feedback?
On project completion, the final report of the project will be given to all participants via email.

Ethics Committee Approval
The project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (insert project number here).

Queries and Concerns
Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the research team. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office team via telephone 08 8201 2543 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet which is yours to keep. If you accept our invitation to be involved, please sign the enclosed Consent Form.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

Questionnaire:

Application of knowledge to the decisions and functions of social work practice in Saudi Arabia

My name is Nouf Barasayn and I am a lecturer at Um ALQura Al-qura University. I am also a PhD student at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia where I am undertaking research as part of my degree.

I am trying to better understand the functions and decisions of social workers in Saudi Arabia and your filling out this questionnaire will be helpful in providing very helpful information for my project.

Thank you for taking part!

A) Personal Information

1. Gender?

- Female
- Male

2. Age group

- 25 and over
- 35 and over
- 45 and over
- 55 and over

3. Marital status

- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Single

4. What languages do you speak fluently other than Arabic?

- **English language**
- **Other:**

B) Educational Background.

5. What are the names and locations of the post-high school educational institutions that you attended?

……..

6. Do you have a qualification in social work?

- Bachelor's Degree in Social Work (BSW)
- Social Work Diploma
- Master's Degree in Social Work (MSW)
- Ph.D. in Social Work
- No Social Work Degree

7. If you have a social work qualification, do you have an exact major?

- Youth Care

- Family and childhood
- Psychological health
- Elderly
- Disability / Comprehensive Rehabilitation
- Community Development
- School
- Correction
- search
- Medical social service
- Organization and management in social service
- Clinical social service
- social therapy
- social planning
- general practice
- Welfare policy and social institutions
- There is no exact specialty.
- Other:

8. If the educational qualification is other than social work, please indicate your specialization?

……..

9. If the educational qualification is other than social work, please choose the academic degree?

- Bachelor's degree in literary disciplines
- Bachelor's degree in scientific disciplines

- Higher Diploma
- Master's
- PhD
- Other:

10. Did you study outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

- Yes
- no

11. If the answer is (Yes), please specify the country and the educational institution?

……

C) Employment Background

12. What is your current job title?

- Manager
- Head of the Department
- Social worker
- a social researcher
- Other:

13. Approximately how many years or months have you spent in your current job?

……

14. Determine the number of years or months that you worked in fields other than social service

approximately?

……

15.What is your primary field of work?

- Elderly
- Disability / Comprehensive Rehabilitation
- Events
- social Security
- social development
- orphans
- Juvenile care
- Social protection
- Search
- Other:

16. Have you been assigned to the organization to work with a specific class?

- **Yes**
- **No**

17. If the answer is (yes), please specify the category?

18. Do you work with culturally diverse clients?

- **Yes**

- **No**

19. If the answer is (Yes), please specify its cultural diversity?

……

Example: diversity (ethnic-cultural-social-religious)

Cultural / educational

20. Where do you usually spend most of your work time?

- in the enterprise
- in the field
- both

D) Professional Perception

21. I believe all customers should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what they do or don't do

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

22. I believe in the client's right to self-determination in the decisions that affect their life even if I don't necessarily agree with the choice they make

- OK
- Neutral

- Do not agree

23. I believe it is important for social service professionals to contribute to the positive elements in the lives of their clients

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

24. When making professional decisions related to the client, I analyze the current information and data of clients to determine the method of professional intervention with them

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

25. I make backup plans in response to changes in my clients' situation

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

26. I provide current data to decision makers and administrators regarding customer needs or problems

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

27. Work with other institutions together for jointly planned interventions

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

28. I constantly evaluate my work

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

29. I create self-help groups among my clients

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

30. I teach people to find solutions to their needs with their own capabilities

- OK
- Neutral
- Do not agree

31. Do you use the social work practice approaches you studied in your work?

- Yes
- No

32. Which professional intervention approach would you prefer to use?

- Strength perspective
- Psychosocial model

- Human
- Case Study
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Problem solving model
- Family therapy model
- Crisis intervention
- Task focus model
- Selective model
- Other:

33. Did you learn your occupational intervention approach in your studies?

- Yes
- No
- Other:

34. Do you think the professional intervention approaches you studied were relevant to your work with clients?

- Yes
- No

35. If the answer is (No), please state the reason?

…….

36. To what degree do each of the following influence your interaction with customers?

	strongly affect	little affect	Not affected at all
The theories you have studied			
Practical knowledge			
Religious beliefs			
Ideas based on own experiences			

37. Are there other factors that affect your interaction with clients, please mention them?

…….

38. Do you find any conflict in your work between what you studied at university on how to interact with clients and your practice in the reality of your daily work?

- Yes
- No

39. If the answer is (Yes), can you comment more on the nature of the conflict?

40. When making professional decisions regarding the client, do you use the techniques you learned in your studies of social work?

- Yes
- No

41. If the answer is (No), what are the sources that you used?

42. Looking back on your studies of social work, do you have suggestions on how to make the curriculum more relevant to the realities of professional practice?

……

43. Are you a member of any organization (formal or informal) for social service, locally or abroad?

- Yes
- No

44. If the answer is (Yes), please mention the name of the social work organization?

……

45. Are there any other approaches to professional intervention that you think are important to your work as a social worker that you were not asked about? Please state its importance

……

46. Did you graduate from your major in Social Work between 2019 and 2004?

- Yes
- No

47. If the answer is (yes), would you like to conduct a personal interview to discuss your social service practice in more depth?

(The interview is strictly confidential and for the purpose of scientific research only)

- **Yes**
- **No**

48. If the answer is (Yes), please write your means of communication (e-mail or mobile number)

All information and data collected will be encoded so that you are not personally identifiable. We assure you that the information you provide will be treated in strict confidence and will not be passed on to any third party, including your manager.

……

49. Are there any comments you would like to communicate to the researcher?

……..

The questionnaire has ended.

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire.

Appendix 5: Consent Form for Questionnaire

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Application of knowledge to the decisions and functions of social work practice in Saudi Arabia

I ….....

being over the age of 18 years, hereby consent to participate as requested in the questionnaire for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.

2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.

3. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.

4. I understand that:

- I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
- Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time; and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
- While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
- Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my progress in my course of study, or results gained.
- I may stop at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the completing this questionnaire without disadvantage.

6. I understand that only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to my research data and raw results unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties.

Participant's name……..……..……...

Participant's signature……Date……...

I, the researcher certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name…….....

Researcher's signature……..…Date……...……

NB:Two signed copies should be obtained.

Ethics Committee Approval

The project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (insert project number here).

Queries and Concerns

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the research team. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office team via telephone 08 8201 2543 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

Appendix 6: Consent Form for personal interview

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (Interview)

Application of knowledge to the decisions and functions of social work practice in Saudi Arabia

I ….....

being over the age of 18 years, hereby consent to participate as requested in the interview for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.

2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.

3. I agree to an audio of my information and participation

4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.

5. I understand that:

- I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
- Participation is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time; and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
- While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
- Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my progress in my course of study, or results gained.
- I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time and that I may withdraw at any time from this interview without disadvantage.

6.I understand that only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to my research data and raw results unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties.

Participant's name……..…….……...

Participant's signature……Date……...

I, the researcher certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name…….…….....

Researcher's signature……..…Date……...……

NB:Two signed copies should be obtained.

Ethics Committee Approval

The project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (insert project number here).

Queries and Concerns

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the research team. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office team via telephone 08 8201 2543 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

Appendix 7: Case Studies for Interview

Instructions for the interviewee

Following are four Case Scenarios. Please read them and choose one for our discussion. (The names are fictitious)

1. 'Maryam' in Foster Care

   A 15 years old girl 'Maryam' has lived with her foster care parents since she was 9 months of age. In one of the regular check-up visits, her foster mother told you, as the social worker, that Maryam had knocked her foster dad over (a man in his 60s) because she was angry at him for not allowing her to go out with her friends. Increasingly the foster mother felt that Maryam had been getting frustrated and angry with her foster parents over discipline.

   The foster mother reluctantly told the social worker about Maryam's recent behaviours because she loved her very much and she was worried that Maryam might be taken from her.

2. Child support assessment for 'Ahlam'

   Two years ago, an unmarried woman 'Ahlam' gave birth to a baby, although this was against her culture norms. She receives a government subsidy to support and raise her young child but has come back to see you, the government social worker, because she has had given birth to another child. As you were having a conversation with her, she said to you in a rude tone, "Just give me the money to raise my children". You don't like the fact that she is bringing children to the world without caring about their future as they won't know their family and they will struggle for the rest of their life.

   Your assessment and recommendation will determine whether or not she gets the extra support.

3. Placement for 'Mona'

   You are the social worker assigned to help 'Mona' a 17-year-old girl who was caught by the police attending an illegal party with unrelated males and females in attendance. There was also some evidence of alcohol and possibly drug use. Maria said her school friend had invited her to the party and that she had no idea what was going to happen there. After an investigation of the situation and receiving a legal penalty Mona was released but her family refused to pick her up from the juvenile detention centre. They said she would need to be placed in a foster care facility.

4. Should ‘Sarah’ continue as a foster child?
   You are meeting with a foster care couple with a 4-year-old child ‘Sarah’ in their care. The mother says that she is pregnant and happy to expand her family to include two children. Her husband asks if their fostered child can be given back because he doesn’t have feelings towards Sarah any more since knowing he is having a child of his own. The mother says he has been putting pressure on her ask about returning the child but that she loves Sarah and is worried about her family adjusting to a new baby.