

Difficulties of Learning and Practicing the Profession of Social Work in Palestine from the Viewpoint of Social Workers and the Ways to Overcome Them

صعوبات تعلم وممارسة مهنة الخدمة الاجتماعية في فلسطين من وجهة نظر الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين وطرق التغلب عليها

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties of learning and practicing the profession of social work in Palestine from the viewpoint of social workers. In order to achieve the objective of this study, the researcher applied a study tool after verifying its validity and reliability on a sample that consists of 80 social workers, selected from 12 social work institutions in the Gaza Strip, using the available sample method. The results showed that the medium level of the difficulties of learning and practicing the profession of social work is 62.5%. Additionally, the study showed six main observations. First, the difficulties in relation to the learning variable reached 68.6%. Second, the difficulties in relation to the training variable are 67%. Furthermore, the third observation showed the difficulties in relation to the scientific research variable that reached 61.58%, and the fourth observation showed the difficulties in relation to the development variable, which reached 59.42%. The fifth observation indicated that the difficulties in relation to the employment variable are 55.84%. In contrast, the sixth observation revealed the methods to overcome these difficulties from the viewpoint of social workers, which is 59.2%. This included their needs for self-care programs, which amounted to 63.25%. It is done by conducting entertainment retreat days to bring them comfort and quiet. In addition, the necessity of universities' communication with graduates in relation to employment and the development courses' support reached 62.5%. It is also important to provide universities with specialized professors in social work (62%). Finally, the results indicated as well that social workers are in urgent need of continuous development and retreat days to develop their skills in the social work field.

Keywords: *Social Work Profession, General Practice of Social Work, Social Workers, Difficulties of Learning the Profession of Social Work, Difficulties of Practicing the Profession of Social Work.*

المخلص

هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف إلى صعوبات تعلم وممارسة مهنة الخدمة الاجتماعية في فلسطين من وجهة نظر الأخصائيين

الاجتماعيين. ولتحقيق الهدف تم تطبيق أداة الدراسة بعد التحقق من صدقها وثباتها على عينة مكونة من (80) أخصائياً اجتماعياً تم اختيارهم من (12) مؤسسة للخدمة الاجتماعية في قطاع غزة بطريقة العينة المتيسرة. وأشارت النتائج إلى المستوى المتوسط لصعوبات تعلم وممارسة مهنة الخدمة الاجتماعية بنسبة (62.5%). بالإضافة إلى إشارة النتائج إلى ست ملاحظات أساسية: أولهما الصعوبات المتعلقة بمتغير التعليم حيث كانت (68.62%)، والثانية في الصعوبات المتعلقة بمتغير التدريب بنسبة (67.0%). علاوة على الملاحظة الثالثة التي أشارت إلى الصعوبات المتعلقة بمتغير البحث العلمي بنسبة (61.58%) والملاحظة الرابعة التي أشارت إلى الصعوبات المتعلقة بمتغير التطوير بنسبة (59.42%) وأيضاً الملاحظة الخامسة التي أشارت إلى الصعوبات المتعلقة بمتغير التوظيف بنسبة (55.84%) ثم الملاحظة السادسة التي أشارت إلى وسائل التغلب على هذه الصعوبات من وجهة نظر الأخصائيين بنسبة (59.2%)، واشتملت على احتياجاتهم لبرامج الرعاية الذاتية بنسبة (63.25%) والتي تتم من خلال عمل أيام ترفيهية لجلب الراحة والهدوء لهم، بالإضافة إلى الحاجة إلى تواصل الجامعات مع الخريجين فيما يتعلق بالتوظيف ودورات التطوير بنسبة (62.5%). علاوة على ذلك الحاجة إلى إمداد الجامعات بالمتخصصين في الخدمة الاجتماعية بنسبة (62.0%)، وأخيراً أشارت النتائج إلى أن الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين في حاجة ماسة للتطوير المستمر وإلى أيام رعاية وظيفية من خلال فكرة مساعدة المساعد لتطوير مهاراتهم في مجال الخدمة الاجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهنة الخدمة الاجتماعية، الممارسة العامة للخدمة الاجتماعية، الأخصائيون الاجتماعيون، صعوبات تعلم مهنة الخدمة الاجتماعية، صعوبات ممارسة مهنة الخدمة الاجتماعية.

Introduction

The profession of social work is a humanitarian profession is a manifestation of human nature. Its humanitarian aspect is shaped in the form of a profession, which is the secret of its continuation. More importantly, it spreads in the world in a noticeable way (Darwish & Masoad, 2008). In addition, the specialists in the field of social work have made remarkable progress in trying to localize the social work profession by paying attention to its academic value in teaching in many universities and colleges. Additionally, teaching this profession helped cover some shortcomings in the number of qualified social work graduates. Furthermore, social work reveals

that this humanitarian profession has roots in many other social fields. It focuses on addressing the developmental relationships and multiple fields of work with contemporary society, requiring research and work whenever needed. This is important for a deep understanding of its humanitarian mission and the difficulty in measuring the various services, whether through their beneficiaries or practitioners in all fields like the rest of the social sciences (Elasouly, 2012). In the Arab world, especially in Palestine, the Nakba of 48 played an essential role in preparing the land and the historical conditions for the birth of the social work profession in Palestine. Therefore, it represented fertile soil for practicing the profession of social work due to the ongoing incidents of violence, aggression, and occupation. In addition, it paved the way to a predominant nature of needs, which is a state of the constant need for help (Frag, 2017). In light of the professional practice of the social work profession in Palestine as well as the constant need of people, the gap between what was and what should be increased when the theoretical side did not match the practical side. The general difficulties in practicing the profession in the Arab world included the lack of a general and integrated theory in the social work field, alongside a negative perception by citizens, and many other difficulties pertaining to each country. Furthermore, when the specialists are trying to solve a societal problem or bring social and economic development, many other problems arise, and they require to be dealt with. Also, attempting to find a change in society requires the ability to realize it truly. For example, many graduates still have obstacles and difficulties related to practicing the profession or employment, and many areas suffer from the lack of their presence, such as the medical field, school field, and labor field; in addition, to prisons, as well as the juveniles, youth, and elderly centers, and others. Thus, this need has become clearer and more defined within the social work majors in Palestinian universities recently compared to the previous years.

Previous Studies

Ellaham et al.'s Study (2019)

This study aimed to identify the importance of social work education in developing the professional identity of social workers in

Bethlehem Governorate from the viewpoint of social workers according to gender, age, education, qualification, field of work, work sector, and work experience. The researchers used the descriptive-analytical method because of its suitability for the purposes of the study, where a questionnaire consisting of two parts was designed to collect data. The first part contains 25 paragraphs, and the second one contains 11 paragraphs. The results showed that the highest averages were in relation to social work education, which played an important role in making the social workers committed to professional ethics. The results showed no statistically significant differences in the importance of social work education in developing the professional identity of social workers in Bethlehem Governorate due to gender, age, educational qualification, field of work, work sector, and work experience. The researchers reached a number of recommendations: 1. Reviewing the methods of preparing and rehabilitating social workers through assessing the reality of teaching the social work, developing curricula and methods of teaching and training, and qualifying teachers and training supervisors in order to provide the students with the knowledge, skills, and ethics that make them eligible for the general practice of social work in its various fields. 2. Creating ethical bylaws adopted by the social work institutions in Palestine. These bylaws will be formulated in a clear and specific language based on practical reality. Therefore, the social workers swear to abide by it before they start working. Anyone who violates the constitution will be held accountable, giving the social worker the opportunity to modify his/her behavior according to the terms. 3. Introducing the subject of the professional identity of the social workers in the preparation and training of specialists during and before they start the social work. 4. Preparing training programs to raise the level of professional identity of the social workers and study their impact on the practical side.

Ibrahim's Study (2018)

The purpose of this comparative study is to determine the level of interaction of the social work profession with community issues in Palestine, Qatar, and Tunisia from the perspective of students. The design of the research involves

four variables: Professional practice institutions, societal recognition of the profession, social work graduates, and the interaction of the profession with the community issues. The findings of the study revealed that Qatar University received the highest relative strength score compared to al-Quds University in Palestine and Carthage University in Tunisia. In addition, this study determined several applications to improve social work education and practice in the three universities, particularly, and for universities in the Arab world in general. It also sheds light on those four components to encourage researchers to study each component of quality levels individually and develop recommendations to improve social work education and practice.

Elrentesy's Study (2018)

This study aimed to identify the obstacles that face social work students and seek field training benefits in the social institutions from the viewpoint of the students. The researcher adopted the descriptive method and social survey. The study comprised all social work students in the third year level who applied for the field-training course. Besides, students in the fourth year level who completed field training in the social work department at the Islamic University of Gaza were also selected. The sample consisted of 108 students (males/females). The researcher used a questionnaire tool to reveal the results of the study. The results showed that the main obstacles that faced the students in field training conducted in institutions are related to the institutions' supervisor and then the social work department's obstacles. Finally, this study highlighted the obstacles related to the academic supervisor and the students. The study also found statistically significant differences in the responses of the study sample according to the obstacles that faced their benefit from the field training in the social institutions based on the gender variable and the academic level, in favor of male students and the fourth-year students.

Ibrahim's Study (2017)

This comparative descriptive study sought to determine the impact of localization on international social work education. Using quantitative methods, this study reports objective findings for a randomly selected, non-probability,

purposive sample of 178 faculty members who are geographically distributed among faculties and departments of social work at 22 universities in eight Arab countries. The primary research tool used was a standardized questionnaire. Data analysis of the responses of the faculty members found that the participants' attitudes were equally weak regarding globalization and international social work education. This could be attributed to the variables of faculty members, social work students, university textbooks, quality of library services, methods of teaching, field practicum, and the quality of student evaluation. In contrast, the averaged attitudes of the faculty members on the track of globalization and international social work education could be attributed to the variable of social work curricula. The analysis also revealed a marked absence of sustained contact with social work professionals and scholars from other regions and societies of the world.

Elarab and al-Rawashdeh's Study (2016)

The study aimed at identifying the difficulties that affected the quality of social work field training in Jordan in light of some social variables. The questionnaire used is the main tool to collect the information from a sample consisting of 100 field training course students at al-Balqa Applied University. The study concluded that the most important difficulties that limited social work field training entailed the skills development axis, the academic axis, and training guidance. The results showed no significant differences at $\alpha = 5.0$ level in the academic axis, training guidance, and organization. On the other hand, significant differences were found for the skills development axis attributed to the training axis variable and the academic axis attributed to the academic achievement variable. In light of the above-mentioned results, the study came up with some theoretical and practical recommendations.

Monwar's Study (2014)

This study aimed at identifying the obstacles of the social work profession, using a performance case study in the governmental universities in the capital of Sudan, Khartoum. The researcher shed light on the impact of constraints on the performance of the teachers and the social work profession, applied to some governmental universities in Khartoum. The researcher aimed to

find several objectives, including identifying the internal and external obstacles social work teachers face. The researcher used a simple random sample. The study relied on the following question: How far are the constraints affected by the performance of social work teachers? The study adopted the descriptive-analytical method because of its suitability for the purposes of the study and the statistical approach used to transfer data. The most important results comprised the inadequacy inside the working environment. Finally, the researcher recommended providing assistive devices needed to create a healthy working environment and refer attention to the media role.

Lawson et al.'s Study (2014)

This study aimed to conduct an international comparison of the career of social work by students in social work's international interactions and launched its investigations into cross-national comparisons. The study posed two fundamental questions: Are there similar professional patterns and values in social work that are universal across national and cultural differences? Are there national or cultural dimensions that influence or shape differences even when there is an underlying professional similarity across cultures and nationalities? With a sample of 356 social work students from Hungary, Germany, Finland, Italy, and the United States, a two-part survey was carried out. The first part contained demographics and questions about social work, while the second part included 36 items with four sub-scales specifically developed and validated to determine their perception of what is important in a social work job. The results showed the values, characteristics of the profession, and the similar professions to social work. In contrast, some differences showed the similarity in values and perceptions than differences.

Elasouly's Study (2012)

This study aimed to identify the ethics of practicing the social work profession in some social work institutions in Gaza city and identify problems and obstacles to applying these ethics and developing a mechanism to overcome these obstacles. This was possible through the strengthening of the social workers' moral ethics (social work practitioners) and producing a

comprehensive guide for social work ethics practices, which includes a monitoring system to oversee its implementation in the institutions of the Palestinian society. The study answered the questions that revolved around the features of ethics, which are perceived by groups that received the service in some institutions, with a description of the reality of the work of these institutions and the role of social workers too. The researcher applied the descriptive approach on a random sample consisting of (20) beneficiaries from the social work services stakeholders in 4 institutions, divided into five beneficiary groups in every institution; as follows: Elrabea Institution for Juvenile, Gaza Central Prison, Elamal Institute for the Orphans, and Balsam Association for Community Rehabilitation. The researcher interviewed 12 social workers. The data analysis was implemented using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The main results were as follow:

It was deduced that 55% of the sample felt valued and respected in Elrabea Juvenile Institution, the Orphans, and the Balsam Association. In contrast, 25% of the sample did not feel valued. Furthermore, 75% of the sample met with social workers, while 25% did not. Perhaps this is a result of not applying the social work profession in some institutions. Moreover, when the researcher asked about ethics, the following was concluded: An average of 60% of the sample replied that the causes of non-compliance with ethics included lack of responsibility, lack of understanding of ethics, lack of experience, competence and training, the burdens of life, lack of innovation, lack of teaching style and concern.

Eshtaia's Study (2012).

This study aimed to identify the impact of the changes made in the specialization of social work at al-Quds Open University in Palestine in improving the quality of social intervention for graduates as professional practitioners after joining the workforce in social work institutions. The researcher used the content analysis approach to analyze the contents of the study plan, with both theoretical and practical aspects, to identify the impact of this study plan on the quality of graduates. In addition, the researcher used the evaluation method to find out the extent to which officials working in social work institutions are

satisfied with social work graduates and their professional role in bringing the required societal changes, especially those related to sustainable development. The study community consists of all workers inside the social work institutions in Nablus Governorate, who occupy advanced leadership positions in their institutions to know their satisfaction with the professional level of al-Quds Open University graduates, within four main areas, through a special survey that was built for this purpose and distributed to the sample. The study data was collected and analyzed using statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS). The results were as follows: For the field of cognitive abilities, the total degree of the cognitive abilities of graduates was very large; also, the total percentage of respondents' responses in this field reached 83%. For the field of the skills, the overall degree of skills graduates possess was great, as the overall percentage of respondents' responses to this field reached 78.92%. For the field of ethics and values of the social work profession, the overall degree of social work ethics and the values that graduates enjoy were great; also, the total percentage of responses of examiners in this field was 76.98%.

Coleman and Harris' Study (2008)

This study aimed to identify and promote the use of information, communication technology, and call centers as a key for developing and accessing social work services. This strategy is an official policy, and call centers are presented as one attempt to change the relationship between service users, the clients, and providers of services. However, the strategy suggested for the use of call centers in social care institutions did little to shift the balance of power. Call centers bring together four dimensions of discourse: Learning from the private sector, cutting costs, technology, and consumerism. Three issues emerged from the employment of these four dimensions: Undermining social work's sense of place, the restriction of service user participation, the rationalization of social workers. The call center serves as a signifier for what a combination of consumerism and technology can achieve. However, this quality is somewhat clouded in terms of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Contrary to their campaigns and slogans, call centers may be curtailing service user

participation and delimiting the social work role accordingly. Although the call centers' role has important implications for service users and social workers, little research has been done in this regard.

Comments on the Previous Studies

Most of the previous studies provided the researcher with an opportunity to benefit from and learn the aspects of difficulties and practices of the profession of social work from different models and countries. At the same time, the current study differed from the previous studies in providing a new perception focusing on the difficulties in the Palestinian society from the viewpoint of social workers who are working in the field and presenting a set of recommendations to overcome these difficulties..

Theoretical Framework of the Study Terms and Definition of Social Work

Social work is considered a specialized scientific profession, and it is the result of some of the needs of the twentieth century worldwide. It is a human concept that relates to interdependence and cooperation between members of society. It has undergone many developments until it reached a *profession* framework dealing with human need necessities. It is dependent on scientific rules, principles, and methods of work in many countries. In addition, it is considered the result of the industrial revolution that led to the growth of competition. Individualism, migration, secondary relations, weak social control, and problems of beggars, delinquency, and crime emerged in a form that required the presence of unions to defend them and social reformers to manage the efforts of reformatory to reduce the misery of the poor classes. The emergence of social work was one of these human endeavors to alleviate the aforementioned problems. (Obaid & Wajdat 2009:13).

The Profession of Social Work

Herbert Bison (1952) defined social work as a process by which services can be provided to help individuals to overcome current and independent social and psychological obstacles that prevent their full effective contribution to society. Sarhan (2006: 84) said, "A professional service provides people, with the purpose of

helping them, as individuals and groups, to reach relationships that they feel comfortable with. In addition, it raises the levels of living consistent with their desires and capabilities.” Walter Fred Lander defined it as a professional service based on the basis of scientific facts and skills in the field of human relations. Its purpose is to help people to achieve personal and social well-being. In addition, to develop their capabilities to direct their affairs by themselves and the practicing of this service within specialized in social work institutions (as cited in Khater 2009: 130-133).

The National Association of Social Workers defined social work as professional activities that help individuals, groups, and communities enhance and restore their capacity with social functioning and create societal conditions favorable to this goal (Jhala, 2016).

In addition, social work practice consists of the professional application of social work principles and techniques to one or more of the following:

- To help people obtain tangible counselling and psychotherapy services with individuals, families, and groups.
- To help communities or groups and provide them with skills to improve their social processes.

Furthermore, social work practice requires knowledge of human development and behavior of social, economic, and cultural institutions and the interactions of all these factors (Jhala, 2016).

The National Society of Social Workers also considered the profession of social work as a profession that exists to provide effective social services and human services to individuals, families, groups, local communities, and the larger community, “in order to help them improve their social employment, and the quality of their life in society” (al-Suruji, 2009: 19).

In Arab societies, Ghorabya defined social work, in 1993, as a professional performance. It had an effect on the required social change and was directed according to scientific methods related to the problems of people, individuals, groups, and societies. Without discrimination or bias, it is aiming to achieve a higher level of development and a greater volume of luxury for these people (Ghorabya, 2008: 21). In addition, Abu Bakr Hassanein developed a procedural definition that refers to social work as a scientific

profession based on some knowledge derived from social sciences and its experiences of the profession itself. Besides its methods of serving the individual, group, and organization and aiming to bring desirable changes in individuals’ lives, groups, and societies, it finds mutual adaptation, which works in various fields, including juveniles, the medical field, the elderly, workers, and others. Volunteers assist social workers from citizens and various popular leaderships to practice it. It adhered to democracy in its application and cooperated with other professions in various fields. Furthermore, to develop social work, all available resources should be invested without limitations, considering that the efforts of the parties involved in the government’s practices, in line with the philosophy, ideology, and specificity of society, are constantly in rapid development (Sayed, 1988). In addition, the researcher believes that social work is one of the social service methods that the social workers use to help individuals and groups effectively confront the problems that hinder their performance of their social functions in a way that achieves the desired adaptation.

General Practice of Social Work

Habib (2009) states that Ames Clayson sees this approach as a tool to build skillful components and use mental abilities to visualize applied reality. This tool is reliable and used in a variety of situations. The approach consists of assumptions aimed to achieve strategies and tactics to guide professional practice efforts followed by steps, roles, procedures, and evaluation (Habib, 2009: 233-236).

Al-Suruji (2009) also believes that this approach is a professional application of the values, principles, and tactics for the social community. To achieve the purpose of the profession, it should include providing the necessary services to individuals, then providing individuals with counseling and psychological treatment, as well as providing the families and societies with social services, in addition to providing groups, societies, and participants with legislative processes related to them. Moreover, this approach is considered a new method that focuses on using the trend of work therapy. Therefore, the client performs certain tasks assigned to him/her by the social worker during the

various professional intervention stages in order to solve his/her problem and reach the goal that achieves the highest possible degree of adaptation. The client adapts to the conditions or problems that he/she suffers from; then returns to the social worker for help.

The professional practice concept also refers to this approach as a set of scientific and professional steps that a social worker undertakes to help the client, whether he/she is an individual or more, to solve his/her problems. These steps are theoretical in succession, interactive and interrelated with each other. In addition, these steps are expressed in the term of professional intervention that mainly focuses on the client's pattern of interaction with others. This interaction may be negative or positive as negative interaction leads to the occurrence of problems and difficulties that the client faces (Abdul Majeed, 2014).

Elements and Dimensions of Advanced General Practice

The advanced general practice of social work depends on the following elements:

- Depending on the perspective of the ecological system.
- Focusing on the problem.
- Focusing on the entrance to the needs of strength.
- Relying on multiple approaches.
- Free choice of theories and models of professional intervention.
- It is a process for solving problems.

These elements are integrated and interrelated in general practice when the general practitioner provides services to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and societies. Thus, the practice consists of all the values, knowledge, and skills. Therefore, the practice is advanced when delving into a specific social problem that specializes in working with it (Habib, 2009).

Social workers

Social workers are important components of society that are prepared scientifically and practically to practice the profession of social work and trained through specialized colleges and

institutions. The practitioner and the profession are closely related to each other. This relationship depends on the practitioner's livelihood, way of living, and ability to make decisions which helps position him/her in society providing him/her with a degree of self-esteem and affirmation. Moreover, this gained self-esteem and affirmation is a source of satisfaction towards the job social workers perform (al-Mabhough, 2000).

In addition, the role of social workers with multiple individuals and groups is important in order to meet the individual's needs through the interaction between the social worker and the individuals. The group has the power to influence the culture of the individuals through developed cultural aspects. Social workers teach how to deal with others in the group since it helps them gain the required behavior and develop their creative, physical, mental, social, and psychological capabilities, such as the need for security, stability, emotional equilibrium, self-control, love, and freedom from fear and anxiety. Upon reaching these needs, they then help them develop their ability to make the right decision and face problems. (Hasan, 2007). Perhaps the intended interaction here is that process by which the interconnection between individuals, groups, and institutions in society can be achieved, and consequently, positively alter the behavior and functions. Interaction is often called the concept of a face-to-face relation. Abdel Latif (2008) states that Parsons and Sheds view interaction as a behavior-oriented practice towards achieving specific goals and objectives that result in satisfying the drive to behavior, while Viper considered that the basic unit of analysis of society is the active person. In light of the interaction theory, the researcher sees that when the client faces a problem and senses an imbalance in the interaction process, then the social worker has a fair opportunity to intervene in restoring his balance.

In addition, there is a theory that explains interaction as well, which is the social exchange theory. It comes to satisfy a set of concepts about the nature of the interaction between human groups and indicates that the interaction comes in its simplest form. It is based on the idea that social behavior is an exchange process, a cost-benefit analysis, where people are valued in regard to their degree of interactions. It weights people's

performance in life activities, leading them to reach the highest possible level of benefit and lower costs to the least possible extent. All humans' behaviors are affected by the desire of individuals and their endeavor to satisfy their needs by exchanging services, such as a doctor providing health services to community members in exchange—in terms of money—for his needs to purchase vegetables and fruit as well as acquire services from others (Suleiman, H & Bahr, 2005). The researcher also believes that social exchange is required in most individuals' transactions since most of them prefer to decrease their costs to gain social benefits. Hence, the main role of social workers here is to guide them to the way for accomplishing these benefits.

Research in Social Work

Some researchers consider doing research in social work a method to understand the profession of social work, while some consider it a necessity to develop the profession itself. In fact, research in social work is not different from research in other fields or other sciences in terms of origins, institutions, curricula, and tools. According to Khater (2006), in 1960, McDonald said that, "the contribution of social research [is] in developing the knowledge building of the profession." Moreover, most researchers in social work try to add to its theoretical truth plausible applications since they are not satisfied with only its theoretical side but need true applied practices. Therefore, based on Graiba (2008), these applied researches try to reach practical solutions to problems and attitudes within society (as cited in Khater, 2006). Contemporary social work is distinguished by the following:

- Using scientific methods and social research to investigate the causes and factors that lead to social problems, as well as using research methods to measure the causes of the problems to develop a plan of action.
- Focusing on social relations in all their forms and all aspects of the surrounding environment.
- Defending the rights of citizens and ensuring a decent life for humans.
- Interacting with the fields of medicine, mental health, juvenile, personal status courts, and many other areas.

- Promoting the interest in preparing a generation of trained social workers to meet the needs of modern civilization development.
- Focusing on the contemporary structural trend, which is based on directing social interaction towards avoiding the occurrence of various social problems (Khater, 2006: 170-170).

The social work field is distinguished by its practices, principles, knowledge, and reliance on behavioral and social sciences. Social workers realize that there is no comprehensive theory to explain the social problems they encounter in the field. Social workers must depend on a number of theories in behavioral and social sciences to carry on their professional intervention (Rashwan, 2006: 40-41).

Professional Ethics

The ethical mindset behind the profession of social work represents the philosophy and framework that support it, which is further highlighted by the actions and behaviors of social workers in different situations. The major focus of a society is to deal with the individuals who form the core of a society. Societies, in general, derive their values from providing assistance to those individuals and preserving their human dignity. Assisting and sharing mutual dependence between the society and the individuals do not lower the value of any of the parties involved but instead reinforce it and promote mutual responsibility and individual differences. Society is responsible for satisfying the needs of its members. They have the right to equal opportunities, given that the individual is willing to change—in terms of behavior and practices—and able to endorse these changes (Sarhan, 2006: 185-18). Moreover, the profession of social work could reach its highest status by developing the practitioners' scientific and practical skills in light of contemporary global trends and the commitment to apply the principles and values of professional practice according to the ethical code (Skeet, 2017). Hence, the researcher believes that the ethics of the profession are similar to that of the vast majority of professions that deal with individuals and groups, such as the medical professions, health, and educational professions, as well as others. Consequently, social workers must always apply these ethics in their professional practice.

The Study Problem and Questions

The difficulties of learning and practicing the profession of social work are gathering an increased interest in conducting studies and researchers worldwide. Researchers tried to tackle the topic from various sides; however, in order to learn more about these difficulties that societies in general face, the researcher sought the need for a deeper investigation into the topics of learning and practicing the profession of social work in Palestine and later presented some recommendations. Thus, it becomes important for the study to answer the following main question:

What are the difficulties of learning and practicing the profession of social work in Palestine from the viewpoint of social workers and the ways to overcome them?

As for the sub-questions, they are as follows:

- What are the difficulties of learning the profession of social work in Palestinian universities?
- What are the difficulties in relation to scientific research in the field of social work?
- What are the difficulties in training practices in the field of social work?
- What are the difficulties of development and qualification in the field?
- What are the difficulties in relation to employment in social work fields?
- What are the ways to overcome and mechanisms to face these difficulties from the viewpoint of social workers?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the difficulties of learning and practicing the profession of social work. It specifically aims to examine the following objectives:

- Identifying the difficulties related to learning the profession of social work in Palestinian universities.
- Knowing the difficulties related to scientific research in the field of social work.
- Monitoring the difficulties related to training in the field of social work.
- Highlighting the difficulties related to development and qualification in the field.

- Identifying the difficulties related to employment in social work areas.
- Accessing ways to overcome these difficulties and learn about the mechanisms to face them.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study is to shed light on the following:

- **The scientific importance** that benefits decision-makers in Palestinian universities, seeking assistance in applying the recommendations and suggestions reached by the study to achieve the required development.
- **The practical importance** that will reach beneficial results for specialists in the field of social work.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher conducted this study within the following limitations:

- **Human limitation:** The sample of the study consisted of social workers who are working in various social work institutions.
- **Time limitation:** The study was conducted during the year 2020 (from January until the end of April)
- **Place limitation:** The study was conducted in the Gaza strip.

Study Methodology

Based on the nature of this study, the researcher used the descriptive approach to fulfill the requirements of the study as well as observe and analyze the research problem and its reality in an attempt to describe, interpret and predict the results. The researcher found that this approach is the most effective one for this type of study.

Population of the Study

The study population consists of social workers who work at various social work institutions in Gaza Strip.

Sample of the Study

The study sample consists of (80) social workers working in the social work field, distributed over 12 institutions. Six to seven social workers were selected from every institution. In addition, the researcher used the available

sampling method due to the difficulty of using random sampling, as the population of the study cannot be restricted and due to the lack of official statistics on the number of social workers in Palestine, especially in the Gaza Strip. The nature of the researcher's work with these institutions—conducting a field training that targets university students at these intuitions—helped in designing a fieldwork guidebook that suits the purpose of the study. The institutions that were included in the study are:

- The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS)
- Al-Amal Institute for Orphans
- Balsam, for Social Rehabilitation
- AISHA Association for Women and Child Protection
- The National Center for Community Rehabilitation
- The General Union for People with Disability
- Al-Noor Charity
- The Working Women Association
- Elmostaqbal Palestine Institution for Cerebral Palsy
- The Women's Activity Center in Elshatie
- Al-Amal Association for the Handicapped
- The National Rehabilitation of the Disabled Association

The reasons for choosing these institutions were the following:

- These institutions are known and have a long history of addressing many social cases and providing their services to many people in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, they provide practical training for students of various specializations in social work under the supervision of a professional team of social workers.
- The work of these institutions includes the vast majority of the fields in social work.

Tools of the Study

The study used a questionnaire as the main tool for data collection to study the difficulties of learning and practicing social work in Palestine from the viewpoint of social workers. The researcher developed a questionnaire based on previous literature reviews and studies. The

questionnaire was composed of (36) questions, divided into six core areas, and every area is divided into six paragraphs, as shown in Table 4. The answers from the questionnaire were based on the Likert scale five-response categories, as shown in Table 1.

Procedures of the Study

This chapter provides an insight into the statistical measures that were followed to analyze the data of the study, as detailed below.

• Statistical Methods

The researcher used the SPSS program to extract simple iterative tables and data percentages. They were later subjected to interpretation. Qualitative analysis was conducted to fulfill the goal of the study. The approved criteria determined the length of cells in five points, Likert scale, through calculating the range between degrees (5-1=4), then dividing it by the largest value (4/4=0.8). The result was then added to the lowest value, which is the correct one (1), in order to determine the upper limit of this cell. The study determined the degree of approval according to the approved test, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Approved Criteria of the Study

Degree of Approval	Relative Weight	Cell Length	Level
Strongly Disagree	From 36% or less	From 1.00 - 1.80	low
Disagree	More than 36% -52%	From 1.81 - 2.60	
Neutral	More than 52% -68%	From 2.61 - 3.40	Medium
Agree	More than 68% -84%	From 3.41 - 4.20	High
Strongly Agree	More than 84% - 100%	From 4.21 - 5.00	

• Reliability and Validity of the Study

The validity of the study results was verified by peer-reviewers, who provided feedback that was taken into consideration in the final measurement process. The reliability of the study and its different core areas were measured through Cronbach's alpha measure of internal coefficient, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of Cronbach's Alpha Measure of Internal Coefficient of the Study

Self-validity	Alpha Cronbach	Number of the Questions
.846	.716	30

Table 2 indicates the accepted percentage of reliability (.716) and the percentage of self-

validity (.846). It means that the questionnaire has a suitable level of reliability and validity.

The Study Sample Properties

The researcher used the SPSS program to extract simple iterative tables, percentages, and the study sample properties shown in Table 3, as follow:

Table 3 Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Age	22-25	24	30.0
	26-30	39	48.8
	31-40	17	21.3
	Total	80	100.0
Gender	Male	50	62.5
	Female	30	37.5
	Total	80	100.0
Governorate	Northern Gaza	8	10.0
	Gaza	30	37.5
	Middle of Gaza	7	8.8
	Khan Younis	21	26.3
	Rafah	14	17.5
Total	80	100.0	
Qualification	Diploma of Social Work	7	8.8
	Bachelor of Social Work	50	62.5

Experience	Bachelor of Sociology	18	22.5
	Postgraduate Studies	5	6.3
	Other studies related to social work or sociology, such as Psychological Guidance	-	-
	Total	80	100.0
	1-3 years	19	23.8
Institution	4-7 years	43	53.8
	8-12 years	18	22.5
Total	80	100.0	
Institution	Primary of Social Work	80	100.0
	Secondary of Social Work	-	-
	Total	80	100.0

Findings and discussion

This chapter provides a detailed account of the main results of the study in order to answer the study's questions, as shown in Table 4.

The extracted iterative table related to each core area of the tool of the study and the results are shown below:

Table (4) Means and the Percentages of the Study Tool

The Core Area	The Core Area's Means "%"	Number of Paragraphs	Paragraphs	Degree of Approval	Frequency	%	Means	%	Rank										
1-Learning Difficulties	3.431 (68.62)	1	I was taught by professors who are not specialized in social work.	Disagree	8	10	3.55	71	3										
				Neutral	29	36													
				Agree	34	43													
				Strongly agree	9	11													
				Total	80	100													
				2	I had difficulties in understanding the courses related to social work.	Disagree				14	18	3.2875	65.8	5					
						Neutral				29	36								
						Agree				37	46								
						Total				80	100								
						3				I had no access to the university's various social work departments.	Disagree				21	26	2.925	58.5	6
Neutral	44	55																	
Agree	15	19																	
Total	80	100																	
4	I have found a significant difference between social work courses, which I studied at the university, and the ones taught to my colleagues in other universities.	Disagree	7				8.8	3.4625	69.3		4								
		Neutral	36				45												
		Agree	30	38															
		Strongly agree	7	8.8															
		Total	80	100															
		5	My teachers did not link theory with practice during lectures.	Neutral	28		35					3.65	73	2					
				Agree	52	65													
				Total	80	100													
				6	My professors did not increase my motivation to work in the field of social work after graduation.	Disagree	8			10					3.7125	74.3	1		
						Neutral	21			26									
Agree	37					46													
Strongly agree	14					18													
Total	80					100													
2-Research Difficulties	3.079 (61.58)					7	I had no opportunities at the university to participate in research on social work.	Disagree	21	26	3.2							64	4
								Neutral	29	36									
		Agree	23					29											
		Strongly agree	7					8.8											
		Total	80					100											
		8	The university graduation project was not on an area of social work.	Strongly disagree	24			30	1.7125	34.3		5							
				Disagree	55			69											
				Neutral	1			1.3											
				Total	80			100											
				9	The university did not conduct a sufficient amount of studies and research in the field of social work.			Disagree					7	8.8	3.55	71	1		
Neutral	36					45													
Agree	23					29													
Strongly agree	14					18													
Total	80					100													
10	Universities do not have postgraduate studies in the field of social work.					Disagree	14	18			3.4125		68.3	2					
		Neutral	31			39													
		Agree	23			29													

The Core Area	The Core Area's Means “%”	Number of Paragraphs	Paragraphs	Degree of Approval	Frequency	%	Means	%	Rank
3- Training Difficulties	3.35 (67.00)	11	My institution did not carry out any scientific research related to the field of social work.	Strongly agree	12	15	3.4	68	3
				Total	80	100			
		12	My university did not train me efficiently on research methods of social work.	Disagree	14	18	3.2	64	4
				Neutral	28	35			
		13	I did not receive an adequate field training in all areas of social work.	Agree	30	38	3.5375	70.8	2
				Strongly agree	8	10			
		14	I have found a lack of interest from the supervisors of the field training at the designated institutions.	Total	80	100	3.3625	67.3	3
				Disagree	14	18			
		15	The university's field-training supervisor did not follow up with or guide me adequately during the training.	Neutral	36	45	3.7875	75.8	1
				Agree	30	38			
		16	Institutions that train social workers efficiently were not available.	Total	80	100	3.1875	63.8	5
				Disagree	14	18			
		17	Training period was not sufficient to gain experience and skills.	Strongly disagree	8	10	3.35	67	4
				Neutral	24	30			
		18	I have found a huge gap between what I learned in theory at the university and what I had found in the field.	Agree	39	49	2.875	57.5	6
				Strongly agree	4	5			
		19	I have not received social work training since the beginning of my work at the institution.	Total	80	100	2.8125	56.3	6
				Strongly disagree	9	11			
20	I was not nominated to attend any workshop or conference in the field of social work by those in charge.	Disagree	14	18	3.175	63.5	1		
		Neutral	42	53					
21	I was not asked to do a workshop or a scientific symposium in the field of social work.	Agree	13	16	3.0625	61.3	2		
		Strongly agree	2	2.5					
22	No expert in the field was hosted to provide me with adequate professional support.	Total	80	100	2.85	57	5		
		Disagree	4	5					
23	I did not receive technical supervision, follow-up, nor direction by specialists in the field at my institution.	Neutral	12	15	2.8875	57.8	4		
		Agree	22	28					
24	I was not encouraged to complete graduate studies in the field of social work.	Strongly agree	42	53	3.0375	60.8	3		
		Total	80	100					
25	I have found it difficult to find a suitable and fixed job in social work field.	Disagree	3	3.8	2.65	53	4		
		Neutral	32	40					
26	I did not work in the field in which I wanted to fulfill my professional aspirations.	Agree	15	19	2.8125	56.3	3		
		Strongly agree	30	38					
5- Employment Difficulties	2.792 (55.84)	25	I have found it difficult to find a suitable and fixed job in social work field.	Total	80	100	2.65	53	4
				Strongly disagree	4	5			
26	I did not work in the field in which I wanted to fulfill my professional aspirations.	Disagree	37	46	2.8125	56.3	3		
		Neutral	23	29					
26	I did not work in the field in which I wanted to fulfill my professional aspirations.	Agree	15	19	2.8125	56.3	3		
		Strongly agree	1	1.3					
26	I did not work in the field in which I wanted to fulfill my professional aspirations.	Total	80	100	2.8125	56.3	3		
		Strongly disagree	1	1.3					
26	I did not work in the field in which I wanted to fulfill my professional aspirations.	Disagree	22	28	2.8125	56.3	3		
		Neutral	49	61					

The Core Area	The Core Area's Means “%”	Number of Paragraphs	Paragraphs	Degree of Approval	Frequency	%	Means	%	Rank		
6- Ways to Overcome Difficulties	2.96 (59.20)	31	Recruit specialized professors in the field of social work to teach at Palestinian universities.	Agree	7	8.8	2.9125	58.3	2		
				Strongly agree	1	1.3					
				Total	80	100					
				27	I did not have any opportunity to volunteer in one of the various social work institutions.	Strongly disagree				1	1.3
						Disagree				14	18
						Neutral				60	75
						Agree				1	1.3
						Strongly agree				4	5
				Total	80	100					
				28	The university did not help me to find a job in the field.	Strongly disagree				7	8.8
						Disagree				29	36
						Neutral				32	40
						Agree				11	14
						Strongly agree				1	1.3
				Total	80	100					
				29	The university has not contacted me since I graduated from the field.	Strongly disagree				2	2.5
						Disagree				26	33
						Neutral				38	48
						Agree				13	16
						Strongly agree				1	1.3
				Total	80	100					
				30	I did not get proper promotion opportunities in the institution because of majoring in social work.	Strongly disagree				5	6.3
						Disagree				22	28
						Neutral				30	38
						Agree				19	24
						Strongly agree				4	5
				Total	80	100					
				31	Recruit specialized professors in the field of social work to teach at Palestinian universities.	Disagree				30	38
						Neutral				22	28
						Agree				18	23
						Strongly agree				10	13
						Total				80	100
				32	Request the assistance of experts and coordinate with other Arabic universities in the field of social work.	Disagree				51	64
						Agree				13	16
						Strongly agree				16	20
						Total				80	100
33	Improve and develop field-training opportunities at universities and various social work institutions.	Disagree	40	50							
		Neutral	22	28							
		Agree	4	5							
		Strongly agree	14	18							
		Total	80	100							
34	The need for universities to communicate with graduates of social work to provide opportunities of employment, further courses, and support.	Disagree	30	38							
		Neutral	22	28							
		Agree	16	20							
		Strongly agree	12	15							
		Total	80	100							
35	Continuously help students through support institutions and technical supervisors.	Disagree	47	59							
		Neutral	27	34							
		Agree	1	1.3							
		Strongly agree	5	6.3							
		Total	80	100							
36	Create regular recreation opportunities to alleviate the pressure that specialists endure in the field.	Strongly disagree	1	1.3							
		Disagree	33	41							
		Neutral	14	18							
		Agree	16	20							
		Strongly agree	16	20							
Total	80	100									

Extracting the means of the study tool

The researcher extracted the means of the study tools, as mentioned in Table 5.

Table (5) Means of the Study Tools

Item Means	Mean	No. of Items	The Relative Wight
	3.125	30	62.5

This table indicates the relative weight of the summary items statistics means for all the core areas' paragraphs. The total relative weight of the paragraphs is medium. In reference to the approved criteria of the study, Table 1, we find that the percentage is (62.5%). This may indicate the

number of difficulties these social workers face in the education they receive at the universities and the number of other professional difficulties mentioned in Table 4. In addition, the result mostly agrees with Ellaham's study (2019) and disagrees with Eshtaia's study (2012), as well as Coleman's study (2008).

Findings and discussion of the result related to the study questions are shown below.

a. The main question

What are the difficulties of learning and practicing the profession of social work in

Palestine from the viewpoint of social workers and the ways to overcome them?

In order to answer the first question of this study, the researcher calculated the means and the percentages, as shown in Table (4).

The results shown in Table 4 refer to the ratio of the summary items statistics. It is noted that the percentages came as follows; learning difficulties (68.62 %), training difficulties (67 %), scientific research difficulties (61.58%), development difficulties 59.42 %, employment difficulties (55.84 %), and the ways to overcome them (59.2 %). The researcher attributes these difficulties to the localization of the social work profession in Palestine, as it came late, as well as the consequences of employment in social work institutions. In addition, it was noted that social workers have different working experiences; many of them depend on themselves in skills development as they tend to portray their institutions in the best image possible while filling out the questionnaire.

b. The sub-questions

In order to answer the sub-questions of the study, the researcher calculated the study's means and the percentages, as shown in Table 4. The following are the sub-questions and their answers as follows:

- **What are the difficulties related to learning the profession of social work at Palestinian universities?**

Table 4 shows the results of the first core area, which is related to the difficulties of learning. The percentage of learning difficulties is 68.62%. Paragraph 6 included the professors who did not help social workers in increasing their motivation to work in the field of social work after graduation (74.25%). Paragraph 5 indicated the teachers who did not link theory with practice during the university lectures with a percentage of 73%. Paragraph 1 provided the responses of those who were taught by professors who are not specialized in social work with a percentage of 71%. These results agree with Ibrahim's study (2017) and disagree with Eshtaia's study (2012). The researcher attributes this to the qualifications of the teachers in the past who were not specialized in social work and the lack of a suitable teaching method. The researcher believes that in case the

research had been conducted on the recent social workers who completed their education and obtained jobs, then the difficulties facing social workers in Palestine would have been less or different. Moreover, education instability in the Palestinian society should be taken into consideration, as well as the impact of the occupation.

- **What are the difficulties related to scientific research in the field of social work?**

The second core area included the difficulties related to scientific research in social work, which was 61.58%. Paragraph 9 indicated to the insufficient amount of studies and research in the field of social work at universities was at 71%. In addition, the percentage of 68.25% in paragraph 10, indicated the rate of absence of postgraduate studies in the field of social work at universities. Moreover, the percentage of 68% in paragraph 11 indicated the rate of the lack of scientific research related to the field of social work at institutions. This result agrees with Monwar's study (2014). The rest of the percentages were as shown in Table 4. The researcher attributes these results to the shortage of scientific research funding resources. They are not available at the majority of the social work institutions. Besides, the economic condition plays a vital role regarding this point. All of these factors surely decrease the motivation of social workers and exacerbate the difficulties related to this item.

- **What are the difficulties related to training in the field of social work?**

The third core area is related to the difficulties of training, which was 67%. Paragraph 15 indicated that the university field-training supervisor did not follow or guide the social workers adequately during the universities' training, which percentage was 75.75%. Moreover, paragraph 30 revealed the rate of not providing adequate field training in all areas of social work, which was 70.75%. Paragraph 14 indicated that the lack of interest by the supervisors in the training institutions where the social workers train at was 67.25%. This result agrees with Elrentesy's study (2018) as well as Elarab and al-Rawashdeh's study (2016). These results call for the training institutions to follow up

with the supervisors and the need to train students on the various social work fields. The researcher attributes the lack of interest in training supervisors at these institutions to them not obtaining returns or rewards for the training they provide and only obtaining certificates of appreciation that are granted by the universities interested in developing the field training process.

- **What are the difficulties related to the development in the field?**

The fourth core area is related to the difficulties of development in social work, which were at (59.42%). Paragraph 20 revealed that social workers were not nominated by those in charge to attend any workshop or conference in the field of social work, with a percentage of 63.5%. Moreover, paragraph 21 indicated the rate of not participating in workshops or scientific symposiums in the field of social work, which was at 61.25%. In addition, paragraph 24 revealed that 60.75% of the participants were discouraged from completing graduate studies in the field of social work. These results agree with Ibrahim's study (2018) and Lawson et al.'s study (2014). The results indicate the urgent need for social workers to attend workshops, conferences, scientific symposiums and participate with their colleagues in conducting research activities in the field of social work.

- **What are the difficulties related to employment in the social work field?**

The fifth core area is related to the difficulties of employment in social work, which was at 55.84%. Paragraph 30 indicated that 58.75% of the participants did not get proper promotion opportunities because of the social work major at these institutions. In addition, 58.25% of the participants in paragraph 27 did not have any opportunity to become volunteers in social work institutions - this could be due to favoritism. Moreover, 56.25% of participants in paragraph 26 did not work in the field in which they wanted to fulfill their professional aspirations due to the difficulties they face in the social work field. This result agrees with Monwar's study (2014). The researcher attributes the difficulties of

employment to the community's lack of recognition of its need for this profession in many institutions, such as schools, hospitals, factories, and government institutions, which forces some of the graduates to work in other fields.

- **What are the ways and mechanisms to overcome these difficulties from the viewpoint of social workers?**

Finally, the sixth core area included approaches to overcome the difficulties, which was at 59.2%. Paragraph 36 indicated that 63.25% of the participants think they need entertainment and recreation opportunities as well as self-care days to mitigate the pressure that social workers endure. In addition, paragraph 34 revealed that 62.5% of the participants believe that universities should keep in contact with graduates in the field of social work to provide opportunities for employment and support through offering further courses and experience. Paragraph 31 indicated the necessity of recruiting specialized professors in social work to teach at local universities. Paragraph 32 showed that 58.5% of participants think it is important to request the assistance of experts and coordinate between Arab universities in the field of social work. Moreover, paragraph 33 indicated the need for improving and developing the field-training opportunities at the universities and various social work institutions, which was at 58%. Paragraph 35 indicated the need for helping and supporting students through support institutions and technical supervisors. These results indicated the urgent need by social workers for continuous development and recreation opportunities (helping the helper). The rest of the percentages were as shown in Table 4. This result agrees with Lawson's study (2014) and other studies¹.

Recommendations

Despite these results, which expressed the sample's need for many services and the number of obstacles they face, further studies should focus on the unemployed social workers as they need more services. In light of the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

¹ It is worth noting that master's and doctorate degrees in social work were not available in the Palestinian universities at the time of this study. In (2019), Bethlehem University developed a master's degree in social work.

Al-Quds Open University and the Islamic University also developed a master's degree in social work. It was approved to start next semester, in (2020).

- To direct the attention of social workers to the importance of claiming their rights and changing people's attitudes towards the profession of social work while providing services to the public. This may urge society to recognize its need for the social work profession. Moreover, this would contribute to the localization of the profession of social work.
- To recruit specialists at local universities to improve and develop the departments and faculties of social work. Moreover, there is a need to pay attention to the training process and connect it theories with practices as well as motivate students to work in the field of social work while informing them of its various fields through the training supervisors at the institutions. The need for the development of the training field requires concerted efforts between all universities. In addition, there is a need for networking with institutions to develop plans to overcome the difficulties that social workers face.
- To invite specialists from Arab and international universities to attend workshops to discuss the planning and implementation mechanisms of training agendas and to exchange experience in this regard.
- To create an integrated guidebook on practicing the profession of social work in Palestine. It should be developed by specialists who work in the field of social work to be in line with the specificity of the Palestinian society. It would help supervise the guidebook practices' application in the field while enriching the research and measuring the quality of the services provided in the field. Moreover, the guidebook would help select competent people to work in the profession, continuously assess and develop their performance, and make sure they adhere to the work ethics.
- To invite ministers and public officials to lectures and workshops to explain the importance of social workers' jobs in their areas.
- To conduct workshops to develop theoretical and practical social work teaching methods, with the participation of international experts.
- To create a network between the social workers and the universities through different training workshops and keep them updated with the new developments in the field of social work.

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