

Research Trends in Social Work in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The research points out that most of the studies in social work in KSA are individual researches and that the number of Saudi female researchers in social work is increasing to approach the number of male researchers. The research was mostly descriptive, using the two types of social survey, the sample and the comprehensive. The most frequently used tool in collecting data was the questionnaire. The research also indicates that there is an extreme shortage in experimental and the evaluative research. The most important issues on which the research focused were the issues of professional practice of social work, as such, the social workers were the highest category that were studied through these researches. In addition, most studies were conducted in Riyadh, indicating a need to broaden the scope of the spatial field where the research in social work is conducted to include the various areas and cities of the Kingdom.

Keywords: Trends Social work research-Saudi Arabia

Introduction

The practice of social work began in Saudi Arabia in 1955, through the employment of two social workers to supervise school social activities (Al Saud, 1986: 69). In 1970, certified social workers were employed to develop guidelines for social work education. It began with specific social workers in schools for girls (Alobikan, 1981: 78). Then the practice of social work expanded to many areas such as the care of teenagers and adolescences and those with special needs, medical care, charity activity, development and other fields. The expansion created a need to establish educational institutions to graduate social workers of both genders. This led to the creation of an Institute for social work under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Affairs. At an academic level, it was followed by the establishment of graduate programs at Saudi Universities (Al Saud, 1986:82). In addition, students were sent abroad for further higher studies related to social work and to develop, establish and acquire additional skills, knowledge and experience they can apply back in their country.

Besides their educational role, social workers were also involved in academic research in a great variety of disciplines involving social work and its positive impact on the society. Due to the lack of a specialized periodical time for social work in Saudi Arabia, many Saudi academics indulged in publishing their research papers in Arabic periodicals from other countries, particularly in the famous Journal in Social Work from Helwan University, Egypt. Egypt is a well-known to be a pioneer in the field of social work and one of the oldest Middle Eastern countries to form academics specialized in this respective field. The aim of this study is to describe and find the research trends in social work in Saudi Arabia by performing a survey and finding analysis of the peer-reviewed literature in social work research published in "Studies in Social Work and Humanities" for the period 1999 – 2015. In order to meet these goals, this research paper aims at:

-Descriptive gender and participated researcher in the research" for the period 1999-2015.

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-Describe the methodical characteristics of the social work research concerning the type of study, the used methods, and the study of tools, issues, types of reference and most frequently used methods in researches pertaining to social work and practical fields.

Literature Review

As-Saghir (2000), found that the subject of the study consistently expressed three weak and positive attitudes related to coordination (the coordination between research centers in the universities. The coordination between research centers in the universities, the social non-academic institutions, and the coordination between academic research centers including social workers as well as social researchers. The positive attitude of the subject appeared clearly towards the third dimension of the coordination dimensions, which includes social workers as well as social researchers in the process of coordination. The results also revealed that the standard of the subject's attitudes towards academic research was weakly positive in general. The results established from the study assured that there were differences and varieties in the researcher's attitudes according to the variables of the workplace.

Al-Buraythin (2000), Pointed that

1. Weak relatedness between PhD dissertations and a variety of fields of practice, the spatial, temporal and human fields.
2. The infrequency of research using an experimental method and design.
3. The majority of the research recommendations were applicable and feasible.
4. The rarity of recommendations directed to the professional practitioner.

Muhammad (2005), Found that research on community organization in Egypt from 1996 to 2003 focused on the topics of organizations, urban development, popular participation, and leadership. It also found that the models most frequently used in research on professional intervention were initially, the models of local development, next the social work model and finally, the social planning model. The most frequently used statistical transactions were percentages, arithmetic mean, correlation, standard deviation and weighted mean. The general trends of community organization research from 1996 to 2003 were the activation of the organizations of civil society, development of slum areas and professional skills of the social organizer, local development, and women's issues in organizing community. In the conclusion, the study pointed out the unavailability of a research policy for the research on community organization.

Abu Zaid (2008). The findings of the study concluded that the issues of interest to researchers were housing, slums, the issues in the health field and related to education and that the categories in which the researchers were interested are those of staff/ workers, including family and children. As for the researcher's motives for their choice of research problem, they were primarily academic motives, followed by personal motives; ideological motives came third, followed by practical motives, which came last.

Social work researchers in KSA:

Social work emerged as a profession in KSA from 1955, the Ministry of Education (Ministry of A-Ma'aref then), sought the help of two social workers from Egypt to carry out the plan of the management of education and social activity. This led to the realization of the important role of the social worker for the students, hence, social work started to take its place in the educational, social, and medical and security institutions in the Saudi society.

Among the factors that affect the development of the profession of social work is the movement of social work at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the twentieth century. These changes resulted in the acceptance of the need for a profession that is able to deal practically with the emerging social problems. Apart from the theories which had been adopted by sociologists. The contribution of research to social work is exemplified by the establishment of an aware and organized thought process of the professional practice to achieve two goals simultaneously, where the aim of the first goal is to enrich the theoretical data of the profession. The second is to develop evidence-based practices that work to both present the best services and increase the efficiency of professional practitioners, as well as to develop the processes of professional interventions.

Others view that social work in KSA must focus on research, especially that which concerns measuring the results of professional intervention and perform studies and academic and field research, continuously taking into consideration each of the following:

1. The variable positions, the current changes and the resulting outcomes.

2. A large scale that is inclusive of all the categories, levels and areas.
3. The ability to predict.

Methodology

The study is descriptive.

Tool of study: Research content analysis guide that includes the following points:

- a. Identifying the topic: i.e., analyzing the social work research in KSA from 1999 to 2015.
- b. The research community: i.e., the study material that is subject to analysis.

The research community for this study was all the research studies that formed the study sample, which were published in the Periodical of the researches on Social Work and Humanities, Faculty of Social Work, Helwan University and the number of researches were 85.

The results:

Table No: (1). the years of publication of the researches of the sample study:

Year	Quantity	%
1999-2003	9	10.6
2008-2004	23	27.1
2012-2009	26	30.6
2015-2013	27	31.8
Total	85	100

The previous table shows that the most prolific period of publication for Saudi researchers was the most recent period from 2013 to 2015, where the percentage reached 31.8%, followed by the period from 2012 to 2009, with a percentage of 30.6%, and lastly the period between 1999 and 2003, with a percentage of 10.6%. This may be due to the natural increase in the numbers of Saudi University staff members in the Saudi Universities and the increase in the number of the researches presented by them. Also, this may be due to the recent current interest in the quality of education as one of the aspects of quality in the Saudi universities with a focused academic research. This interest from the authorities concerned with higher education in the Kingdom has facilitated the attendance at academic conferences whether inside the Kingdom or abroad.

Figure No: (2). The distribution of the study sample according to the specialty, number and type of researchers.

Specialty	Quantity	%	Author& Authored	C0-Quantity	%	gender	Quantity	%
Case work	10	11.8	One	74	87.1	Male	37	44.6
Group work	4	4.7	Two	9	10.6	Female	46	55.4
Community organization	22	25.9	Three	2	2.4	Total	*83	100
Fields of social work	10	11.8	total	85	100	*Some researches were co-authored		
Social work	32	37.6						
Social Planning	7	8.2						
Total	85	100						

The study results also point out that the male to female ratio of researchers is 55.4 to 44.6%, this may be because the only female faculty specializing in social work is "The Faculty of Social Work, Princess Nourah University", which is also one of the most ancient educational institutions in social work in KSA. In all the academic departments of social work, there is a branch for female students where the teaching staff is female. This helped to achieve the number of female researchers in social work, which exceeds the present rate of the staff members in the Saudi University where the women represent only one-third.

The table shows that generally, majority of research was in social work with a percentage of 37.6% followed by research on community organization method with a percentage of 25.9 %, the least amount of research was in group work with a percentage of 4.7%. This may be because social work in its present form is practiced with no specialty in a particular method. It may also be because most universities have a department that includes all the sub-majors in social work as a whole, and many of them lack higher studies in some departments. The previous table shows that most research was conducted by single authors (87.1%), while the rest were conducted by two authors and one research was done by three researchers.

This is a good initiative to start conducting collaborative research with a teamwork approach that may have positive results on research in the future.

Table no: (3). Distribution of the study sample according to the categories of clients relevant to the research:

<i>Serial</i>	<i>Issues</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Serial</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>%</i>	
1	Issues of Professional Practice of Social Work	22	25.9	1	Youth	3	3.5
2	Economic issues	8	9.4	2	woman	12	14.1
3	Women's Issues	7	8.2	3	Families	3	3.5
4	Youth issues	6	7.1	4	Social workers	18	21.2
5	Issues of the Quality of Social Work Education	7	8.2	5	Addicts	2	2.4
6	Issues of People with Special Needs	7	8.2	6	Members	1	1.2
7	Elderly issues	2	2.4	7	NGO's Workers	4	4.7
8	Social Defense Issues	5	5.9	8	Islamic Judges	1	1.2
9	Family Issues	7	8.2	9	Immigrants	2	2.4
10	Community development	12	14.1	10	Special needs	3	3.5
	homosexuality	2	2.4	11	Staff Members	9	10.6
Total		85	100%	12	orphans	2	2.4
				13	Theoretical	19	22.4
				14	elderly	1	1.2
				15	University students	1	1.2
				Total		85	100

The table shows that the issues of the professional practice of social work accounted for 25.9 % of the total number of researches. This may be attributed to the profession's recent introduction in KSA and ensuing discussion of professional issues that were already finalized in many other countries where social work has long been available, such as in the Egyptian society. Also, the unique nature of the Saudi society may have a role in the discussion and research around the nature of the professional role in a society characterized by its specific traits, for example, elderly issues came last in the order of frequency with a percentage of 2.4%, i.e., with only one study. This may be because the Saudi society, despite the aspects of modernity that characterize it, still holds fast to many customs and traditions, among which the respect for elderly who have a special status in society. As a result, no specific issues require study in this field unlike many other issues that need study due to the changes experienced by the society that affect all its patterns.

The table shows that the highest category being researched is the category of women which is (14.1%), and social workers with the same percentage. With respect to women, it is due to the availability of some female researchers as noted in Table no. (3). Hence, it is easy for them to conduct studies about women in a society that has special traditions of separating the two sexes. As for social workers, with the recent presence of the profession in the Saudi society, social workers might face some difficulties in the performance of their professional roles that require study and research to overcome. In addition, the direct contact of researchers with social workers through their field training in social work makes them especially aware of what the practitioners face in the field.

Table no: (4). The type of studies used and the number of variables for each research

Serial	Type of Study	Quantity	%	Serial	Variables	Quantity	%
1	Descriptive	29	75.3	1	One variable	37	63.8
2	Pilot	2	2.4	2	Two	20	34.5
3	Experimental	3	3.5	3	Three variables	1	1.7
4	Evaluative	3	3.5	Total		58	100
5	Theoretical	13	15.3				
Total		85	100				

The previous table shows that 75.3% of the research studies were descriptive while pilot studies represented 2.4%, experimental researches represented 3.5%, and evaluative researches represented 3.5%. What is noted here is the infrequency of the evaluative and the experimental studies despite their importance. This may be due to the difficulties in performing such studies which may require approval from many places.

Table no: (5). The methods and the tools used in research

Serial	Type of Method	Quantity.	%	Serial	* 58=	Quantity	%
1	Comprehensive social study	29	34.1	1	A questionnaire form	57	67.1
2	Comprehensive sample study	31	36.5	2	An interview guide	3	3.5
3	Experimental Method	3	3.5	3	Measurement	5	5.9
4	Content Analysis	2	2.4	4	Unidentified	15	17.6
5	Theoretical	18	21.2	5	Do not apply	5	5.9
6	Case Study	2	2.4	*Some researchers used more than one tool			
Total		85	100				

The previous table shows that the majority of research studies were conducted using the social survey method whether comprehensive (34.1%) or with a sample (36.5%), whereas the case study method was used in only 2.2%. This may be partially due to the suitability of this method for many types of studies, especially the descriptive, which was prevalent in this research. The absence of the other methods points to the necessity of working with a variety of methods in research and conducting studies characterized by more depth in social work in the Saudi society. The table also shows that the tool most frequently used in research was the questionnaire with a percentage of 67.1%. As there were studies that used more than one tool. In contrast, 17.6% of the studies did not identify a tool for collecting data, which reflects a methodological disorder in the research.

Table No: (6). The category of the research's contribution to the theoretical heritage of social work and the type of references used.

Serial	Type of results	Quantity	%
1	Recommendations	57	67.1
2	Proposal	18	21.2
3	Improving the validity of empirical hypotheses.	5	5.9
4	Planning indicators	2	2.4
5	A suggested practical model	1	1.1
6	A guide	1	1.2
7	Professional intervention program	1	1.2
Total		85	100

The table shows that 67.1% of the research resulted in recommendations while 21.2% presented a proposal and 5.9% offered validating hypotheses.

Table No: (7). The spatial field and the types of institutions where research was conducted

Serial	Spatial field	Quantity	%	Serial	Institutions	Quantity	%
1	Riyadh	65	76.5	1	Universities	33	38.8
2	Makkah Al-Mukarramah	5	5.9	2	Economic Establishments	3	3.5
3	Al-Qassim	4	4.7	3	Charitable societies	22	25.9
4	Al-Madeenah Al-Munawwarah	1	1.2	4	Residual institutions	3	3.5
5	Jeddah	3	3.5	5	Youth Hostel	1	1.2
6	All the KSA Cities	2	2.4		Penal institutions	2	2.4
7	Eastern area	2	2.4	6	Schools	8	9.4
8	Theoretical researches	3	3.5	7	Hospitals	3	3.5
	total	85	100	8	Rehabilitation centers	5	5.9
				9	Do not apply	5	5.9
				Total		85	100

The table shows that 76.5% of the research studies were applied in Riyadh. This is because it is the capital city, hence, it gets the greatest attention. Furthermore, it has three places where social work is taught. These are The Faculty of Social Work, Princess Norah University, the Department of Social Studies, King Saud University and the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Al-Imam University. As for the types of institutions, universities came first (38.8%), followed by charitable societies (25.9%).

Conclusion

The period from 2009 to 2012 was the most prolific period for research studies in social work in KSA. This is related to the increase in the number of staff members of the Saudi Universities. In addition, integrated social work is the most frequently used professional method in social work research. This is attributable to the young age of the profession in the Kingdom and because social work was part of the academic departments of Arts or Education and did not have independent faculties. Thus, the education in social work did not give the researchers a chance to practice academic research in a full professional form. Hence, using integrated social work is a substitute for academic research. Most studies were conducted by single authors, though there were initiatives for bilateral and trilateral research. The female researchers contributed a significant percentage to these studies through their work as staff members in the Saudi University.

The researches were mostly descriptive and theoretical with few experimental or evaluative researches that are considered a way to construct the theoretical knowledge of social work. The researchers primarily used the social survey method, whether comprehensive or with a sample. This is consistent with the research based on descriptive studies. Consequently, the tool used in this type of research was the questionnaire.

The studies also depend on only one variable. The studied research was not based on any identified theory, which belittles the contribution of this research to support efficiently the theoretical framework of the profession in the Kingdom. The issues relating to the professional practice of social work were first of the issues that received attention from the researchers. The social specialists were the highest categories that were studied. The findings reached by the research varied from displaying the issues that were studied, to recommendations and setting proposals to validating empirical hypotheses. Most studies were based on references in both Arabic and English languages. Almost half of the research was applied in Riyadh, which is the Capital city, and has three places where social work is taught. Universities were the first spatial field for research in social work. This may be due to the ease of communication between researchers and students, whether men or women. In the other identified institutions, researchers may face difficulties in collecting data, due to the conservative customs and traditions in the Saudi society. The second most frequent location was charitable societies, which constitute one of the major fields of work for social work, hence, researchers find the opportunity to conduct their research in these institutions.

Recommendations

- Issuing a Saudi periodical specializing in social work research.
- Paying attention to experimental and evaluative research in social work.
- Working on the diversity of the tools used to collect data for research.
- Conducting research in more varied areas and cities of the Kingdom instead of focusing only on Riyadh.

- Relying more on the academic theories that emphasize the academic value of the research.

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Appendix

Table 1

Information of the Universities

No.	Name of university	College/department with social work program	Date of establishment	Location
1	King Saud University (KSU)	Faculty of Arts/Department of Social Studies/Division of Social Work Studies	1971	Riyadh
2	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU)	Faculty of Social Work	1975	Riyadh
3	Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU)	Faculty of Social Sciences/Department of Sociology and Social Work/Social Work Division	1982	Riyadh
4	King Faisal University, Al-Ahsaa (KFU)	Faculty of Arts / Department of Social Studies / Division of Social Work	1982	Al-Ahsaa
5	Umm Al-Qura University (UQU)	Faculty of Social Sciences/Social work Department	1984	Mekkah
6	University of Hail (UOH)	Faculty of Arts/Department of Social Studies/Social Work Division	2005	Hael
7	King Abdulaziz University (KAU)	Faculty of Arts/Department of Sociology and Social Work/Division of Social Work	2009	Jeddah

Table 2

Year	Quantity	%
2003-1999	9	10.6
2008-2004	23	27.1
2012-2009	26	30.6
2013-2015	27	31.8
Total	85	100

Table 3

Specialty	Quantity	%	No. of researchers	Quantity	%	gender	Quantity	%
Case work	10	11.8	One	74	87.1	men	37	43,5
Group work	4	4.7	Two researchers	9	10.6	women	46	54,1
Community organization	22	25.9	Three researchers	2	2.4	combined	2	1,2
Fields of social work	10	11.8	total	85	100	Total		100
Social work	32	37.6				Some researches were co-authored		
Social planning	7	8.2						
Total	85	100						

Table 4

Serial	Issues	Quantity	%	Serial	Category	Quantity	%
1	Issues of Professional Practice of Social Work	22	25.9	1	Youth	3	3.5
2	Economic issues	8	9.4	2	woman	12	14.1
3	Women's Issues	7	8.2	3	Families	3	3.5
4	Youth issues	6	7.1	4	Social workers	18	21.2
5	Issues of the Quality of Social Work Education	7	8.2	5	Addicts	2	2.4
6	Issues of People with Special Needs	7	8.2	6	Members	1	1.2
7	Elderly issues	2	2.4	7	NGO's Workers	4	4.7
8	Social Defense Issues	5	5.9	8	Islamic Judges	1	1.2
9	Family Issues	7	8.2	9	Immigrants	2	2.4
10	Community development	12	14.1	10	Special needs	3	3.5
	homosexuality	2	2.4	11	Staff Members	9	10.6
Total		85	100%	12	orphans	2	2.4
				13	Theoretical	19	22.4
				14	elderly	1	1.2
				15	University students	1	1.2
				Total		85	100

Table 5

Serial	Type of Study	Quantity	%
1	Descriptive	29	75.3
2	Pilot	2	2.4
3	Experimental	3	3.5
4	Evaluative	3	3.5
5	Theoretical	13	15.3
Total		50	100

Table 6

Serial	Type of Method	Quantity	%	Serial	* 58=	Quantity	%
1	Comprehensive social study	29	34.1	1	A questionnaire form	57	67.1
2	Comprehensive sample study	31	36.5	2	An interview guide	3	3.5
3	Experimental Method	3	3.5	3	Measurement	5	5.9
4	Content Analysis	2	2.4	4	Unidentified	15	17.6
5	Theoretical	18	21.2	5	Do not apply	5	5.9
6	Case Study	2	2.4	*Some researchers used more than one tool			
Total		56		100			

Table 7

Serial	Type of results	Quantity	%
1	Recommendations	57	67.1
2	Proposal	18	21.2
3	Improving the validity of empirical hypotheses.	5	5.9
4	Planning indicators	2	2.4
5	A suggested practical model	1	1.2
6	A guide	1	1.2
7	Professional intervention program	1	1.2
Total		85	100

Table 8

Serial	Spatial field	Quantity	%	Serial	Institutions	Quantity	%
1	Riyadh	65	76.5	1	Universities	33	38.8
2	Makkah Al-Mukarramah	5	5.9	2	Economic Establishments	3	3.5
3	Al-Qassim	4	4.7	3	Charitable societies	22	25.9
4	Al-Madeenah Al-Munawwarah	1	1.2	4	Residual institutions	3	3.5
5	All the KSA Cities	2	2.4	5	Youth Hostel	1	1.2
6	Jeddah	3	3.5	6	Penal institutions	2	2.4
7	Eastern area	2	2.4	7	Schools	8	9.4
8	Theoretical researches	3	3.5	8	Hospitals	3	3.5
Total		85	100	9	Rehabilitation centers	5	5.9
				10	Do not apply	5	5.9
				Total			100