

Conflict and conflict management in Social work in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: *Conflict is inevitable between top management and workers in working environment. Conflict in school social work in the KSA has remain one of the challenging phenomena to policy makers. The conflict normally occurred between social workers and other professionals like the teachers and top administrative staffs due to unclear role by the ministry on the social work as a profession. The Social work in schools has been considered as one of the professions that has emerged as a response to a range of pressing concerns such as rising behavioral problems and existence of other cultures. Though, most of literature regarding conflict and conflict management in social work are Eurocentric or American based, signifying that there was a limited study done on this issue in the KSA. This research intends to examine conflict and conflict management strategy in social work in the KSA and contributes to the limited available literatures. The study is fulfilled through the utilization of content analysis. Form the literatures the study understands that social worker in KSA faces a series of conflict in discharging their duties which includes conflict in role, conflict resulting from the negative perception, interpersonal conflict among the social workers and stress, and role ambiguity. In order to manage the conflict effectively, the study recommends that the policy makers should design a clear role, duty and responsibility for the social workers in the designated place of work and the school managements should also avoid mixing social work with teachings thereby recognizing and respecting the social workers at the work place (school).*

Keywords; *social work, conflict, management, role, work place.*

Introduction

In educational institutions conflict between professionals, both co-workers and beneficiaries are inevitable especially in social work. (Goian, et.al, 2018). Conflict can never be ignored as it is an indispensable feature of working as a team. Conflict can be described as a struggle or a dispute between people with conflicting needs, ideas, beliefs, values or objectives. Team conflict is inevitable; however, conflict outcomes aren't clearly defined. Conflict could increase and contribute to unproductive results, or conflict can be resolved in a beneficial way and lead to quality end products. Conflict is a result of behaviours. It constitutes an integral part of human life. Conflict always occurs when there is interaction. Conflict means an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and incomprehension. It is also linked to situations involving a conflicting interest between two rival groups. It can be defined as a discrepancy between two or more people or groups with each person or group trying to gain acquiescence of their views over others (Thakore, 2013). Conflict management on the other hand refers to the acquisition of conflict resolution skills, self-awareness about conflict modes, communication skills and the establishment of a conflict management structure in an organizational environment (Thakore, 2013).

Therefore, conflict in social work in the KSA is inevitable as it results to series of problems between the social workers and their top administrative and this is occurred as a consequence of undefined role and clear or specification of duties and responsibilities between the social worker and the working environment by the ministry of education. This issue has created a conflict in social work leading to stress, because social work is not recognized and downgraded. Systematic reviews of stress among social workers show that they typically encounter more stressors and experience relatively high levels of stress reactions when compared with normative populations (Coyle et al., 2005). Although there is evidence that social workers may experience higher levels of stress and resulting burnout than comparable occupational groups, the quantity and quality of empirical research of this problem is still weak, mostly supported only by anecdotal evidence, and without enough comparison with other occupational groups (Lloyd et al., 2002).

Though, the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), a country in Western Asia constituting the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula, was founded in 1925 by the establishment of the Directorate of Education. A year later, with an official order of law, the Directorate led the establishment of a central national government project. In 1927, the establishment was made to form the Knowledge Council. The principal aim of the establishment was to institute an educational system to supervise

education in the Hejaz region in the west of present-day Saudi Arabia. The country later expanded the development of the Directorate of Education from initially focusing only the Hijaz area, which later expanded to include all educational affairs throughout the country encompassing 323 schools from a beginning of only four. In 1952, the Ministry of Knowledge was established during the rule of King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud. The Ministry of Knowledge was an extension, upgrading and development of the Directorate of Knowledge. The Ministry was entrusted with the planning and supervision of general education for boys in three stages of education (elementary, middle and secondary). With the development of education in the KSA, there had been an increase in the number of students and schools throughout the country. The noble commitment of the Ministry in helping students and their families to cope up with social and behavioral problems was found to be necessary and timely (Ministry of education of Saudi Arabia, 2018).

In 1954, the Department of Social Education and Social Activity were established. Subsequent to the establishment of formal system of education in the KSA, the Ministry of Knowledge was rebranded to Ministry of Education. The Ministry developed social workers' specialist programs in schools responsible for building and developing social performances of students, as well as preventing students from falling into problems in misbehaviors that could lead to various deviations, as well as to overcome behavioral, family and social problems. Due to these problems, social cohesion may be affected and this may hinder academic performance. The Ministry, which holds the responsibility on the practice of social work, is the Ministry of Social Affairs but delegated the authority to the Social Welfare Agencies under its Ministry. The welfare agency continuously employing social workers for a long time, despite lack of monitoring, follow-up and weak identification of tasks, responsibilities and roles. This has led to poor professional performance and expected outputs. However, the placement of school social workers in the organizational structure of the school is commendable and appeared to be in the right direction. A social worker is considered as an educational, vocational and technical support to connect school, student, family and community at large (Albrithen, 2013). The program started with two colleges and one university, known as the King Saud University. Presently, the number has increased to seven universities with social work departments, especially those universities with master and doctoral degree programs. Six out of the seven universities are for both males and females whereas the Princess Noura bint Abdulrahman University, being reserved for females only.

Social work in schools has been considered as one of the professions that has emerged as a response to a range of pressing concerns such as rising behavioral problems and existence of other cultures brought in by foreign students especially in major cities. The social worker, while performing his professional obligations, gives assistance to students to benefit from the educational processes and helps school to achieve its roles and functions. Social work as a profession encounter a lot of conflict with the top management while discharging their responsibilities and this has become an unending challenge to government and policy makers in KSA. This conflict is psychosocial problem that constitutes three factors: affective conflicts (emotions), intellectual (on ways to analyze situations differently) and mix conflicts (both causes) (Negruti, 2012). However, there are numerous types of conflict, but in each of them the true cause must be identified, to succeed in resolving and restoring the effectiveness of communication (Pânișoara, 2003). This is to view that a cause of conflict in social work with other professions at the work place in the KSA is highly associated with lack of communication, unclear responsibility and role of social work by the Ministry of Education.

Problem statement

In the KSA social workers at school perform a lot of routine work, such as filling in the required records, writing reports which may require a lot of time to complete. Professionals may face conflicts between their roles as professionals and their duties as employees. Social workers, as professionals, always feel that they are not allowed to work due to many problems surrounding them such as administrative restrictions, inadequate level of training, inadequate professional form, and unclear roles. Working in such difficult situations, it is possible that the situation is not stable and the environment is not appropriate and encouraging for creativity. Social workers are most likely to separate their feelings and personal ideas from following the rules provided, professionally and practically (Sloan., et al ,2017). Al-Goaib (1988) point it out the challenges often faced by social workers when exercising their roles within the school is in relation with customs, traditions, family cohesion and privacy. There is no governing body or department in the Ministry of Education that serves as a substitute for social workers who defended their rights and looked at the challenges they faced in the field. This has resulted to many conflicts between the social workers and the top management in various school in the KSA. School social workers in most schools in the KSA do not operate under specific standards due to this conflicts. In fact, they operate as conventional social workers without paying attention to specific needs of school children. Specific standards for the KSA are totally absent (El Sendiony et al, 1987; Carrillo,2019).

In most institutions and especially in secondary schools, this has relegated the activities of social workers. The roles they perform in schools are unclearly defined and this has rendered their activities less important in the eyes of the schools and the community. The lack of a defined role for them to follow and what they actually do have created a vacuum and this has affected their obligations (Al saif 1991; Balobaid, Qari, & Al-Zaidan, 2016). Therefore, this study explore the social workers conflict and the strategies they adopt in managing those conflict while playing their roles in schools. On this justification, the researcher finds it necessary to conduct a study that explores conflict management between social work and counseling practices among social work in schools. In this regards, this study explore conflict management between social work and counseling practices among social workers in schools in the KSA using the available literatures.

Conflict theory

Social work in the 1960s was somewhat affected by dynamic thinking and simulation. Criticism was directed at the practice of social work that because it focuses on the individual and internal factors and hides the impact of the relationship between social issues and society. To achieve this criticism to confront social problems on a large scale and start defending rights. In the beginning of the 1970s began to use the perspective of conflict in social work and had an impact on the social work practice. The influence of sociologists on social work practice is less than the influence of psychology. But he gave the theory of conflict deriving Karl Marx (Marxism) is another dimension of social work practice and prejudice to social issues. It served as a support for social work practice and claiming and defending his rights. Parsons (1991) noted that one of the most important historical roles played by the social worker since 1970s is the role of the mediator in solving family disputes, disputes and disputes over child custody, a role derived from conflict theory.

Criticism of society became an important axis of social work, and demands for changes in many institutions began to benefit individuals and the profession in general. The conflict model also had an impact on the methods of doing work in social work. As the social and political fluctuations affected the necessity of moving towards this model. Where societies are characterized by differences, conflicts, and sometimes coercion to change. Conflicts that occur between groups or social classes within society based on considerations of strength and weakness will result in the victory of some, the acquisition of some privileges, and the loss of others (Gould, 1987). The theory of conflict provided a careful analysis of the society's situation, the difference between its classes and classes, and the identification of oppressed groups through their position within society. The theory gave an understanding of the different dimensions and how a distinction can be made between the conflicting groups based on different interests. The evolution of the use of conflict theory in social work to try to help persecuted people and those in a position of helplessness and vulnerability to be active in society. They can claim and obtain their rights. Contribute to changing and supporting, as well as changing the society to which they belong. Parsons (1991) noted that the effect of force and repression cannot be overlooked by the regime that has the most influence on the regime that has the least influence.

Findings

Conflicts

Based on the available literatures, the study understands that conflict in social work in the KSA can be categories into the following themes;

Role conflict

The concept role conflict relates to a collision between two or more roles or conflicting characteristics of an individual in the same role. Such misunderstandings may involve specific desires, needs, beliefs and attitudes. There can be two different types of role conflict: intrarole conflict, associated with incompatible specifications in the same role. And interrole conflict, referring to conflicting interests within the same person from separate roles (Allard, Wortley & Stewart, 2003). Ideally, Society is structured such that people and organizations have roles in all social structures, as well as social workers. A role is said to be a set of behaviors, expectations, and relationships based on the position that a person occupies. It is important for a person to learn to work as a member of a multidisciplinary team and to know the limits and requirements of the role. A professional requires not only to obtain qualifications and skills, but also to recognize his colleagues from other professions. Role theory emphasizes how people learn the roles attributed to them and understand the role attribute as well as the behaviors associated with it (Schofield, et al., 2013). Due to external forces and the different roles people held with different expectation, interest leads to conflicts with other professionals in the same working environment. In the KSA conflicting role emerge as a result of unclear specification of duty between the social workers and the teachers. It is shown that most of the teachers in KSA schools are given and play a role of social workers and at the same time a teacher. Because, they have the believe that as teachers they know the problems of their student far better than the professionals of social work. As such the social worker was left with nothing to do in the place of work. In most cases, the social workers tend not to report to their working place regularly as expected, because they have the feelings that their job is taken away from them. Even though, most of teachers lack the practice, skills and experience to carry out the social work properly. This has relegated the work of the social work in most schools thereby creating conflict between the two professions

Role ambiguity

The school social workers' role has been a subject for discussion for a long time (Costin, 1969; Kelly, Berzin, et al., 2010; Meares, 1977). According to Altshuler and Webb (2009), the role ambiguity of school social work adds to the underutilization and misinterpretation of services that are provided by school social work, since their clinical effort will likely be perceived having a strong link to the schools' overall mission, besides, their visibility in the services that they deliver is going to be reduced. Richard & Sosa (2014) role ambiguity might be experienced by school social workers as a result of their role having a lack of clarity, continually evolving, and being context-dependent, which could affect theirs have job satisfaction as well as performance. When expectations are ambiguous, role ambiguity will ensue among employees in a certain position making ambiguity that arises with ill-defined tasks and anticipated results (Kahn et al., 1964). This is resembling the role of the school social worker since there has not been a precise school social worker's role fixed or prescribed as the standards have been laid down via national organizations or states (Richard & Sosa 2014). Besides, school social workers could certainly experience role ambiguity as the

job descriptions are not always stating the role of a school social worker or adjust in accordance with the changes that take place in the educational policies that leave its effect on the role of a school social worker in a direct way (Richard & Sosa 2014).

When employees' role is not clear, they likely to undergo a reduction in their job satisfaction, stress, burnout, as well as increased tendencies towards withdrawal or turnover (Bebetsov, Theodorakis, & Tsigilis, 2007; Miles, 1975), which result in hostile effects on self-efficacy for these employees (Eys & Carron, 2001; Weiner, 2005) as well as a higher likelihood of leaving their job (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981). Additionally, according to Agresta (2004, 2006) role clarity is needed to both differentiate and comprehend the overlap in roles among the school social workers, psychologists, as well as counselors. Role ambiguity is another conflict distorting the profession of school social work in KSA. As a result of the unclear responsibility in the profession, many social workers have turndown, withdraw and many have switch to other professions. This has reduced the number of required skills personal in the profession of social work.

Conflict resulting from the negative perception of social workers by other staff

In addition to voicing concerns about the general lack of understanding about the roles of social workers, Nguyen et al.'s (2019) pointed out to the other staffs' concern about the potential "turf wars" between existing staff and social workers in the public sector settings. According to their study, more than a third of survey informants selected this concern as one of their top two reasons against creating additional positions for social workers in the public sector services. The reality demonstrates that many school social workers in KSA have the feeling that other professions have no respect or recognition to their jobs as people who help in administration and teaching, apart from their main duty. In fact, most of the administrative officers and some of the teachers sees the social work as not part of the school requirement or job needed. Moreover, most of the family of the students don't recognize the social work as people who help their children to grow socially and academically. Whenever, the parents have problem with their child performance or any social issue they tend to discuss it with the teachers than the social workers

Nguyen et al. described that they are worried that integrating social work as an independent profession might cause disharmony among existing staff and disruptions in the models of how they deal with things. The findings of their study revealed that other staff thought that social workers might take over their own tasks or those of other professionals. According to Dash & Mohan (2015), social work in schools is facing problems in involving teachers in the class and activities to make their programs sustainable. Their study found that many teachers consider social workers as their replacement and they engage themselves in other works when facilitators are there in the class. Social workers sometimes sense a lack of initiative from teachers' side, as the schools have the authority to say no to them anytime, they compromise now and then to sustain in the school (Dash & Mohan, 2015). Dash & Mohan reported social workers saying that school teachers expect help from them in administrative work, and many times it's a challenge for them to make headteachers believe in their values, methods, and activities.

Interpersonal conflict among the social workers and stress

Social workers throughout their work experience many interpersonal conflicts, both from communicating with other agencies, management, and services and from making communication with their clients in complex circumstances. According to Pines and Kafry (1978), indications are suggesting that social workers' stress is more contingent upon their interpersonal relations with clients and colleagues than it is on their intrinsic working conditions. Besides, a significant stressor for social workers found to be their relationships with other people (Bennett et al., 1993). Consequently, it might be helpful to look at interpersonal conflicts in the job stress context. According to Barki and Hartwick (2004) interpersonal conflict is defined as "a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals" (p. 234).

According to Vrgović's (2018) study, social workers not only reported higher stressor exposure but also displayed more skill when managing interpersonal conflicts than displayed by employees from other public institutions engaged in similar workshops. Vrgović (2018) maintained that formal education background that social workers often have open doors for them to manage interpersonal conflicts. Also, they frequently participate more in the activities of informal education, such as direct transfer of knowledge from their colleagues, and soft-skill training and workshops. Finally, based on their job choice and education, helping other people for most of them is probably interests them intrinsically, making them more inspired to constructively find resolutions for interpersonal conflicts (Vrgović, 2018).

The roles that social workers play in schools differ from place to place. Social workers devote their energy and time to working with students individually or collectively. They also often meet the psychological and social needs of students (Webber, 2018). School social workers, who are overburdened with the primary responsibility for counseling and guidance, carry out their tasks of "stand at the interface not only with students and schools," but also parents, families' community and schools. Albrithen and Yalli (2012) indicated that social workers in Saudi Arabia suffer from job stress as a result of the increase in the number of working hours and the small number of practitioners. In schools, for example, there is one social worker with a large number of students. This is one of the major problems facing social workers in all fields of practice in Saudi Arabia.

Conflict management strategies

Conflict management strategies has and quite deservedly been the topic much debate in terms of its implications for team building and group dynamics as well as for related organizational issues (Richardson, 1995). Nordly, (2018) posited that conflict resolution skills of managers have also been described in the literature on conflict management as their managing styles, communication abilities and ability to communicate correct values and attitudes. It has been widely reported that managers need conflict resolution skills to ensure sound organizational results. As such, Managers need to consider how constructive conflicts are good for their organization and the detrimental effects of disruptive conflicts. Therefore, Conflict can only be triggered or resolved through contact. Managers must also consider the types of contact experiences that can trigger conflict, and the communication patterns that are most effective after conflict has formed. A successful communicator may actually carry tension to the surface and turn it into a constructive process (Williams, 2019). The following are identified as the major strategies adopted and suggested to social workers in the KSA in discharging their responsibilities, these strategies are found on the current available literatures as discuss below.

Avoidance

The desire to withdraw from or suppress a conflict (Kodikal et al, 2014). Avoidance is generally the denial of conflict. The avoider usually side steps an issue by either changing the topic or withdrawing from the controversy. This strategic response is sometimes more effective (Asadmin, 2012). For instance, a social worker may decide to avoid or ignore any situations leading them into conflict with other professionals in the same working environment. In order to protect the relationship with others, the social worker may decide to denied himself what he wants for the benefit of others. This signifies a high level of sacrifice and cooperativeness (Al-Ajlan, 2000). Most of the literatures in this aspect in KSA, have shown that most of the social workers tends to be avoiders not because they don't want their interest to be protective but because they want to maintain the co relationship with other professions and avoid any issues that can result to conflicts between them. While, others tend to be less avoiders, this type of social workers restrict themselves from any work that was not assign to them. If any attempt to take their job or responsibility they responded negatively. Avoidance is a strategy used by many social workers in KSA schools to avoid conflict with others, especially the staff at top management in the school or at the ministry (Al-Ajlan, 2000). Alotaibi (2007) study, which is a study on the reality of conflict between workers in Saudi schools, revealed that the avoidance strategy is one of the most used strategies. Providing recent studies related to the most prominent strategies used in conflict management and training employees in Saudi schools is necessary and important (Alzahrani,2009). The study recommends to the ministry and school administration to be sending professionals to training especially on conflict management to reduce or manage the conflict that exist between the various staff.

Competition

This is another form of strategy used by many social workers as posited by scholars. This is a kind of I win you lose game (Burrell, 2001). It associated with winning a conflict with competition between two conflicting people on same position. Competing is regarded as assertive and un co-operating leading to a desire to satisfy your interest regardless of the impact on the other party to the conflict (Kreitner, 2009). Alsufyani (2009) believes that the competition method is used by some school social workers in a study on the relationship between the organizational climate and the methods of conflict management used in schools. The study found that there is a negative relationship between the use of the competition strategy and the dimensions of organizational communication. In order for the organization to achieve its goals, it must rearrange the priorities and adopt effective conflict management strategies, to take advantage of the conflict as much as possible by aligning the goals and values of the organization along with the individual goals and values of the workers (Rabi,2014). Competition is one of the strategies used by social workers to avoid conflict with other professions in the schools. Some of the competition were introduce by the administration while others are introduced by the various professions. This has helped the social work in conflict management.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a technique of I win you win. It is associated with teamwork and cooperation aim at helping each other in achieving targeted goals while maintaining the strong relationship (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). The success of any organization in achieving its goals requires creating a comfortable working atmosphere based on cooperation in order to support stability, which reflects positively on the satisfaction of all employees. Modern management thinking is based on the recognition that conflict exists and that it is an inevitable thing that cannot be ignored. Although ignoring the conflict can cause inactivity. The problem is not with the conflict in itself, but rather with how to best handle and manage it. Taking advantage of the conflict properly can create a comfortable learning environment (Rabi, 2014). Al-loah (2008) revealed the necessity of promoting the use of the cooperation strategy as it is the strategy that benefits everyone and has an impact on raising the level of satisfaction among workers. This situation in which the parties to a conflict each desire to satisfy fully the concern of all parties. This is also regarded as one of the major strategies in conflict management and associated with social work in the KSA. According to Al-Namlah (2007), Alotaibi (2007) and Al-Sharif (1997), the cooperation strategy is one of the most used strategies in Saudi schools. Zaid (1995) also pointed out that the use of cooperation strategy reduces the sense of the severity of the conflict among workers to a large extent, because it allows the presentation of opposing views and try to find possible solutions that satisfy everyone.

Compromise

This is another method of I bend you bend, signifying that winning a goal while losing a little is ok. That is both professionals are placed against the middle in an attempt to serve the common interest while ensuring each party maintain something of their original position. This explain the desire of each party to a conflict is willing to give up something (Whetton & Cameron, 2014).

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Conflict management techniques are different and vary from person to person, but there are still some of the methods that require skill in their application. Especially among some cultures, such as the Arab culture. There is always a kind of intransigence in giving up something, which the person believes he is entitled to even if it causes trouble with other parties. People with high self-confidence tend to try to bridge points of view with others in order to reach a compromise that satisfies all parties, but ultimately depends on the other's ability to relinquish any of its convictions. One of the methods that subordinates always desire is to find a compromise and put forward all conflicting ideas for discussion and dialogue. Whereas, Abdulwahid (2008) recommends the necessity of training the subordinates in cases where it is possible to resort to the use of a compromise strategy according to the data, the circumstances and the development of solutions taking into account the authentic Arab customs and culture. Social workers in Saudi schools often tend to find possible solutions that help them overcome any conflict, even if it costs them to do work that is not one of their main tasks. Al-Namlah (2007) study revealed that the compromise strategy comes second after the cooperation strategy as the most used strategy in Saudi schools by managers and employees.

Al-Asri (2007) indicated that the presence of conflict may cause disintegration between individuals within the organization and arise from blocs that may lead to the disintegration of collective action and the concentration of individuals becomes the service of the blocs to which they belong. Alnamlah (2007) argues that conflict can have positive effects in honing individuals' energy and energy towards excellence and creativity. Conflict has many useful aspects as it shows problems in order to be dealt with and confronted. Sometimes it leads to a situation of cooperation between the members of the group within the work environment. Conflict management techniques are usually based on "the concept of a desire for effective and productive arrogance," which may inspire enthusiasm in individuals and groups for creativity and innovation (Eid, 1997).

Conclusion and recommendations

From the foregoing discussion therefore, it can be understood that conflict in social work as a profession in KSA is quite a challenging phenomenon to the policy makers and supervisors. Conflict normally arose between social work and other professions as a result of unclear specification or direction of responsibility. Most of the conflict faced by social work in KSA like any other profession includes role conflict between social workers and other teachers in the school, role ambiguity, conflict resulting from the negative perception of social workers by other staff, interpersonal conflict among the social workers and stress. These conflicts are inevitable. In order for the social workers to manage the conflict studies suggested the application of strategies such as avoidance, compromise, competition and collaboration. It is found that these strategies are diligently utilized by the social workers to manage the current conflict confronting them. Despite applying the strategies yet, the conflict remains unresolved especially in discharging their duties. To manage the conflict effectively this current research recommends that policy makers should design a clear role, duty and responsibility for the social workers in the designated place of work. Establishment of rules and regulation that distinguishes the role of social work and teachers is also needed. There is need for constant training among the school staff. The school managements should also avoid mixing social work with teachings or given teachers to act as social workers, this has to be avoided. Recognizing and respecting the social work at the work place (school) by all professions is very crucial. Regular orientation needs to be done to students' family on the function, role, responsibility and importance of the social work. The study further recommends for an in-depth research to understand the main conflict and conflict management directly from the social workers both in qualitative, quantitative and mix method. There no adequate data to explain this problem in the KSA based on the empirical data. Exploring their experience on this matter is quite important.

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