

Social Work Practices in the Multiethnic Urban Reality of Covid-19 in the Middle East: The Case of UAE

Walaa Elsayed¹

Ajman University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Abstract: The study developed a set of universal challenges for social workers and investigated the impact thereof on social workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Based on a qualitative analysis of previous research, a set of 10 universal challenges was developed. A questionnaire was created, and a survey was conducted among 304 respondents currently employed as social workers in the UAE. The survey results showed that most survey respondents selected the risk of infection as the strongest challenge. Emotional burnout, lack of reliable information, limited resources, staff capacity, problems with social distancing, lack of instructions/protocols, remote client service, and inadequate education obtained average scores meaning that they are important but not critical. Scientists and practitioners can use this set of universal challenges to investigate pandemic-related challenges for social workers in various countries and regions.

Keywords: coronavirus, discrimination, lockdown, pandemic, social agency, social inequality, social policy, socially unprotected population, social worker, the poor.

The historical development of social policy largely reflects how social problems are perceived and how it became possible to politically mobilize different interests around social problems (Palme & Heimer, 2019). Social work with the poor and socially vulnerable groups of the population serves two political and economic purposes: strengthening public order, preventing social tension and civil unrest, and providing jobs for the poor for their social integration. Thus, social security and social care policies can be defined both as a form of social control and assistance to those in need within the framework of poverty management (Woodward, 2019). The work of the state for the social protection of citizens should also be accompanied by various social innovations like new ideas that can improve the quality or quantity of life of the population of a country or region (Jeong & Alhaneaee, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatic socioeconomic implications. A significant portion of the population became poor, unable to pay for housing, lost their jobs, homes, leading to health problems and depression and, consequently, higher mortality rates on a national and global scale. The problems of individuals become the problem of the whole society (Cepel et al., 2020). New scientific knowledge was required for people to understand the dangers of COVID-19 better. Risk aversion and compassion have led most citizens to follow social distancing guidelines more closely to reduce their own risk of infection and potentially reduce the risk to others (Algara et al., 2020).

¹ Corresponding Author: Assistant Professor of the Department of Sociology, College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University, Ajman, UAE. E-Mail: w.elsayed@ajman.ac.ae

Literature Review

COVID-19 revolutionized many aspects of people's lives and livelihoods in the first half of 2020. Conditions for those with whom social workers usually work - people already on the margins of society, suffering from ill health, poverty, racism and other forms of oppression and inequality - have deteriorated. The consequences of the lockdown also hit migrants who lost their jobs, whose access to social security benefits was limited due to the use of certain derogations from the principle of equal treatment allowed by the legislation of several countries. Social exclusion has increased, and some social services have been cut. Social workers struggled to keep doing their jobs - they had to adapt and innovate to meet new needs and reorient the most pressing and important aspects of their role (Banks et al., 2020; Jędrzejowska-Schiffauer & Schiffauer, 2017).

The devastating impacts of the pandemic have primarily affected the elderly. Older people living independently, relying on various public services, have faced an inability to meet their basic needs, like housing and food. Aged adults watching the news witnessed death, family members who had lost a beloved one were unable to organize or attend funerals, and aged displaced family members could not reach the people most important to them, resulting in loss and grief in isolation. Therefore, social workers, guided by values and ethics, primarily focused on protecting the most vulnerable, the elderly (Miller & Lee, 2020).

The social worker profession aims to improve society and protect marginalized and vulnerable groups. Seven core values describe the mission of the profession: honesty, human dignity and labor, service, the importance of human relationships, social justice, and competence. Relationships between people and between groups are the main tools for the assessment, intervention and evaluation of social work. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, social workers face many challenges related to adhering to the core values of social work and maintaining their health and well-being during uncertain and rapidly changing situations (Farkas & Romaniuk, 2020).

A social worker is hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, given its devastating impact on the poor. Responding to social problems stemming from the social and health sector is the aim of the social work profession, and combating pandemics for society in general and individuals, families and households, groups, and communities is a professional imperative (Amadasun, 2020a). At the same time, the management of many social agencies worldwide has changed the structure of rewards and incentives for social workers, resulting in behavioral changes to match those rewards and incentives. While some professionals among social workers retain a certain degree of professional discretion, the level of discretion is reduced in many cases, and their ability to base their work on professional principles rather than adapt to the demands of management requirements varies significantly depending on institutional standards (Perez-Vaisvidovsky et al., 2020).

The situation of socially unprotected segments of the population during a pandemic deteriorates if social workers do not perform their functions properly. For example, Jordan's social workers did not play a significant role during the pandemic-related crisis. Therefore, individuals and institutions had to intervene to help the community better cope with the social and psychological impact of the spread of the disease and government emergency measures. Even the Ministry of Social Development did not engage in meaningful joint initiatives or partnerships with any private or public organization to provide social and psychological support to Jordanian citizens. Its activities were limited to providing material and financial assistance to families in need (Al Gharaibeh, 2020).

According to Amadasun (2020b), the COVID-19 pandemic has had dire consequences disproportionately affecting the psychological and social well-being of vulnerable populations. The disease has exacerbated human rights violations, famine, massive unemployment, and

economic deprivation in Africa, including rural exclusion and ethnic exclusion. Moreover, it exposed the largely dilapidated state of public health and social care infrastructure across the continent, linked to corruption, manifested in the lack of resources for vulnerable population groups. The latter is related to the reductions of social workers in social security sectors (Amadasun, 2020b).

Cox (2020) argued that COVID-19 had discriminated based on age, race, income levels, and other manifestations of social injustice towards the poor. The pandemic presents incredible challenges as well as an opportunity for necessary systemic changes that reduce social inequality. The result of such changes should last long after the pandemic, as they serve to integrate all disadvantaged people into a just society. Social work with interventions may vary from case to case, but social work professionals can use their skills and processes to create a more equitable society in which policies, services and resources will benefit all citizens (Cox, 2020).

Social workers faced a new pandemic-related challenge: the huge number of rumors and conflicting information made the population feel insecure, fearful, and sad. In some groups, this enhanced the drive for control, while in others, it led to an underestimation of the risk of infection, suggesting that alternative explanations for the virus and its lethality are correct (López Peláez et al., 2020). In this regard, social networks played a crucial role, through which opinion leaders and ordinary citizens spread both truthful and fake information about the coronavirus and its origin, including various conspiracy theories (Yum, 2020). Digital social work as a means to cope with these new challenges of misleading information provided an opportunity to enhance the role of social workers facing social emergencies and pandemic situations in today's digital society. One priority of digital social work must be to disseminate its results in this digital environment to be more effective (López Peláez & Marcuello-Servós, 2018; López Peláez et al., 2020).

The pandemic has created political, professional and personal problems for social workers and people using social work services. Also, new ethical issues have emerged in the context of the pandemic, including maintaining the trust, confidentiality, dignity and autonomy of service users in remote relationships; allocation of limited resources; balance of rights and needs of different parties; deciding whether to violate or change the policy in the interests of users of the services; dealing with emotions and taking care of oneself and one's colleagues (Banks et al., 2020).

The pandemic created numerous challenges for the social work profession. Among other challenges for social workers, the researchers also noted psychological trauma, the inability to maintain social distancing of low-income and homeless citizens due to overcrowding and appalling living conditions, overcrowding in temporary detention centers and correctional facilities (Murenje & Porter, 2020). The usage and coordination of online services have become a challenge, especially in large interdisciplinary teams. Protocols are often lacking, and social workers have also grappled with ethical concerns when providing online services (Dauti et al., 2020). Often social workers are simply unprepared. Indeed, Murenje and Porter (2020) noted that the role of social workers in emergencies is often ignored in social work education and training.

Several scholars have attempted to isolate the main challenges in the role of social work during COVID-19. For example, Redondo-Sama et al. (2020) said that these the unpreparedness of social workers for the consequences of the pandemic, the lack of PPE for social workers, the growth of basic needs (food, shelter, etc.) of the vulnerable groups, closure of services for homeless people, and changes to official guidelines and protocols for dealing with COVID-19. Abrams and Dettlaff (2020) found that many social workers put themselves and their loved ones at risk of infection by continuing to work with clients and organizations without easy access to PPE and professional answers to pandemic-related questions.

Bern-Klug and Beaulieu (2020) created a more comprehensive list of the challenges. They included:

- The need to deliver bad news, listen to desperate families, and help identify and validate family resilience;
- A lack of PPE and lack of training on how to use it safely;
- A lack of truthful information from reliable sources;
- Emotional burnout;
- Fear; fear of communities weakening COVID precautions too early;
- fear of public transport to and from work;
- Mistrust, including in the broader social context of racism, ageism and discrimination against persons with disabilities;
- Limited staff capacity;
- Dealing with practical problems with enormous psychosocial consequences;
- Anxiety about how to help one's own children keep up with school;
- The feeling that neither the community nor the administration appreciates one's sacrifices.

Several studies have examined country-specific issues. According to Necel and Zaręba (2020), the most stressful challenges for Polish social workers in a pandemic are the need to work in hazardous conditions, an excessive sense of responsibility towards both colleagues and social security clients, a lack of procedural clarity at the national level, and difficulty reconciling work and family responsibilities (looking after minors and the elderly). Nyashanu et al. (2020) surveyed UK social workers at the forefront of working with low-income populations. They found that insufficient pandemic preparedness, shortages of PPE, anxiety and fear among professionals, problems with social distancing, challenges in fulfilling social protection responsibilities, anxiety and fear among residents and service users, delays in testing, developing PPE guidelines, and staff shortages were the challenges that frontline social workers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because many of these studies have been done in a Western context with specific religious and cultural values and norms, studies should consider other cultures with different values and norms. Previous research dedicated to the challenges faced by social workers during a pandemic lacks a single system of challenges that would allow studying their impact on the work of social services and organizations. Besides that, there are no studies dedicated to challenges for social workers in Arab countries, especially those with high income and social standards.

In this context, the pillars of Islamic faith and ritual practice have important implications for the Islamic worldview and the conceptualization of social work in Muslim-majority countries like the Gulf States (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Many of the shared values that are emphasized in this Muslim worldview (community, interconnectedness, consensus, interdependence, community actualization, group achievement and success, community trust, respect for community rights, self-control, sensitivity to group oppression, identity rooted in culture, and implicit communication that protects other people's opinions) are consistent with and complementary to the values and goals of social work (Sloan et al., 2017).

The Gulf States are associated with rapid urbanization, immense wealth and societies striving for excellence. This desire manifests itself in all walks of life in many Gulf countries. The UAE is not just a high-income country but one of the most generous welfare states in the world. The UAE is a welfare state for its citizens, which testifies to the enormous wealth and an approach to social development that is possible only in a resource-rich country with a relatively small population (Helliwell et al., 2020). The government's commitment to ensuring

the well-being of residents across the Gulf has led to the development and strong support of a variety of health and social welfare programs and initiatives that support medium- to long-term development plans. It demonstrates the government's active role in developing and maintaining social safety to ensure the satisfaction of citizens' basic needs. Emiratis are supported through various programs and initiatives, including high-quality medical care, subsidized higher education, government-funded pension plans, fuel subsidies, and access to land for home construction with interest-free loans (Rotabi et al., 2017; Sloan et al., 2017).

The study aims to form a set of universal challenges for social workers and investigate the impact of social workers in the UAE. The following objectives were set.

1. To determine the set of universal challenges for social workers based on previous research.
2. To define the impact of challenges on social workers in the UAE.
3. To rank challenges according to their importance for social workers.

Materials and Methods

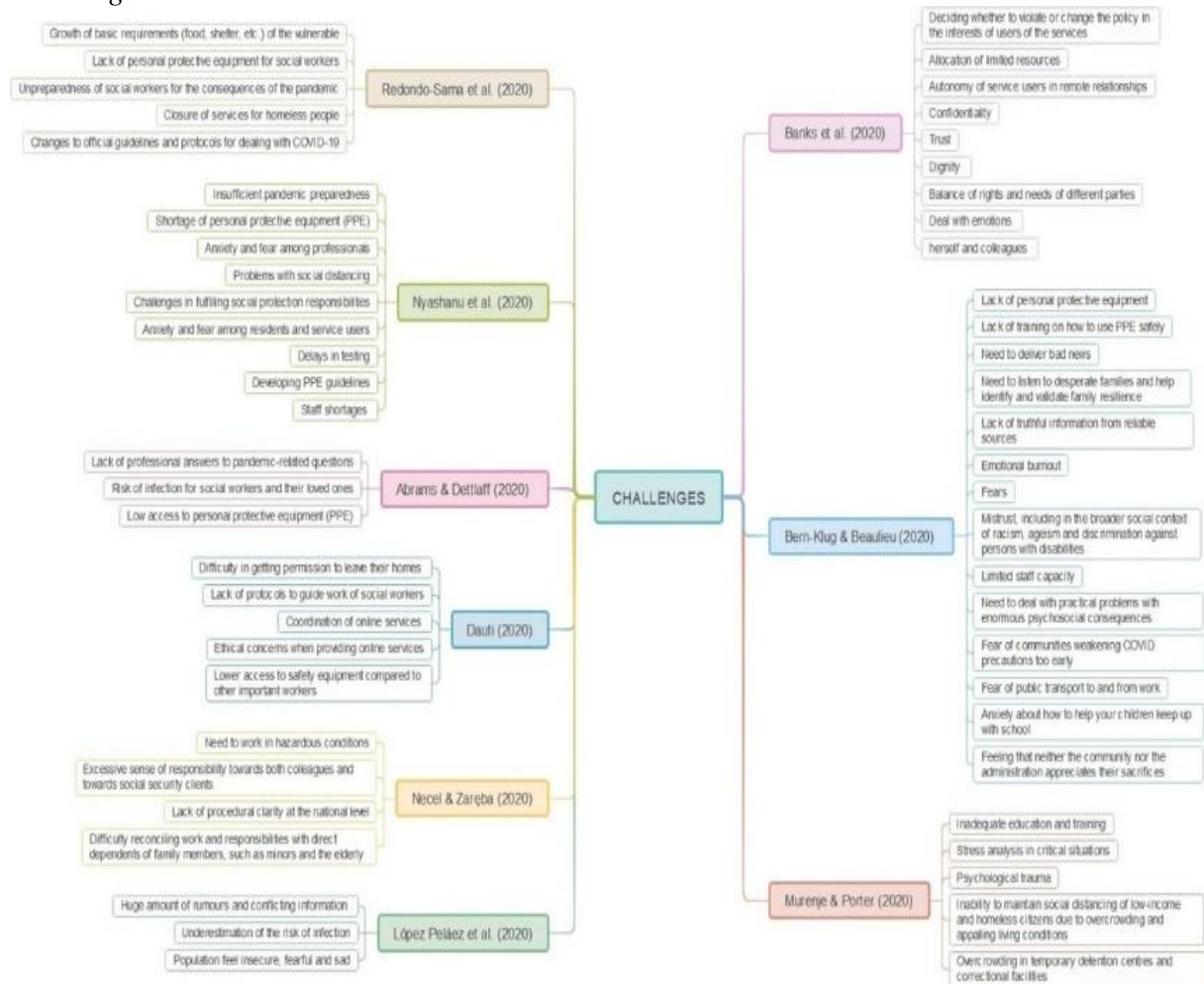
Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on a review of the research already done and the search for conceptual generalizations for a lengthy search in the field of identifying the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic from the point of view of the population. The study of existing empirical studies, in particular, surveys, interviews and other methods of directly obtaining assessments from respondents in this area, conducted since 2019, is aimed at creating a list of identified challenges (Snyder, 2019). After that, the technique assumes generalization of the resulting list of challenges (Rahi, 2017). The resulting generalized call list should be verified by interviewing respondents. Statistical research is conducted using descriptive statistics, since research is an analysis of raw evaluative material. The subsequent development of this study can be a factorial or correlation analysis of the identified challenges and their factors on a wider sample. For the study, the challenges investigated by previous research were qualitatively analyzed and systemized (See Figure 1).

Based on challenges investigated in previous research, ten universal challenges were extracted:

1. Limited resources/staff capacity
2. Problems with social distancing
3. Risk of infection for social workers and their families
4. Lack of PPE
5. Delays in testing
6. Remote client service
7. Lack of instructions/protocols
8. Inadequate education and training
9. Emotional burnout
10. Lack of reliable information

Figure 1
Challenges listed in Previous Research



Note. Developed by the authors based on Abrams and Dettlaff (2020), Banks et al. (2020), Bern-Klug and Beaulieu (2020), Dauti et al. (2020), López Peláez et al. (2020), Murenje and Porter (2020), Necel and Zaręba (2020), Nyashanu et al. (2020), and Redondo-Sama et al. (2020).

Research Design and Sample

Based on the above set of universal challenges, a questionnaire was created. Respondents could select scores for each challenge from 1 to 10, where 1 was the least important and 10 was the most important. Respondents were not allowed to put two similar scores. The sample of the questionnaire form is given in Appendix 1.

Based on available information on profession/employment in accounts in social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter), 350 potential respondents were selected and contacted. Of these, 337 confirmed that they were currently employed as social workers, and 326 agreed to take an anonymous survey and provided their e-mails. The survey was written in Arabic. Of the 326 survey forms sent to potential respondents, 304 were filled in and sent back, 14 respondents failed to send the form back in due time, eight survey forms were filled incorrectly (different challenges received the same scores). Thus, the survey sample comprised 304 respondents ($n = 304$). The sampling and survey were conducted throughout March 2021.

Data Analysis and Statistical Processing

The survey data were systemized by the total score in MS Excel, then the share of points for each challenge from the total number of possible points was derived, and the final results were statistically processed in Stata programming.

Data Validity and Reliability

The reliability of the survey data was verified by the Cronbach alpha method, and the values within the range of $\alpha = 0.793$ to $\alpha = 0.913$ were obtained. Thus, Cronbach's alpha analysis showed high reliability of all ten factors.

The validity of the data was tested in two ways: by participant assessment and by observation. The results of the tests have confirmed the validity of the data.

Ethical Issues

The research was conducted ethically in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. The research was approved by the local ethics committees of [BLINDED] University. Participants were asked to volunteer to participate in the study, and their consent was obtained before the study. Participants were asked to participate in the survey only if they adhered to the ethical issues outlined in the e-mail that accompanied the survey form.

Research Limitations

This research is limited to 10 challenges, the methods applied, and the United Arab Emirates. The study's sample size was relatively small and did not include all social workers in the UAE, limiting the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the sample can only reflect the thoughts of this particular group of social workers, which might not be representative of the country. The survey is also based on the subjective and self-evaluating opinions of the respondents, which in general can lead to undesirable variance in the dependent variables. While methodological limitations may prevent the generalization of results among all social workers in the United Arab Emirates or outside the country's context, this study provides insights into the challenges that social workers faced in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides a summary of the survey results.

Table 1
Summary of Survey Results (n=304)

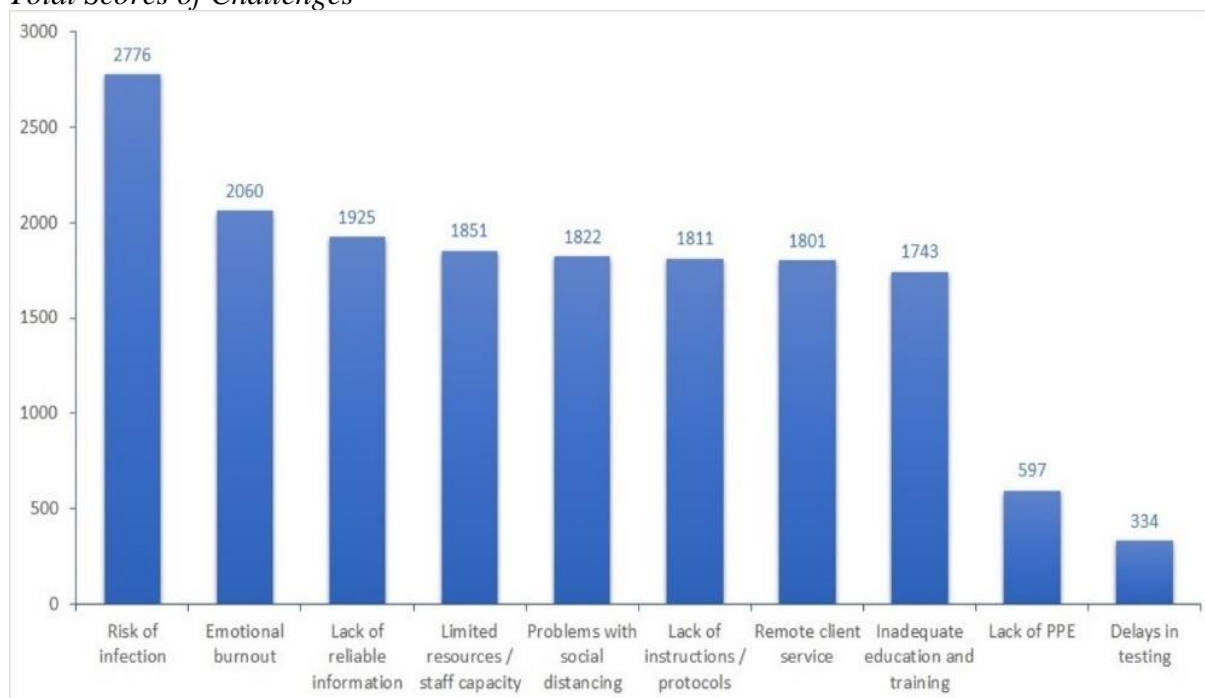
Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Limited resources/staff capacity	6.088816	3.016239	3	10
Risk of infection	9.131579	0.3666675	8	10
Remote client service	5.924342	2.72215	3	10
Lack of PPE	1.963816	0.5986839	1	7
Lack of instructions/protocols	5.957237	1.403019	3	8
Inadequate education and training	5.733553	2.563657	3	10
Emotional burnout	6.776316	1.726124	4	9
Lack of reliable information	6.332237	1.151042	2	8
Delays in testing	1.098684	0.2987293	1	2
Problems with social distancing	5.993421	2.063343	3	10

According to Table 1, the challenge “Risk of infection” obtained the highest scores from respondents (9.1), followed by “Emotional burnout” (6.7). “Limited resources/staff capacity” (6.0), “Problems with social distancing” (5.99), “Lack of instructions/protocols” (5.95), “Remote client service” (5.92), and “Inadequate education and training” (5.7) have almost equal scores. The lowest scores have such challenges as “Lack of PPE” (1.96) and “Delays in testing” (1.0).

Figure 2 shows the total scores of survey results.

Figure 2

Total Scores of Challenges



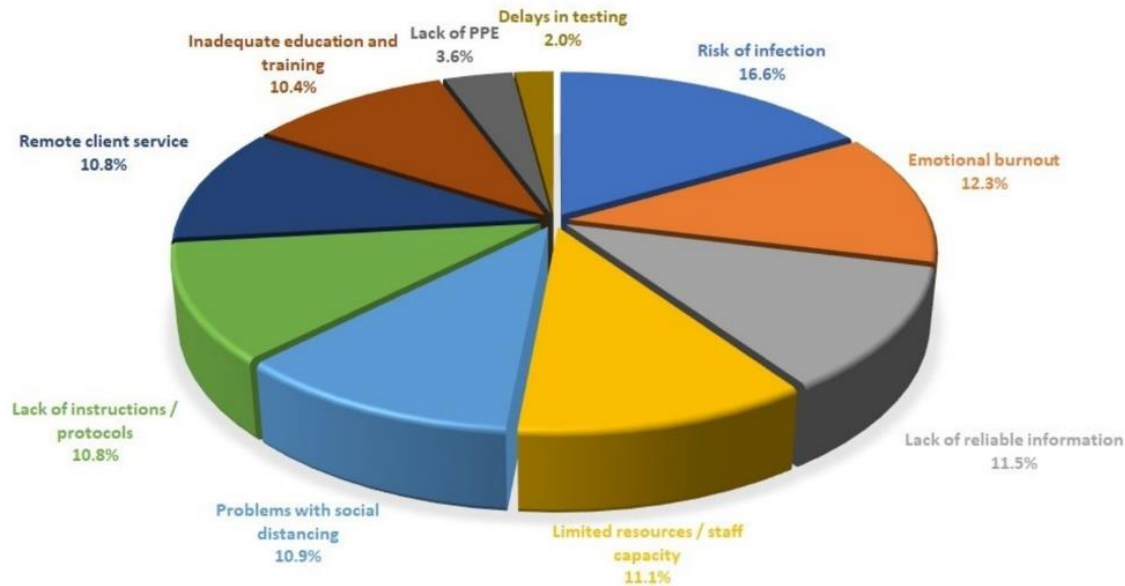
As shown in Figure 2, the highest scores obtained were “Risk of infection” (2776), the lowest – “Lack of PPE” (597) and “Delays in testing” (334). Other challenges have average scores.

The study found that the main challenge for social workers in the United Arab Emirates was the perceived risk of COVID-19 infection. Both the social workers and their relatives were exposed to this risk. This is consistent with the findings of Abrams and Dettlaff (2020) and Necel and Zaręba (2020). News about the number of infected and dead from several countries whose medical system was overwhelmed by an influx of patients undoubtedly impacted social workers whose duty was to contact low-income groups who usually fall into high-risk groups for viral infections.

The United Arab Emirates took all the necessary measures promptly to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and also invested heavily in the purchase of PPE and tests so social workers in the UAE did not feel a shortage of them. Unlike other countries like the United States (Abrams & Dettlaff, 2020; Bern-Klug & Beaulieu, 2020), the United Kingdom (Nyashanu et al., 2020), Spain (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020), Poland (Necel & Zaręba, 2020) and Albania (Dauti et al., 2020), where there was an acute shortage of PPE and testing at least in the first months of the pandemic. Shares of challenges’ scores for the total score of the survey are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Shares of Challenge Scores in the Total Score of the Survey



According to Figure 3, the biggest share for the total scores was the “risk of infection” challenge (16.6%), followed by limited resources/staff capacity (11.1%). The smallest shares were a “lack of PPE” (3.6%) and “delays in testing” (2.0%).

According to the survey results, the ranking of challenges is as follows:

1. Risk of infection
2. Emotional burnout
3. Lack of reliable information
4. Limited resources/staff capacity
5. Problems with social distancing
6. Lack of instructions/protocols
7. Remote client service
8. Inadequate education and training
9. Lack of PPE
10. Delays in testing

“Risk of infection” was selected by the majority of survey respondents as the strongest challenge. “emotional burnout,” “lack of reliable information,” “limited resources/staff capacity,” “problems with social distancing,” “lack of instructions/protocols,” “remote client service,” and “inadequate education and training” had high average scores meaning that they were important, but not critical. “Lack of PPE” and “Delays in testing” had the lowest scores.

Emotional burnout was second among the challenges for social workers. Undoubtedly, this was associated with the need to communicate terrible news to relatives, see the suffering of people without being able to help them, and attend to organizational issues after the death of their subordinates. Similar results were obtained in Bern-Klug and Beaulieu (2020).

In the context of a pandemic, the spread of a new virus, about which humankind previously knew practically nothing, the question of adequate and reliable information about COVID-19, its symptoms and treatment methods arose. The situation was aggravated by numerous fake information and conspiracy theories, which flooded social networks. It is no secret that even some opinion leaders, including heads of state, often disseminated false information, misleading citizens and forcing scientists and doctors to refute it, which is

consistent with the findings of López Peláez et al. (2020) and Yum (2020). Due to the lack of information about the virus and experience in working in a pandemic and lockdown, social workers, especially in the first months, found themselves in an information vacuum, and national governments did not always have time to issue and promptly update instructions that meet the requirements of work in a rapidly changing environment, as Dauti et al. (2020) and Redondo-Sama et al. (2020) also concluded. Lack of work experience in quarantine conditions, including in remote mode, also became a challenge for social workers. In addition, the clients of social services work often do not have access to communication facilities, computers or gadgets, and Internet access, an argument that Amadasun (2020b) and Banks et al. (2020) support.

The world found itself in new conditions, for which no one was preparing; therefore, the previous education and training of social workers in several aspects ceased to meet the new requirements (Murenje & Porter, 2020). Accordingly, the main problems faced by social workers around the world were the lack of proper training and preparation, as well as the difficulties with remote communication and the use of almost exclusively electronic communications for working with clients. These conclusions from empirical studies in different countries are completely identical to those obtained in this study (Necel & Zaręba, 2020; Nyashanu et al., 2020; Redondo-Sama et al., 2020; Yum, 2020). Programs aimed at improving employees' skills to work in a pandemic were developed slowly and did not always respond to the changed conditions of work of social services (Murenje & Porter, 2020).

The new conditions required other resources, both material and human. According to Banks et al. (2020) and Nyashanu et al. (2020), in the conditions of lockdown and quarantine, the poor and socially unprotected segments of the population found themselves without a livelihood and often without food and necessities. Additional functions fell on social workers, which in terms of number did not meet the requirements of the time. However, an important problem faced by social workers is the lack of reliable information and instructions on how to adequately confront a negative situation (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Yum, 2020). This situation makes it difficult to help those who need it and creates a situation where people can refuse help. This point further demonstrates the relevance of the research findings to different regions of the world, not just Arab countries (Necel & Zaręba, 2020).

Social distancing has become a significant challenge for social workers. Like the results of this study, Miller and Lee (2020), Farkas and Romaniuk (2020), and Murenje and Porter (2020) also found that living in densely populated areas or being in closed overcrowded institutions (correctional institutions, migration centers, nursing homes), the poor multiplied the risk of infection to each other. In case of illness, they could not isolate themselves from others.

Implications of the results of the proposed study may include:

- determination of the order of importance of the post-pandemic challenges specific to the UAE can serve as a guideline for structuring the activities of social services in Arab countries, where there are similar challenge factors;
- comparison of the study results with similar empirical data from countries in Europe, America and Asia can provide a broader anthropological context for understanding the possible response to pandemics and other excesses of a planetary scale in different cultures and regions;
- the findings of the study indicate the need for regular similar studies in order to obtain a temporal snapshot of changes in the socio-psychological state of people during a pandemic, after it and when anti-pandemic measures are resumed.

Recommendations

1. Additional training is needed for social workers related to work while maintaining social distance.
2. Social workers should prepare at the level of special role interactions for interaction with clients in various psychological states associated with Covid-19 challenges: actual fear of infection, depression as a result of death or illness of loved ones, disorientation due to isolation, euphoria of withdrawal from isolation, etc. etc.
3. There is a need to strengthen the skills of social workers in a predominantly electronic communication environment and in the transition from electronic communication to personal (offline) communication.
4. Most of the respondents in various forms pointed to the problem of information completeness. Therefore, a communication form can be created for social services that would provide clients of social workers with the necessary medical and important current information necessary to survive and understand the situation when interacting with a social worker.

Conclusion

The aim of the study is to identify the most significant challenges for social workers, which are formed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The case study is focused on AUE, but it is important both for the Arab countries and for other regions. Methodologically, the study is based on a research review of empirical field studies on the challenges of Covid-19. Based on previous research on challenges for social workers, this research formed a set of 10 universal challenges: risk of infection, emotional burnout, lack of reliable information, limited resources/staff capacity, problems with social distancing, lack of instructions/protocols, remote client service, inadequate education and training, lack of PPE, delays in testing. Analysis of empirical studies in other countries suggests that this call list is relevant not only for the UAE, but for many countries. Based on the above set of universal challenges, a questionnaire was created, and a survey was conducted among 304 respondents currently employed as social workers in the United Arab Emirates. The survey results showed that most survey respondents selected risk of infection as the strongest challenge (scored 2776). Emotional burnout (2060), lack of reliable information (1925), limited resources/staff capacity (1851), problems with social distancing (1822), lack of instructions/protocols (1811), remote client service (1801), and inadequate education and training (1743) obtained average scores meaning that they are important, but not critical. Lack of PPE (597) and delays in testing (334) had the lowest scores. The study is significant for identifying the problems and areas of protection for the poorest and most socially vulnerable social groups, for which the challenges of the pandemic are more severe and are mostly reflected by social workers.

Future studies could investigate pandemic-related challenges for social workers in various countries and regions using the set of universal challenges developed by the study and methods applied herein. Further research could be conducted in other countries or regions using other challenges. Additionally, future research could develop Likert-type scales using the challenges listed here.

References

- Abrams, L. S., & Dettlaff, A. J. (2020). Voices from the frontlines: Social workers confront the COVID-19 pandemic. *Social Work*, 65(3), 302-305.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa030>

- Al Gharaibeh, F. (2020). The response of Jordanian society and social workers to the COVID-19 crisis. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 811-814. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820944989>.
- Algara, C., Fuller, S., Hare, C., & Kazemian, S. (2020). The interactive effects of scientific knowledge and gender on COVID-19 social distancing compliance. *Social Science Quarterly*, 102(1), 7-16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12894>.
- Amadasun, S. (2020a). Social work and COVID-19 pandemic: An action call. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 753-756. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820959357>.
- Amadasun, S. (2020b). COVID-19 pandemic in Africa: What lessons for social work education and practice? *International Social Work*, 64(2), 246-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820949620>.
- Banks, S., Cai, T., de Jonge, E., Shears, J., Shum, M., Sobočan, A. M., Strom K., Truell R., Úriz, M. J., & Weinberg, M. (2020). Practising ethically during COVID-19: Social work challenges and responses. *International Social Work*, 63(5), 569-583. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820949614>.
- Bern-Klug, M., & Beaulieu, E. (2020). COVID-19 highlights the need for trained social workers in nursing homes. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 21(7), 970-972. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2020.05.049>.
- Cepel, M., Gavurova, B., Dvorský, J., & Belas, J. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the perception of business risk in the SME segment. *Journal of International Studies*, 13(3), 248-263. <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-8330.2020/13-3/16>.
- Cox, C. (2020). Older adults and Covid 19: Social justice, disparities, and social work practice. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 63(6-7), 611-624. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2020.1808141>.
- Dauti, M., Dhëmbo, E., Bejko, E., & Allmuça, M. (2020). Rethinking the transformative role of the social work profession in Albania: Some lessons learned from the response to COVID-19. *International Social Work*, 63(5), 640-645. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820940356>
- Farkas, K. J., & Romaniuk, J. R. (2020). Social work, ethics and vulnerable groups in the time of coronavirus and Covid-19. *Society Register*, 4(2), 67-82. <https://doi.org/10.14746/sr.2020.4.2.05>.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., Sachs, J., & De Neve, J.-E. (2020). *World Happiness Report 2020*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Ibrahim, Q. A., Sorur, M., Labidi, L., & Osburn, L. G. (2020). Quality of social work education and practice in the Arab countries: A comparative study of Palestine, Qatar and Tunisia. *Social Work Education*, in press. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1773781>
- Jędrzejowska-Schiffauer, I., & Schiffauer, P. (2017). New constraints on mobility in Europe: Policy response to European crises or constitutional ambiguity? *Journal of International Studies*, 10(3), 9-23. <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-8330.2017/10-3/1>.
- Jeong, S. S., & Alhanea, D. W. T. A. (2020). Prosocial motivation as a driver of social innovation in the UAE. *Social Science Quarterly*, 101(7), 2450-2464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12913>.
- López Peláez, A., & Marcuello-Servós, C. (2018). e-Social work and digital society: Reconceptualizing approaches, practices and technologies. *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(6), 801-803. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1520475>.
- López Peláez, A., Marcuello-Servós, C., Castillo de Mesa, J., & Almaguer Kalixto, P. (2020). The more you know, the less you fear: Reflexive social work practices in times of COVID-19. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 746-752. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820959365>.

- Miller, V. J., & Lee, H. (2020). Social Work Values in Action during COVID-19. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 63(6-7), 565-569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2020.1769792>
- Murenje, M., & Porter, S. K. (2020). Covid-19: Challenges and prospects for the social work profession. *International Federation of Social Workers*. https://www.ifsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Murenje-Porter_ChallengesAndProspects.pdf.
- Necel, R., & Zaręba, M. (2020). Social assistance institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of Polish social workers. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 803-806. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820959361>.
- Nyashanu, M., Pfende, F., & Ekpenyong, M. (2020). Exploring the challenges faced by frontline workers in health and social care amid the COVID-19 pandemic: experiences of frontline workers in the English Midlands region, UK. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 34(5), 655-661. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2020.1792425>.
- Palme, J., & Heimer, M. (2019). A taxonomy of child policies: Conceptualizing the missing step in defamilization of social policy. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 1, jxz016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz016>.
- Perez-Vaisvidovsky, N., Mizrahi, R., & Halpern, A. (2020). The mother-based intervention: Policy, social work, and the absence of fathers in the social services in Israel. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 1, jxaa004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaa004>.
- Rahi, S. (2017). Research design and methods: A systematic review of research paradigms, sampling issues and instruments development. *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences*, 6(2), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2162-6359.1000403>
- Redondo-Sama, G., Matulic, V., Munté-Pascual, A., & de Vicente, I. (2020). Social work during the COVID-19 Crisis: Responding to urgent social needs. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8595. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208595>.
- Rotabi, K. S., Bromfield, N. F., Lee, J., & Sarhan, T. A. (2017). The care of orphaned and vulnerable children in Islam: Exploring Kafala with Muslim social work practice with unaccompanied refugee minors in the United States. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 2(1), 16-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-017-0027-2>.
- Sloan, L. M., Bromfield, N. F., Matthews, J., & Rotabi, K. S. (2017). Social work education in the Arabian Gulf: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 36(1-2), 199-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2017.1311247>.
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333-339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>
- Woodward, K. C. (2019). Race, gender, and poverty governance: The case of the US child welfare system. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 1, jxz036. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz036>.
- Yum, S. (2020). Social network analysis for coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States. *Social Science Quarterly*, 101(4), 1642-1647. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12808>.

Notes on Contributor

Walaa Elsayed has PhD. She works as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Sociology, in College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University specializing in social work, community organization and has long teaching experiences. She is an accredited arbitrator in many prestigious scientific journals. ORCID: 0000-0003-4333-2219.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Based on your personal opinion/perception, please, put a score for each challenge of social workers from 1 to 10, where 1 is the least important, 10 – the most important. Please, note that you cannot use the same score for any two challenges.

Challenge for social workers	Score (from 1 to 10)
Limited resources/staff capacity	
Risk of infection	
Remote client service	
Lack of PPE	
Lack of instructions/protocols	
Inadequate education and training	
Emotional burnout	
Lack of reliable information	
Delays in testing	
Problems with social distancing	