PARENTING CHALLENGES AND ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN HELPING DIPLOMAT FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY IN SAUDI ARABIA EMBASSY IN SINGAPORE

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by

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CABARAN DAN PERANAN PEKERJA SOSIAL DALAM MEMBANTU KELUARGA DIPLOMAT: SATU KAJIAN KES DI KEDUTAAN ARAB SAUDI DI SINGAPURA

ABSTRAK

Pegawai diplomatik yang ditugaskan ke negara asing mengalami pelbagai cabaran yang disebabkan oleh jurang perbezaan sosio-budaya yang ketara antara negara berkenaan dengan negara asal mereka. Kajian ini meninjau peranan pekerja sosial dalam membantu memudahkan misi pegawai diplomatik Saudi Arabia di Singapura bagi mencari solusi kepada cabaran yang dihadapi ibu bapa yang ditugaskan dinegara asing. Persoalan kajian merangkumi: Apakah cabaran sosial yang dihadapi oleh pegawai diplomatik dalam memelihara dan mendidik anak-anak mereka di negara asing, khususnya di Singapura? Apakah kompetensi budaya dan faktor kesedaran yang diperlukan oleh pekerja sosial ketika mengurus pelanggan dari Saudi Arabia? Apakah peranan pekerja sosial dalam membantu tanggungan pegawai diplomatik untuk mengatasi cabaran keibubapaan ketika di Singapura? Kepelbagaian budaya, pembelajaran sosial dan teori ekologi digunakan sebagai asas pendekatan dalam penyelidikan ini. Kajian berbentuk kualitatif ini mengumpul data primer yang diperolehi daripada 16 temubual, 2 perbincangan kumpulan fokus (focus group) dan 2 temubual dari informan utama. Analisis secara deduktif digunakan untuk menghasilkan analisis tema berbantu komputer. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian, pegawai diplomatik Saudi memerlukan tenaga profesional bagi membantu mereka menangani cabaran bebanan budaya asing ke atas mereka, termasuk kejutan kebudayaan, kejutan kebudayaan berbalik, dan potensi pendedahan awal kepada prosedur-prosedur kehakiman. Bantuan dan sokongan profesional seharusnya diberikan oleh pekerja

sosial yang terlatih dan berpengalaman. Dua Model telah dibangunkan untuk membolehkan pekerja sosial kenal pasti peringkat untuk menyesuaikan diri dan menawar intervensi yang sewajar dengan keadaan, serta memberi bantuan psikologikal dan jaringan masyarakat. Dapatan kajian ini penting dan berguna bagi *KSA Department of Affairs*, pegawai diplomatik Saudi dan pekerja sosial yang berminat untuk memberi khidmat kepada pegawai diplomatik Saudi serta imigran supaya pekerja sosial dapat menyedia dan menyampaikan penyelesaian kepada cabaran yang berpanjangan. Dapatan kajian juga berguna bagi pembelajaran pekerja sosisal kerana telah menyaran dan menegaskan keperluan latihan pembelajaran dalam bidang kepelbagaian budaya. Tambah lagi, dapatan kajian sangat berguna kepada para penyelidik, kerana ianya menyediakan titik permulaan untuk mengkaji impak daripada jurang besar sosio-budaya ke atas mekanisme untuk menangani masalah dikalangan pegawai diplomatik dan keluarga mereka. Pendekatan yang berdasarkan teori yang dikemukakan juga dapat membantu dalam penyelesaian masalah mereka. Jika dipraktikkan, dapatan kajian serta cadangan yang syorkan dapat mereda dan mengurangkan cabaran keibubapaan imigran di kalangan pegawai diplomatik Saudi di Singapura serta suami atau isteri mereka serta pihak berkuasa yang berada di Singapura dan pekerja sosial berkenaan.

PARENTING CHALLENGES AND ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN HELPING DIPLOMAT FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY IN SAUDI ARABIA EMBASSY IN SINGAPORE

ABSTRACT

Diplomats sent to countries with significant social and cultural gaps from their home countries encounter numerous challenges. This study explores the role of social workers in facilitating the diplomatic mission of Saudi Arabia in Singapore to identify solutions for parenting challenges. The research questions include: What are the social challenges facing Saudi diplomat parents in raising their children? What are the cultural competencies and awareness factors for social workers when managing clients from Saudi Arabia? What is the role of social workers in helping the diplomat dependents to overcome the parenting challenges in Singapore? The study employs the multicultural approach and the social learning and ecological theories as its basis. The study is qualitative, and primary data are collected from 16 interviews, 2 focus group discussions, and 2 interviews with key informants (KIs). Analysis follows a deductive approach, using computer-aided thematic analysis. According to the findings, Saudi diplomats need professional help to cope with the challenges imposed by a foreign culture, including cultural shock, reverse cultural shock, and potential exposure to judicial procedures. This professional help should come from social workers with sufficient cultural training and exposure. Two models are developed to enable social workers to identify the stage of adjustment and to offer the right interventions, including social or psychological help and networking. These findings are useful for the Saudi Arabian Ministry of foreign Affairs, Saudi diplomats, and social workers interested in serving Saudi diplomats and other

immigrants as they provide solutions to long-term challenges. The findings are also useful for social work education, as they stress the need for practical multicultural education. The findings are additionally useful to researchers, as they provide a starting point for the exploration of the impact of large sociocultural gaps on coping mechanisms among diplomats and their families and the use of a multi-theoretical approach to problem solving. If applied, the findings and recommendations of this study could help in alleviating the potential challenges of immigrant parenting for Saudi diplomats in Singapore, their spouses, the Singaporean authorities, and social workers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Increasing globalization has encouraged the movement of families, especially diplomatic families, from one part of the world to another. Moreover, internationalization has led to the development of relationships between individuals, states, and regional organizations. In particular, it has led to the development of cross-border mobility as well as the immigration of diplomats and their families to different parts of the world as they execute their duties and responsibilities in foreign countries (State University of New York [SUNY] Levin Institute, 2014; Vesajoki, 2002).

The rampant global movement and migration more often than not involves families who are uprooted from the lives they know and are forced to adapt to the way of life in the countries they migrate to. To this end, the challenges that new immigrant families face while settling into a new environment with differing cultural norms and values usually necessitate social adjustments that require the help of social workers (Mellichamp, 2015). In this regard, social adjustment issues also affect foreign professionals and diplomatic family members who are prone to regularly moving around to different countries (Mellichamp, 2015). Furthermore, when members of the diplomatic community are appointed to work in foreign countries, they are forced to adjust and adopt the cultural practices and ways of life in the new society, which necessitates the development of certain institutions that support diplomat families. For instance, the Diplomatic Service Families Association (DSFA), a family support service, assists diplomatic officers from the Commonwealth countries who work overseas. The mandate of the association is to

provide a wide range of support services, advice, and information relating to adapting to their new environment (DSFA, n.d.).

For example, diplomats who travel around with their spouses and children might be faced with parenting challenges during and after settling in their new countries. Since the role of parenting is critical during and after the adjustment process, creating the necessary parenting environment for immigrant families in a foreign country can be an uphill task, especially since foreign influences create parenting challenges while they try to maintain their cultural values, traditions, and heritage (Rudy & Grusec, 2002; Sheldon et al., 2004). In this regard, social workers are useful in establishing strategies that can enhance social adjustment for immigrants and refugees. The impact of the differing cultural and ethnic differences certainly affects the rate of social adjustment. Therefore, learning social adjustment techniques and strategies to help curb the challenges in parenting is necessary for diplomat parents to get more attuned to their new life and keep up with their parenting roles in foreign countries (Awde, 2009). Also, the role of the social worker in assisting diplomat parents in dealing with the challenges that they face in their parenting roles while living in foreign countries makes the social worker more valuable.

Thus, social workers and the diplomatic missions of both Singapore and Saudi Arabia would benefit from the identification of solutions for the parenting challenges that diplomats face while they live and work in foreign countries. To achieve this, a qualitative investigation of the challenges of parenting for Saudi Arabian diplomats in Singapore serves to establish guidelines. Furthermore, the information gained from the study could help curb the abovementioned issues and problems. These problems include, but are not limited to, educational problems,

social issues, psychological issues, and cultural issues (Lardhi, 2016; Umar, Roubaud, & con Rothemburg, 2011). In this regard, there could be an increase in the productivity of Saudi diplomat parents living in Singapore if they learn to deal with the specific challenges that they face in raising their children.

Even though the discussion in this study is so far centered on a general perspective of the challenges immigrants face while adapting to their roles as parents in foreign countries, Saudi diplomat parents face particular parenting challenges since their culture is predominantly Muslim with unique customs (Vassiliev, 2013). To this end, a Saudi diplomat who has been called to duty in Singapore and has to raise his or her children in the city-state is bound to face various unique challenges as the family tries to adjust to the new country's way of life (Li & Gasser, 2005). Therefore, the first chapter provides information regarding the challenges of parenting in an increasingly globalized society as well as the specific issues immigrant parents face as they embrace their roles as their children's guardians in foreign countries.

The role of social workers in identifying challenges and their solutions is also provided, since it helps in the provision of structural information for the remainder of the study. The first section gives the background of the study and focuses on providing an overview of the impact of social work in reducing the consequences of the challenges faced by immigrant parents and their parenting roles in Singapore. This is followed by the problem statement. The subsequent two sections document the study objectives and the research questions. The final two sections of the chapter highlight the significance of the study, particularly for the role of the social worker in helping diplomats deal with these challenges.

1.1 Background of the Study

There are many parenting challenges that come with moving and adjusting to a new way of life in a foreign country, and they are multifaceted and encompass cultural, religious, and social differences (Lazarova, McNulty, & Semeniuk, 2015). Therefore, in this section, the researcher discusses several different challenges for parenting, factors that lead to these problems, and the role of social workers in creating strategies and solutions to the challenges (Umar et al., 2011). First, the researcher compares and contrasts the parenting styles of Singapore and Saudi Arabia by specifically highlighting the parenting styles in Singaporean culture as well as the parenting styles in Saudi Arabian culture. Furthermore, the researcher addresses the challenges that face Saudi diplomat parents in Singapore by discussing them in several subsections that address social, cultural, psychological, and educational challenges. Additionally, the researcher discusses the role of social workers in parenting and gives an analysis of the importance of parenting in social work initiatives.

1.1.1 A Comparison of Parenting Styles in Singapore and Saudi Arabia

Since different countries have their own ways of doing things, it is not surprising that this is also true for parenting. Furthermore, according to Jones and Truell (2012), foreigners face various problems as they move overseas. Moreover, these problems relate to differences in their identity, ethnicity, and cultural values, and one of the issues that differs from those of the host society is mode of parenting (Jones & Truell, 2012). Diplomats face many parenting challenges while they try to settle in their new countries of duty.

1.1.1(a) Parenting styles in Singaporean culture.

Singaporean society, which is perhaps influenced by Western values, looks at gender roles from an equality perspective. In this regard, the equality of genders allows both men and women to work and own property, unlike in some other Eastern societies (Long, 2004; Størksen et al., 2015). Secondly, Singaporean society is fast-paced and allows equal opportunities for both genders, where both men and women have equal chances for education, employment, democratic rights, and other freedoms.

For instance, a study that was conducted at a public hospital facility in Singapore to evaluate a parenting program for children with behavioral problems by Yap et al. (2014) suggested that parents in Singapore rated themselves as significantly less stressed and depressed than parents in many other parts of the world. Furthermore, the study revealed that these parents were relatively more confident and satisfied with managing their child. Also, their study suggested that behavior management becomes more difficult for immigrant parents since they are usually unfamiliar with the new system and do not know the laws regarding child protection in Singapore. Therefore, if their children's behavior problems are not dealt with appropriately, behavior management programs should be made available to parents and caregivers in various embassies. Furthermore, parents should also be aware of the kind of facilities that the Singaporean government provides for diplomat parents and their children to assist in making their adjustment process easier by compensating for the lack of extended family support they are used to having (Yap et al., 2014).

Similarly, according to Quek (2014), the Singaporean family is in a robust and healthy state. However, Quek states that the city-state is facing potential tensions

between the work and family that are weakening the institution of parenting, due to societal pressures caused by Western and Eastern influences. Since Singapore is a state that is open socially and structurally, with a blend of both Western and Eastern cultures, many Singaporean parents still insist on building and maintaining strong family ties and family values. While many people desire to be parents, a gap persists between these ideas and reality.

Therefore, the above-compounded findings support the overall opinion that assertive power discipline or an authoritative approach, as exhibited in the Singaporean parenting style, might still be compatible with a "liberal" parenting style. As an example of a state in a traditional Confucian society, the parenting concepts involve elements of authoritarianism that can be viewed as a positive sign of proper parenting in this culture (Shan & Hawkins, 2014).

1.1.1(b) Parenting styles in Saudi Arabian culture.

The vast majority of Saudis around the world uphold some customs and traditions that are different from both Western and Eastern cultures. Saudi Arabia has strict customs and traditions, which primarily define the roles of different genders and how they function (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006). For instance, a husband's preoccupation with job roles and the lack of an adequate social-support system might create parenting issues that the wife is the only available parent to deal with, and this might bring about extra stress to the available parent. Overall, according to Sim and Chin (2014), the possibility of full-time fatherhood for Saudi Arabian diplomats in their capacity as fathers is obscured, creating further parenting issues due to their passivity in this role.

Deprivation of the typically extensive involvement of extended family members in raising children already presents a challenge to immigrant parents of Saudi Arabian origin. In this regard, the new family structure with fewer members can make it difficult for parents to adapt to the changes caused by broken family bonds. As such, separation from loved ones, culture shock, and communication breakdown with other important family members create further challenges for these families (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008).

Saudi nationals face additional challenges in parenting that put them in a unique position compared to other foreigners in Singapore. For instance, scholars such as Hyland, Alkhalaf, and Whalley (2013) and Ghazwani, Khalil, and Ahmed (2016) suggest that the parenting style of Saudi Arabian parents is different from the parenting style in Singapore, since many parents from generation to generation have utilized physical punishment for children—beating and insults—as part of an acceptable parenting style. According to Ali (2014), even though the majority of Saudi Arabian nationals adhere to the teachings of the Koran, it has been noted that disciplining children through smacking is *haraam* (forbidden) in Islam if the beating causes them harm, injures them, or causes them to die. Moreover, according to Ali (2014), the Koran prescribes that punishment through caning should be done on the legs, shoulder, or hands and never on the face. Furthermore, caning out of one's own desire or lack of anger management is prohibited (Ali, 2014). Similarly, Ghazwani et al. (2016), in their study of social anxiety disorder, revealed parenting styles as a risk factor, suggesting that the old parenting style associated with Saudi Arabia's culture involved parental anger, criticism (particularly in front of others), exaggerated protection, maltreatment, and family provocation.

1.1.2 Challenges Facing Saudi Diplomat Parents in Singapore

One aspect of culture is unique to every nation, and it encompasses the circle of customs and attitudes of the people that pertain to gender roles and differences. Even though Saudi Arabian immigrants have strong cultural imperatives about parenting, a parenting style that is more restrictive and controlling for better structure and guidance is important to them since it ensures the preservation of their traditions (Zhou et al., 2008). Therefore, the challenges that Saudi parents go through as they live in Singapore include social, cultural, psychological, and educational issues.

1.1.2(a) Social and cultural impacts.

Since immigrant children may be faced with psychological and social problems that include social-adjustment issues, parental involvement is especially helpful if children find it difficult to make new friends in Singapore, particularly if they are not fluent in English or Chinese (Morales, 2015). To this end, Haider (2017) suggested that the first social challenge that Arab parents are forced to contend with is their dress code. Some of the areas of concern for parents involve their social and cultural roles in the issue of dressing. While parents might encourage their children to dress up in traditional Islamic attire like the *hijab*, the children might start shunning the dress code to avoid embarrassment, bullying, or racism for being Muslim, since their new peers do not adhere to such codes of dressing. Saudi Arabian parents will have a negative reaction to their children wearing different dress or socializing with the opposite sex, since these are against their cultural norms. In addition, Saudi parents face other difficulties that arise from trying to explain to their children the gender differences between boys and girls in Saudi society and why they culturally behave the way they do, which do not apply to the culture in Singapore (Schwartz et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2008).

Saudi culture involves living in large extended families, which enhances strong family ties and relationships. There is a widespread notion that Saudi customs oppress women by denying them equitable opportunities with men, confining them to the roles of homemakers, as family honor is determined solely by a woman's behavior (Baldwin, 2017). Saudi culture dictates that extended families stick together and communally solve their family issues, do business, and support and protect each other. Other nations might not have this form of togetherness; instead, like many countries, people live as nuclear families. Children of Saudi diplomats working in Singapore have additional challenges that include depression, anxiety, and estrangement caused by isolation from family members and the difficulty of maintaining close ties with Arabia. For these reasons, Saudi diplomat families face more challenges than diplomats from other countries (Reddy, 2014). For example, the fact that the Saudi culture encourages extended families to stay together under one roof creates additional challenges.

First, moving to a foreign country breaks these unique family structures and bonds, since diplomats are not allowed to go to foreign countries with relatives other than members of their immediate family, which includes their spouse and dependents (Vassiliev, 2013). Second, they may be faced with other problems that include difficulty communicating with their new peers as a result of language or cultural barriers. The children may also be strongly affected by other factors such as changing schools, looking for new friends, interacting with new teachers, eating strange foods, developing new hobbies, adopting a different curriculum, and relocating to a new neighborhood (Morales, 2015). Third, the problems caused by lack of communication or negative attitudes of the children's peers related to their Muslim culture and Islamic traditions (like that of dressing) might lead to social

separation. For instance, children in school may distance themselves from the Saudi children, calling them terrorists, and some parents may even move their children from the school, citing safety concerns.

1.1.2(b) Psychological impacts.

Some of the difficulties include psychological problems caused by culture shock (such as unfamiliarity with the local legal processes for disciplining children), dealing with the homesickness of children that results from missing family members and friends, and finding essential social services among that would, among other things, assist them in addressing the challenges of parenting in the foreign country (Kathirvel & Febiula, 2016). Discrimination can adversely affect the children psychologically. Similarly, there might be bullying, racism, and inhibited relationships and friendships that can make the children more prone to depression and other mental illnesses. Discrimination can be tough on both parents and children, and—in addition to the risk of physical abuse—the children may be subjected to cyber bullying, which can affect their performance in academic and social development (Almutairi, 2015). To this end, the challenge of parenting would be educating children on how to deal with such situations and ensure that they understand the relevance of the host customs.

However, research has also indicated that a stress-inducing parenting style, even when normative, has long-term adverse psychological consequences (Hyland et al., 2013). In this regard, Saudi parents in Singapore should relax their stress-inducing parenting style to a more accommodating one that would allow their children to adapt to the new environment better without giving them additional stress. Furthermore, changing schools can affect children's psychological status and lead to the development of adverse behaviors, aggression, and poor academic

performance, among other things (Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013). The parents should be in a position to detect when their children are suffering so that they can offer them necessary help and assist them to adjust to their new environment.

1.1.2(c) Health impacts

Ghazwani et al. (2016) established that parental criticism and anger, as well as maltreatment and family provocation, were significant risk factors that result in health issues and social anxiety disorder (Ghazwani et al., 2016). For instance, they suggested that the changes in weather patterns, food variety, and infrastructural changes might affect children's comfort and make parenting more difficult for an immigrant. Weather patterns, for example, can affect the health of a child. Since Saudi children were used to a hot and dry climate, getting used to the humidity and colder weather in Singapore might affect their health, and they might develop a cold, flu, pneumonia, or even a respiratory disorder like asthma.

In addition, dietary change as a result of moving to Singapore can adversely affect the health of children. Since most immigrant parents lack the skills to help their children deal with dietary issues that might result in allergies, eating disorders and other health problems are matters that the social worker can help parents and children cope with. For instance, obesity has turned into a serious health problem for children. Wang and Riyadh (2014) made clear the role of parenting in the world by providing solid evidence suggesting that parenting styles can affect obesity rates in children. In addition, Wang and Riyadh stated that 18% of school-going youth in the United States are obese according to the World Health Organization's body mass index criteria, compared to almost 10% in Saudi Arabia, which suggests the importance of knowledgeable parents in the global world.

1.1.2(d) Educational impact.

The children of diplomats face additional educational problems that arise from instruction difficulties caused by the difference in language. Also, the change of the education system from the Saudi one to the one used in Singapore can create further culture shock resulting in delays in progress and other learning difficulties. The competitive education system in Singapore is a major concern for immigrant families with young children, especially since many are forced to take their children from their country's system of education to one that they are completely unfamiliar with. For diplomats who have to relocate to new places of work every 4 years, the challenge as parents would be to find an effective education system that can assist their children to transfer credits when they relocate to a new location (Göransson, 2015). Moreover, it is imperative that parental involvement in learning assists children with their studies. More specifically, Luo, Aye, Hogan, Kaur, and Chan (2013), in their study on parental participation in learning, suggested that the inclusion of parents in their children's academic affairs is associated with an adaptive learning profile where children self-regulate themselves as they engage in learning activities.

1.1.3 The Role of Social Workers in Parenting and the Importance of Parenting in Social Work Initiatives

Parenting is a difficult undertaking even in the best circumstances. However, it becomes much harder to be fully committed to this role for the growing number of parents who are called to serve their country in other parts of the world. In particular, the stress in a new society makes it increasingly difficult for immigrants like diplomats to parent effectively in a foreign society, which is the result of some obvious and apparent challenges. Since parenting is a continuous action that occurs

within the context of society, parental problems more often than not reflect problems in society (Long, 2004).

Therefore, the role of social workers is essential in assisting immigrant Saudi diplomats to make a smooth transition and assume their new way of life more easily through initiatives such as counseling and connecting them with the necessary support structures and programs. Furthermore, social workers can extend their services to foreigners, migrants, and refugees who face diverse challenges at different levels given their varied statuses and lifestyles. According to Hyland et al. (2013), parenting plays a significant role in the development of children. Therefore, the art of raising children the right way can have effects on their physical and mental health afterwards. In this regard, the nature of nurturing and parenting can determine the success of failure of individuals and, collectively, a nation. For instance, the results of Hyland et al.'s survey suggested that an aggressive style of parenting, in which beating and insults are synonymous, adversely increases the risk of somatic disease amongst adults. Moreover, their results indicate that an aggressive parenting style has long-term adverse health consequences for children (Hyland et al., 2013).

Therefore, the studies above are examples of the importance of parenting, which determines the general outcome of a person's values, cultures, behaviors, and goals in adulthood. In this regard, Jones and Truell (2012) suggested that these differing values and expectations determine how immigrants and refugees communicate with others, the kind of foods they eat, and the social distance they keep when interacting with other people. Similarly, Ghazwani et al. (2016), in their study of social anxiety disorder, revealed parenting styles as a risk factor, as they associated parenting-style risk factors with social anxiety disorder in adolescent students.

1.1.3(a) The role of social workers in parenting.

Since Singapore is a liberal state that is open socially and structurally with a blend of both Western and Eastern influences, many Saudi nationals find it difficult to adjust to the new society without the help of social workers working in the Saudi Arabian embassy in Singapore (Gentina & Singh, 2015). Therefore, the social workers play a vital role in helping the diplomats and their families make a smooth transition into the new culture and way of life in Singapore (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). However, the social workers must be culturally competent and sensitive to understand both the local language and traditional practices of the Singaporeans and Saudis, so that they can use that knowledge to assist those who are experiencing challenges adjusting to their new environment (Morán, Abramson, & Moran, 2014). Furthermore, to help in providing solutions to the challenges of parenting, additional resources like the embassies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, community liaison officers, and post protocol officers, among others, can be essential in acculturation and minimization of the adverse effects that could come with the process of adjusting.

It is important for social workers to develop cultural competence in their practice to improve their consciousness of how people of varied cultures experience their diversity and deal with the uniqueness and similarities when they are in a larger social context (Abugre & Debrah, 2013). Cultural competence enables social workers to apply an intersectionality approach to examine the forms of challenges families are going through, such as discrimination, racism, religion, and gender identity issues. They should be able to portray humility in their service and advocate for the rights of families in a bid to provide quality service (Gallegos, 1982; Gentina & Singh, 2015; Mellichamp, 2015; Schmidt, 2015; Zhou, et al., 2008). Social

workers can help diplomats and their families by lobbying for them by challenging institutions and structures that oppress them. Therefore, social workers and the systems associated with helping diplomats and their families overcome challenges faced in the foreign countries should respond to the diplomats and their families respectfully and efficiently, bearing in mind their differences in cultures, lifestyle, race, socioeconomic background, religion, and more (Littlechild, 2012). They should strive to recognize the value of the individuals in these families and their communities at large so that they can efficiently preserve their dignity.

The role of these social workers is to help vulnerable children and diplomatic families overcome the challenges they face while in the foreign countries. The increasing problems faced by families that move overseas for work purposes make them more susceptible to breaking apart (McNulty, 2015). Therefore, Saudi diplomats moving to other nations may find it hard coping away from family and relatives and starting life as a nuclear family in an unfamiliar environment. The social workers should be in a position to understand the customs and traditions of the families that are experiencing different challenges and provide relevant intervention strategies.

In the case of diplomatic families in other countries, the roles of social workers are more tuned to detect in families the challenges associated with moving to an unfamiliar environment and provide necessary help. For instance, they could offer counseling assistance to the accompanying spouse in cases where the spouse feels left alone after halting his or her life to accompany the partner for work. They could provide guidance on how to cope with the new lifestyle in the host country to both parents and the children. In instances where children begin to perform poorly because of the changes in their lives, social workers could offer professional help to

assist the children to overcome their challenges through their systems and the family-oriented approach (Lardhi, 2016; Littlechild, 2012; Yanca & Johnson, 2008).

Social workers are clinically trained to give the necessary support to family members suffering from mental depression and, in the case of diplomats and their families, are likely to encounter family members with psychological issues (Yanca & Johnson, 2008). They help professionals in embassies, aid agencies, and systems that work together in cross-cultural situations. Social workers in Saudi embassies should be trained to understand the customs and traditions of the Saudi people as well as their languages, their religion, how to interact with them during service provision, and other crucial cultural responsiveness, proficiency, and sensitivity matters. Social workers' systems in the Saudi embassies should be conscious of cultural diversity, be in a position to perform cultural self-awareness, be prepared for the outcomes of interactions between varied cultures, and develop programs and interventions that can serve the clients without bias (Lardhi, 2016).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this section, the researcher discusses the problem among parents and the factors that often lead to challenges, such as social, health, psychological, educational and cultural factors. Furthermore, it is critical to note that this study focuses on the role of social workers as a primary intervention that can help execute the best solution. There are many parenting challenges that come with moving and adjusting to the new way of life in a foreign country, and they are widely multifaceted and encompass cultural, religious, and social differences (Lazarova et al., 2015). This yields implications for social workers, as they must identify social interventions that help Saudi nationals overcome cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences when they transition to a new culture (Payne, 2015).

Globalization has led to the development of cross-border mobility that has resulted in the immigration of diplomats and their families from one part of the world to another as they execute their duties and responsibilities in foreign countries (Gray & Webb, 2014). To this end, the challenges that new immigrant families face while settling into a new environment with differing cultural norms and values usually necessitate social adjustments that require the help of a social worker. In this regard, for diplomats who are parents, the issue of parenting is even more complicated and challenging as they try to raise their children in societies with different values, culture, and language from those to which they are accustomed (Almutairi, 2015).

Family-related challenges, especially the spouse and children failure to adapt to the new culture, have been considered one of the key determinants of underperformance in diplomatic missions worldwide (Scullion & Collings, 2006). Copeland and Norell (2002) argue that diplomatic missions can be a considerable cause of stress and anxiety, particularly for the accompanying spouse, as they involve challenging and often overwhelming family responsibilities, alienation and social isolation, diverse social, economic and political constraints and (often dramatic) changes in their employment or social status. In that process, one of the key challenges for governments and organizations is that diplomatic posts do not only involve employees, but their families and their specific needs, difficulties and adjustment patterns across relocation. Accordingly, diplomatic missions are required to allocate both their time and resources to streamline the relocation process for the diplomats and their families.

Most of these families (spouses, in particular) experience mixed feelings about relocation, going from a variety of difficulties relating to different social and cultural norms, education and diverse health/psychological challenges, to gratitude

for being able to encounter new cultures and lifestyles. Some of the difficulties experienced by diplomat families include parenting challenges, isolation, loneliness, health-related concerns and cultural differences. In certain cultures, diplomat spouses also reported difficulties relate to lack of financial independence, but also the lack of support and engagement of their diplomat spouses (Mashigo, 2014).

Since different cultures have different means of managing social issues such as parenting, it is not surprising to find that a difference exists between Saudi nationals and Europeans (Morán et al., 2014). Jones and Truell (2012) argued that foreigners face various challenges when they move overseas. Moreover, these problems relate to differences in identity, ethnicity, and cultural values, one of which is mode of parenting. Diplomats also face many parenting challenges while they try to settle in their new countries of duty (Jones & Truell, 2012).

The existence of a parenting problem in diplomatic circles has been so evident in the past few years that various organizations and associations have been created as family support service centers, such as the DSFA, which assists diplomatic officers from the Commonwealth countries who work overseas (Schwartz et al., 2017). The mandate of the association is to provide a wide range of support services, advice, and information relating to adapting to the new environment (DSFA, n.d.). Also, where Saudi Arab Muslim immigrant parents are concerned, the culture and traditions of Saudi Arabians are unique (DeLong-Bas, 2013). In this regard, differences in language, religion, culture, and values make Saudi Arab Muslim immigrant parents prone to parenting challenges that lead to social, cultural, physiological, and psychological issues when they move to different cultures (Vassiliev, 2013).

Given the drastic differences in parenting style, in combination with the lack of social worker guidance on the matter for Saudi nationals, it is clear that additional social workers are needed to leverage the best parenting programs (Joussemet, Mageau, & Koestner, 2014). The overarching goal of such social work interventions is to improve upon parenting-style weaknesses. By integrating more social workers in the Saudi Arabia Diplomatic Corps, parenting challenges faced by Saudi nationals can be reversed with evidence-based parenting practices (Gardner, Montgomery, & Knerr, 2016).

Furthermore, due to the cultural differences in these countries, parenting becomes a problem for the Arab and Muslim diplomats when they emigrate to developed countries like Singapore. Moreover, it is a problem, since such immigrants find it difficult to maintain and sustain their traditions and culture in light of the foreign influences that might affect their children during parenting (Hettige et al., 2012). In this regard, the social worker plays a very vital role in helping Saudi Arabian parents living in Singapore deal with parenting challenges. Since Saudi culture is unique, and the role of social workers is critical, any social worker working with them needs to know about the culture to be able to effectively devise practical social work interventions that could prove valuable to the diplomats in their parental roles (Choi, 2003; Morán et al., 2014).

Therefore, to help their foreign service workers, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs undertakes social welfare for its citizens abroad by providing various services. However, it needs to lay down basic rules for professional intervention by its social workers, especially about the problems of parenting and cultural sensitivity. Some of these solutions that the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs undertakes social

welfare for its citizens abroad by providing various services and professional interventions for its social workers (McNulty & Semeniuk, 2014).

Additionally, cultural issues affect critical roles in parenting as well as the role of the social worker in working with Saudi parents to help them deal with the challenges (Schwartz et al., 2017). In the context of this paper, emphasis is placed on the issue of cultural competence, especially relating to social work in multicultural environment. What makes social work unique is the ability to locate social problems within the complex interconnectedness of individuals, families, communities and societies (van Wormer, 2007; Kirst-Ashman, 2008). Engaging in social work also requires confronting the discrimination and repression perpetuated by different individuals, groups, communities and society as a whole. In order to do so, it is important to recognize the discriminated and marginalized groups in a society or culture. Different terms, such as multiculturalism, interculturalism, diversity, cultural diversity, cross-cultural practice, and so on, are used to describe patterns of interaction in social work with different "special populations."

The concept of cultural competence is of critical importance as a practice based on the ideas of multiculturalism and interculturalism. Since monoculturalism presupposes the rejection of differences and belief in the superiority of the dominant culture in a society, multiculturalism thus signifies acceptance and respect for cultural similarities and cultural differences between people (Laden & Owen, 2007). In this sense, social workers are expected to adopt the ideas of multiculturalism as rooted in human dignity and in the fundamental equality of different cultures. Also, a key component of multiculturalism is cultural diversity, in the sense that multiculturalism rests on the plurality of languages, customs, traditions, norms, skills, perspectives, lifestyles and worldviews.

Recognition of these differences suggests that subordinate social groups and communities do not have to give up their identity or assimilate according to dominant norms or patterns of behavior (Reitz et al., 2009), but dominant groups are encouraged to acquire and develop new ways to understand different cultures. The role of a social worker in this regard would be to empower individuals and groups to recognize, understand and accept cultural differences relating to race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, skills and abilities, gender, sexuality, economic and social status, etc. Challenges to understanding and accepting cultural differences usually concern ethnocentrism and xenophobia, as well as prejudices and misconceptions that exist about other cultures.

Interculturalism, on the other hand, implies a useful social exchange in which cultures primarily learn about each other and therefore it involves cross-cultural dialogue and active learning, instead of passive acceptance of multiculturalism, for example, the simple plurality of segregated and/or isolated cultures. The transcultural perspective of individuals should enable them not only to be culturally sensitive to different cultures, but also to be active, engaged and enriched by the experience of interacting with other cultures. In terms of cultural competence, social workers are expected to transcend multiculturalism in favor of interculturalism.

To this end, the importance of cultural competence in social work practice, especially with regard to parenting problems and culture sensitivity, is examined. The findings of this study provide a good reference for social workers who work with Saudi parents and show the importance of cultural competence in social work practice. The findings could be used as reference for other nationalities facing similar problems to Saudis in a foreign country. In addition, the problem is important to society since it could help the authorities in Singapore understand the challenges that

Islamic diplomats face while raising their children, particularly those from Saudi Arabia.

In consideration of the presented background to this study, the researcher aims to explore and broaden understanding of the parenting experiences of Saudi Arabian diplomats and their spouses in Singapore. The study will explore stimulating and discouraging aspects of their life in diplomatic mission in Singapore, as well as a variety of social, health, psychological, educational and cultural factors helping or hindering them to adjust. The study also aims at analyzing the level of support provided by the Department and suggesting social work interventions framework that could help Saudi diplomats and their parents maintain a quality life across their mission in Singapore and other countries.

1.3 Research Questions

In this study, the researcher seeks to answer three research questions:

1. What are the social, psychological, health, and educational challenges facing the Saudi diplomat parents in raising their children?

2. What are the cultural competences and awareness factors for social workers when managing clients from Saudi Arabia?

3. What are the roles of social workers in helping the diplomats' dependents overcome these parenting challenges in Singapore?

1.4 Research Objectives

In this study, the researcher intends to identify significant issues that have historically affected the children and spouses of the Saudi diplomats as they adjust to their new life in Singapore. The overarching goal is to further develop solutions to

the parenting challenges currently faced by Saudi nationals. Secondly, it is critical that the solutions focus on the role of social workers as a means of procuring evidence-based interventions that optimally support improved parenting practices.

The following are the four major research objectives:

1. To examine the challenges facing the Saudi diplomat parents in their roles, which include social, psychological, health and educational issues.

2. To analyze cultural competence in social work practice in Singapore's social work and cultural awareness of diplomats from Saudi Arabia that includes their thoughts, behaviors, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and social groups.

3. To establish the roles of social workers in helping the diplomats' dependents to overcome parenting challenges in Singapore.

4. To provide suggestions for intervention strategies or models to improve parenting skills among Saudi nationals, with an emphasis on Singapore.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Some related studies with different foci, such as international social work, the challenges in diplomatic positions in the case of women, social work with immigrants and refugees, social work practice with children and families, and social work and cultural competence, assisted greatly in the research. Moreover, the findings of the study are significant for Saudi diplomats, their spouses, the Singaporean authorities, and social workers living in Singapore. The findings could assist in enlightening various stakeholders about the potential challenges of immigrant parenting in Singapore and how they can mitigate them.

Also, the findings are significant to the Singaporean authorities and the relevant policy makers for understanding the challenges in raising children that face the diplomats and their families as they come to the country and encouraging them to come up with various reforms and solutions to ease these challenges. On the other hand, they could help the Saudi government to know the kind of social services its citizens need overseas, given that there are unique systems in the country, especially those designed to help with parenting. Furthermore, the findings could also be helpful to the Saudi Ministry of Affairs to activate some social worker roles to attract their citizens in other countries and establish new systems that respect other people's diverse parenting styles.

Similarly, the results are informative for social workers and those who are interested in social work regarding their roles in helping foreign diplomatic workers, especially Saudi diplomats and their families, overcome the challenges they are facing in parenting as they try to adjust to a new way of life in a foreign country. Moreover, the findings of this study could be of help to social workers to understand the nature of the challenges when they move to another open culture by looking to their backgrounds for customs and traditions.

In addition, the study is significant and original as it examines the current issues faced by Saudi diplomat families given that there is increased globalization and countries are opening their borders to foreign workers. The topic is also of interest since it gives new insights into challenges and leads to solutions to them. People are usually at their highest productivity levels when they are free from any challenges, which is be beneficial to the families involved and the two countries at large. It could also open avenues for other related research works, advances in international social work services, and management of foreign workers.