

**AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL WORKERS' RISK
WHILE PROVIDING SERVICES TO THE
CLIENT: A STUDY IN THE UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES (UAE)**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2025

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by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to Allah SWT for giving me the strength to finish this study. Extraordinary gratitude goes out to my dear main supervisor, Professor Dr. Azlinda Azman, the Director General of Higher Education, who has always been there to provide me with all the necessary support, I needed in this journey, and my dear co-supervisor Dr. Syazwani Drani for her support and quick response and for being there always for me. The top management of USM Library and the founder of the Strategic Program in the Research Support Service. In particular, the USM Thesis Formatting team member for their commitment and patience in overcoming numerous obstacles in finishing the task. Moreover, in the process of completing the template, I received assistance and guidance from some respected persons, who deserve my gratitude the Formatting Team, for guiding and helping me in numerous consultations. and thank the team members from the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS) for their input, consultation, and involvement in updating the USM Guidelines in finishing the template. Last but not least, this work is dedicated to the inspiring person in my life, my dear father and my dear mother who always wanted me to have the best, for her love, and the prayers that she made for me. and to my friends my sweet colleagues (Roqaya, Eiman, Reem, Rehab, and Hilal); I would have never started this journey of higher education without your company, love, and encouragement. and a special dedication to the participants who had attended the Research Support Workshop in the USM Library. Thank you for the tremendous positive feedback given along with the continuous support received.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS

	$(Z\text{-score})^2 *$
A	$\text{StdDev} * (1 - \text{StdDev}) / (\text{margin of error})^2$

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CA	Cronbach alpha
CFA	confirmatory factor analysis
CR	Composite Reliability
D	Deleted
EH	Ethical Risks
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
MAR	missing at random
MCAR	missing completely at random
MNAR	missing not at random
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
PHR	Physical Risks
RM	Risk Management
RM	Risk Management
RM	Risk Management
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
Smart PLS	Partial Least Squares –SmartPLS
SSP's	Social Service Practitioners
WLB	Work-Life Balance
WLB	Work-Life Balance

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APPENDIX A RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

**ANALISIS RISIKO PEKERJA SOSIAL SEMASA MENYEDIAKAN
PERKHIDMATAN KEPADA KLIEN: SATU KAJIAN DI EMIRIAH ARAB
BERSATU (UAE)**

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji risiko yang dialami pekerja sosial di UAE dan implikasinya terhadap amalan. Dengan peningkatan keperluan untuk perkhidmatan sosial di UAE, pekerja sosial menghadapi beberapa risiko semasa menyampaikan perkhidmatan kritikal kepada pelbagai populasi. Risiko ini mungkin merangkumi bahaya kesihatan, bahaya fizikal dan tekanan psikologi, yang menonjolkan kepentingan pendekatan pengurusan risiko komprehensif untuk landskap kerja sosial UAE. Objektif utama termasuk mengkaji hubungan antara faktor risiko, strategi pengurusan risiko dan keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dalam kalangan pekerja sosial di UAE. Selanjutnya, peranan pengantara keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan juga dicadangkan. Kajian kuantitatif ini menggunakan kaedah tinjauan untuk menyiasat risiko yang dihadapi oleh pekerja sosial di UAE. Populasi sasaran terdiri daripada semua pekerja sosial yang berdaftar dan mengamalkan di seluruh tujuh Emirates. Menggunakan teknik pensampelan kemudahan bukan kebarangkalian, data dikumpulkan daripada 384 peserta yang memegang sekurang-kurangnya ijazah BSW dan aktif bekerja dalam sektor seperti perlindungan kanak-kanak, kesihatan, kepolisan dan keganasan rumah tangga. Data dianalisis menggunakan SPSS untuk mengkaji hubungan antara pelbagai jenis risiko dan peranan pengantara keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan antara faktor risiko, keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan, dan amalan pengurusan risiko dalam kalangan pekerja sosial di UAE. Penemuan menyerlahkan

sifat meresap risiko dalam amalan kerja sosial dan kepentingan menangani faktor individu dan organisasi untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan dan keberkesanan pengamal. Terutamanya, penyelidikan menentukan peranan pengantara keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dalam mengurangkan kesan buruk risiko terhadap hasil pengurusan risiko. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini menekankan keperluan untuk membangunkan intervensi yang disesuaikan dan mekanisme sokongan untuk melindungi kesihatan pekerja sosial dan meningkatkan kualiti perkhidmatan sosial di UAE. Cadangan termasuk melaksanakan program latihan pengurusan risiko yang komprehensif, menggalakkan persekitaran kerja yang menyokong, dan memudahkan amalan penjagaan diri dalam kalangan pengamal. Dengan menangani perhubungan rumit antara risiko, keseimbangan kerja-kehidupan dan pengurusan risiko, pihak berkepentingan boleh mempromosikan ekosistem kerja sosial yang selamat dan lebih mampan di UAE, membantu pengamal dan komuniti mereka.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the risks social workers experience in the UAE and their implications for practice. With an increasing need for social services in the UAE, social workers face several risks while delivering critical services to myriad populations. These risks may encompass health hazards, physical dangers, and psychological stressors, highlighting the significance of comprehensive risk management approaches for the UAE's social work landscape. The primary objectives include examining the relationship between risk factors, risk management strategies, and work-life balance among social workers in the UAE. Further, the mediating role of work-life balance is also proposed. This quantitative study employed a survey method to investigate the risks faced by social workers in the UAE. The target population comprised all registered and practicing social workers across the seven Emirates. Using a non-probability, convenience sampling technique, data were collected from 384 participants who held at least a BSW degree and were actively working in sectors such as child protection, health, policing, and domestic violence. Data were analysed using SPSS to examine the relationship between various risk types and the mediating role of work-life balance. The study results indicate significant relationships between risk factors, work-life balance, and risk management practices among social workers in the UAE. Findings highlight the pervasive nature of risks in social work practice and the significance of addressing individual and organizational factors to improve practitioners' well-being and

effectiveness. Notably, the research determines the mediating role of work-life balance in mitigating the detrimental impacts of risks on risk management outcomes. Thus, this research emphasizes the need to develop tailored interventions and support mechanisms to protect social workers' health and improve the quality of social services in the UAE. Recommendations include executing comprehensive risk management training programs, encouraging supportive work environments, and facilitating self-care practices among practitioners. By addressing the intricate relationships between risks, work-life balance, and risk management, stakeholders can promote a secure and more sustainable social work ecosystem in the UAE, helping practitioners and their communities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Today, the world is witnessing a great boom and openness in all aspects of life, developments of systems, and methods that regulate human life and rights to decent living and citizenship in its region. This development was accompanied by some developments in the social fields aimed at improving societal frameworks and achieving social well-being (Dentice, 2018; Ojok, 2016).

The economic situation in the axis of the Gulf states imposed a certain type of socialization due to the steady economic growth and social welfare and improving the standard of living that was accompanied by societal problem and challenges that the world and the regions had not known before and we find that these challenges lie in the social status of the individual, which is reflected in his actions (Dentice, 2018). With the prosperity and development, jobs emerged other than those previously that people had known and may have been primitive to solve society's problems, among these jobs is the job of the social worker, which has become important for solving societal problems and combat negative phenomena (Faleiros, 1990; Mito & Nogueira, 2013; Kalantjankos, 2019).

Since the 1970s, trends within Social Work have decisively changed the course of the continent's career. This process, called the 'Reconceptualization Movement',

changed the discourse from the methodological emphasis that had been dominant until then to a discourse on social relations under capitalism, thus making the social policy more recognizable as a place for the struggle to guarantee social rights (Faleiros, 1990). In this sense, according to Campos (1988, p.13), social policy gained a theoretical position in the field of social work, which enabled it to articulate between the intellectual viewpoint of society and that of the profession (Miotto & Nogueira, 2013).

Social work in its professional history is at a daunting time. As the twenty-first century develops, educators and practitioners of social workers face a host of perennial problems and introduce new features to them (Dominelli & Hackett, 2012). Therefore, the subject of the current study came about the work of the social workers and the challenges they may face while performing their job duties and trying to find ways to secure their safety and to deal with the obstacle they face.

1.2 Research Background

In the last century social work started as a profession in the Arab World. In Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the society needed this recognition, which resulted from the efforts made by both educated youth and the sensitivity of the able leadership of both schools and the government to social problems. Social workers play a very important role in society, as they have the ability to tackle the social challenges faced by society and bring a difference in others' life and change in society. According to Forbes, it is the 7th most meaningful job and vital in the functioning of society and community. However, it is important to consider the challenges and risks they face in this profession and measures to be taken to address these risks and challenges (Tradewind, 2019).

In all types of works and jobs, there is some risk involved, however, in social work, there is high risk involved and social workers face some kind or the other on an everyday basis. There is always some risk involved in helping others. Take for example lending someone money involves a risk for getting the amount back, helping a stranger might result in getting conned or getting involved in a harmful situation. Social workers are often placed in a vulnerable position because their job involves helping others. The risk of harm, physical injury is much higher in this profession and multifaceted (Kalantjankos, 2019).

Risk is often described as the probability of occurrence of harm. In other professions risky situations in terms of decision making often associated with possible harms as well as potential gains (Taylor, 2017). However, in social work, the risk concept is more multi-faceted and is associated with negative value because of its seriousness and likelihood (Whittaker & Taylor, 2018). Risk management in social work is the proactive and systematic identification, assessment, and mitigation of the multifaceted risks that social workers face in their daily practice. These risks may include physical harm, emotional stress, ethical dilemmas, and threats to personal safety, particularly during field visits or interactions with vulnerable populations. In the context of the UAE, where social work practice is evolving amidst Western frameworks and cultural specificities, risk management also involves managing professional challenges within high-risk environments while ensuring that ethical standards, work-life balance, and client safety are maintained (Dominelli, 2021). Social work in the USA is considered among the 20 deadliest jobs with 1 death per 100,000. Social workers face the risk of violence, injury, abuse, assault on the job (CBS News, 2020). In the UK, 21

social workers died because of COVID-19 exposure in May 2020 which increased twice from April 2020. The survey of social care practitioners revealed that 30% of social workers reported that they had colleagues who had either died or became ill due to Covid-19 in their line of duty (Samuel, 2020). Another research by Stack (2004) also stated that the suicide rate among social workers is high. Stack (2004) argued that occupations are neglected risk factors in suicide however occupations are directly related as they increase psychological stress. The study results found that being a social worker increased the chance of suicide death by 55.6% compared to other occupations. However social workers benefit from psychological training and resources as they act as a buffer against occupational stress.

The global landscape of social work has increasingly acknowledged the inherent risks and challenges social workers face in their everyday practice. Across different regions, professionals in this field are regularly exposed to emotionally charged, physically dangerous, and ethically complex situations (Brearley, 2023; Dominelli, 2021). These global trends reflect a broader recognition of the need to protect and support social workers as they navigate difficult environments, advocate for marginalized populations, and uphold professional standards in volatile and unpredictable settings (Eder et al., 2021; Blobel et al., 2022). From mental health crises and trauma cases to the rising demands of digital and cross-cultural practice, social workers globally are engaging with an expanding scope of responsibilities that often involve significant personal and professional risk (MacAlister, 2022).

Within the UAE, these challenges are amplified by the unique cultural, institutional, and professional contexts in which social work operates. Social workers in

the UAE face specific stressors related to the rapid modernization of society, diverse population dynamics, and growing demand for services within schools, hospitals, welfare centres, and NGOs (Jones et al., 2025). Despite the growing importance of the profession, there remains a limited amount of local research and policy development addressing the risks faced by social workers, including burnout, physical danger, ethical stress, and work-life imbalance (Dominelli, 2021; Brearley, 2023). Many frameworks applied in the UAE are derived from Western models, which may not fully address the cultural nuances and realities of practice in Arab societies (Bach-Mortensen & Barlow, 2021). As such, it is essential to explore and document the lived experiences of UAE-based social workers to develop more context-sensitive strategies for risk management and professional sustainability.

Similar risk also exists in the UAE though at a low level. Badri (1998) stated in UAE there are many schools of social workers who enhance school effectiveness and help in handling disturbed teenagers. However, they also face many challenges such as their work is not defined precisely, bureaucratic framework, and dealing with disturbed youngsters and their disruptive behaviour. This not only affects their job performance but also their effectiveness and personal lives (Badri, 1998).

Issa's (2013) report in a newspaper also highlighted the issues social workers face citing the example of social workers in the Community Development Authority. Bushra Qaed the head of the Women, Youth, and children department of CDA, stated that social workers need to be patient, highly motivated, and strong to be effective and achieve something. However, the shortage of specialist social workers in the UAE, lack of sufficient laws and legal cover that allows social workers to intervene in a family

situation for protecting a child present enormous challenge for the social workers and negatively affect their morale (Issa, 2013).

In this perspective, the research attempts to examine in-depth the various risks, challenges, and issues faced by social workers in the UAE, their severity and likelihood, how it affects their personal and professional lives and explores what are measures adopted by UAE government, policymakers, and social work agencies. After doing so, the research would also examine the best practices of risk mitigation followed around the world to protect and safeguard social workers and explores the possibility of implementing the same in the UAE.

The evolution of professional social work has been closely tied to the identification and management of societal risks and unmet needs. From its inception, the field has responded to challenges affecting vulnerable populations by providing targeted support to prevent harm or social exclusion (Seden, 2016; Smith, 2011). Traditionally, three main groups have been the focus of intervention: individuals involved in the criminal justice system, children in need of care or protection, and adults requiring assistance due to mental health issues, disabilities, aging, or chronic illness (Seden, 2019; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2007).

Risk, need, and assessment are interdependent components of social work practice. Assessment serves as a tool to evaluate the degree of risk and to determine the appropriate services or interventions. These evaluations often require collaboration with professionals from other sectors, such as healthcare, education, and community services, as well as input from family members and carers (Seden, 2016; Taylor & Whittaker,

2018). A shared understanding of core concepts—such as risk, need, and assessment—is essential to ensure consistency in interdisciplinary settings and to enable informed decision-making (Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2015; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003).

However, social workers often face dangerous conditions, sometimes without adequate training, support, or safety equipment. These risks include verbal threats, physical assaults, and, tragically, even death in the line of duty (Sancken, 2015; Samuel, 2020). The emotional toll of such risks is compounded by high workloads and the stress associated with constantly navigating complex, high-stakes situations (Stanley, 2023; Tims, Bakker & Derks, 2013).

These occupational hazards are not confined to Western contexts. In the United Arab Emirates, similar risks exist for social care workers, compounded by the region's unique socio-cultural and regulatory environment (Tadam, Wagner, & Mitchell, 2023). Workers often encounter aggressive behavior from clients, navigate sensitive domestic issues, and operate in systems where resources for emotional and physical safety may be inconsistent (UNICEF, 2019; Sloan et al., 2017). Issues such as insufficient mental health support, lack of de-escalation training, and cultural resistance to certain interventions present additional challenges. The UAE's National Occupational Standards emphasize the complexity and responsibility associated with the social worker's role, highlighting the need for robust training and cross-agency cooperation to ensure both the worker's and the client's safety (UAE Ministry of Education, 2021).

The global nature of these challenges suggests an urgent need for comprehensive risk management strategies and systemic reforms to support the well-being of social

workers and the effectiveness of their services (Spikin, 2013; Schmid, 2016; SAMHSA, 2019).

1.3 Problem Statement

The social work profession was introduced with the assistance of experts from several Arab countries. The functions of the social work department were to undertake supervision of various aspects of school activity and to establish plans and programs to help improve society. This is a critical period in the history of the development of social work in the UAE where the International Association of Schools of Social Work subjected the first professional social work education and training program offered to the rigor of a review process. Currently most social work programs are evaluated against Western social work accreditation frameworks and quality assurance processes. While this practice may be appropriate in certain contexts, in others, such as in the Arab world, a more authentic frame of reference is required. Since the emergence of the profession of the social worker, social workers have put themselves in risky situations in one way or another when they assist their clients. For all social workers around the world, the risk is inherent and they have to manage risk daily (Abisheva & Assylbekova, 2016). Furthermore, the risk in social work is multi-faceted and serious (Whittaker & Taylor, 2017). The career of social work requires professionals to help clients who may be at their worst (Sedan, 2016; Reardon, 2016). For example, a client may have a mental illness, lost their loved ones; have an ongoing drug addiction, currently experiencing trauma, facing violence, poverty, and homelessness during a social worker's visit. All these elements and more can put the social worker in dangerous situations (Lyter & Abbot, 2007; Dominelli, 2011; Veeran, 2013; Galvani, 2015; Pathak, & Srivastava,

2020). Social workers often put themselves in vulnerable positions and harmful situations to help others. The risks and circumstances that enhance such risks depend on the work environment and the specialty of social work. The risks include stress, health, physical endangerment, and the worsening situation of the client (Kalantjankos, 2019).

Social workers abilities and responsibilities are enormous and different organisations are working tirelessly to empower many individuals within the circle of social workers without gender discrimination (Youssef, 2020). In cooperation with both public and private organisations, social workers contributions are strongly noticed, because social workers improve environment and human activities with grossly high risks tendencies (Tedad, 2020; Al Gharaibeh, 2020). Risks involved in the aspects of social workers responsibilities is unquantifiable (Sarhan & Tedam, 2020).

Consequently, upon above, challenges and risks facing social workers in the field were concerning researchers for decades (Kalantjankos, 2019; Whittaker & Taylor, 2018). Across the New York area and around the United States, experts say that social service workers are gradually at risk of violent assault. Clients have killed at least eight workers in five years. While hundreds of others have been assaulted as they work the front lines between anxious clients and a regime, they believe has caused their problems or cannot solve them (Dillon, 1992). William Griffin, a social work professor at the University of North Carolina in a New York Times article said that "Social work gets more dangerous every year" (Dillon, 1992, p.1). Social work practice is genuinely based on the person-environment theoretical perspective, which means seeing a client at home is essential (Lyter & Abbot, 2007). In social work, the risk is an everyday practice issue, and they are in the business of risk work (Stanley, 2018).

Accordingly, a number of empirical studies on risks encountered by social workers have been conducted in many countries. One of such studies was conducted by Lynch (2017) using a sample population of 33 participants consisting of 22 females and (67%) and 11 males (33%). The study found that social workers were exposed to dangerous situations during home visits. For example, they could be bitten or chased by a dog or other animal, threatened with weapons, exposed to parasites, verbally, or physically assaulted by a client, their family members, or friends.

On 10th August 2015, an interview was conducted with Angelo McClain, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Social Work (NASW) on National Public Radio. McClain mentioned the death of a social worker called Lara Sobel on 7th August 2015, who was shot by a woman who's lost custody of her daughter; the shooter also reportedly killed three of her family members. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2019, p.1), "social worker duty in a repeatedly complex environment such as child welfare agencies, schools, mental health centres, and hospitals", safety can be a concern in many of these settings (Asad, et al., 2021).

Stanley (2018) also stated that social workers get caught up in 'anticipatory risk work' and often find themselves working in a 'pre-crime' space. Kalantjankos (2019) elaborated on the multi-faceted risks social workers face such as physical risks, health risks, stress-related risks, and risk of unintended consequences. The physical risks they face include occupational and environmental hazards such as the risk of exposure to mould, pathogens, warped steps, nails when visiting a client, mentally unstable clients, facility safety where social workers work (Asad et al., 2021).

Kalantjankos (2019) stated that in a survey of 2000 social workers it was revealed that more than 3 quarters of them face high stress in their work which affects their performance at the job. As a result, they get addicted to alcohol as a coping mechanism while others get used to antidepressants. The stress-related illnesses they face include generalized anxiety disorders, chronic fatigue, depression, and PTSD. The final risk social workers face on daily basis is the fear of unintended consequences. Every day they struggle with the question “what if I just make things worse” when the client does not want to help themselves and any intervention by a social worker is met with hostility and unintended consequences (Kalantjankos, 2019). Social workers try to prevent harm and act ethically however in some complex situations it is difficult for them to prevent all harm. They must adhere to professional ethical standards (Asad, Haider, & Fatima, 2018) and make difficult ethical choices which might result in unintended consequences and stress (Reamer, 2015).

Keddell (2017) empirical comparative research in New Zealand between risk-averse and risk-friendly practitioners in child welfare found that compared with statutory child welfare social workers; non-governmental social workers were more risk-averse. It is because they found the risk or severity of abuse higher than the risk-friendly group. Fenton and Kelly's (2017) study on moral injury experiences of social workers in Scotland found that most social workers developed guilt disturbances and shame leading to post-traumatic stress disorder. The study also found that social workers experienced more ethical stress.

Skolnik-Acker, consultant to workplace safety at NASW Massachusetts claimed that “every social worker and human service worker can be a victim of aggression at

some time during their career” (Reardon, 2016, p.14). According to an NASW study along with the University of Albany conducted in 2004 covering 10,000 licensed social workers, it was found that 44% of participants faced personal safety issues in their practice and 30% of social workers stated that their employers were not able to address the safety issues adequately. Another report from OSHA (2015) revealed that three-quarters of workplace assaults that were reported between 2011 and 2013 took place in social services or healthcare setting. Though most of the assaults did not result in death, yet it took time away from the job and result in serious injury to the worker (Reardon, 2016).

Additionally, diverse media such as online, 24/7 digital, and social media have created a wide range of complexities resulting in ethical and high risks for social workers (Reamer, 2013). Sensationalist media coverage of high-profile social work cases further increases the risks social workers face particularly the child social workers (Ayre, 2001). Whittaker & Taylor (2017) argue that the study of risk in social work is just not a study of risk management but a study of the complex interplay between evidence of fact, human behaviour, emotions, organizational systems, and professional values.

Moreover, the concern over work-life balance and risk management is gradually becoming a common talk especially when it comes to social workers. Work-life balance is a state of balance in which the demand of both professional and personal life is equal. Each role has a different set of demands and when such role demands overlap, multiple problems are faced, and it creates a lot of risks. Work-life balance is an additional factor that has been associated with risk management (Van Den Berg et al., 2020). However,

although recent studies have shown that work-life balance plays a critical role in predicting risk management (Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2015; Van Den Berg et al., 2020), there has yet to be extensive research conducted on the impact of work-life balance among social work practitioners specifically.

In this research, the work-life balance variable serves as a mediator. Based on its significance in the literature and its ability to predict risk management in the early stage of the quitting process, the researcher in this study has deduced that this variable is a mediator. Researchers have paid a lot of attention to this factor as one of the extra-role behaviours (e.g., Van Den Berg et al., 2020; Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2015; Van Den Berg et al., 2020), and successful firms usually urge workers to strike a balance between work and life (Sangarandeniya & Wijewantha, 2016). In order for a company to thrive, it needs people who are willing to make contributions outside the scope of their regular work (Sharoni et al., 2012). Moreover, it is essential that organizations understand the significance of work-life balance in reducing risks inside the workplace (Dechen et al., 2020).

The history of social work in the UAE is relatively recent and has largely developed through the influence of experts from other Arab countries. Initially introduced to support the supervision and improvement of school and community welfare activities, the profession has gradually expanded into various sectors, including healthcare, NGOs, and governmental social services (Asad, Haider, & Fatima, 2018). However, unlike Western nations where social work has a long-established framework and professional identity, the UAE's social work education and practice continue to evolve, often relying on imported accreditation standards and models. This has created a

critical need for locally informed approaches that align more closely with the UAE's unique cultural, institutional, and societal context (Elsayed, 2021).

In UAE studies on risks faced by social workers indicated that they are vulnerable to traumatic stress and burnout symptoms. A study conducted by Musa (2009) involved 180 social workers working in NGOs, welfare centres, hospitals, and schools, examined the prevalence of burnout and stress and its effect on their job satisfaction. The study found a high prevalence of burnout and stress among social workers and age is negatively related to secondary traumatic stress and burnout and positively related to compassion fatigue. Burnout was found to be related positively to the workplace. The study concluded that social workers working in social welfare centres were exposed to high burnout risk.

However, very little research or studies focus on the risks social workers face in the UAE and how to manage them. Social workers have been subjected to verbal and physical assaults, and tragically, some have lost their lives while performing their job responsibilities (Elsayed, 2021). These studies indicate that social workers' challenges and risks are inherent in their job duties. They highlight how working in unsafe and stressful environments can jeopardise their lives and impact their personal and professional well-being, potentially leading them to leave the profession. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the risks that social workers face while performing their job duties in the UAE. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by examining the risks social workers face in their practice in the context of the UAE.

The risks and challenges intrinsic to social work practice, i.e., exposure to physical harm, emotional burnout, ethical stress, and high caseload demands, directly

influence both professional outcomes and the quality of services delivered. When social workers work under unsafe or unsupported conditions, their ability to make sound decisions, maintain emotional resilience, and maintain ethical standards can be compromised (Van Den Berg et al., 2020). This not only affects their well-being but also jeopardizes the quality of care and intervention offered to vulnerable clients. Inconsistent support systems, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of culturally grounded training can lead to high turnover, reduced job satisfaction, and diminished effectiveness in client support and advocacy (Saltmarsh & Randell-Moon, 2015).

This research is critically needed to fill the gap in empirical knowledge surrounding the distinctive risk landscape faced by social workers in the UAE. While much of the existing literature is grounded in Western contexts (Asad et al., 2021), there are limited studies that explore the culturally specific stressors and professional challenges faced by practitioners in Arab societies. By focusing on UAE-based experiences, this research contributes to the global discourse by providing a localized understanding of risk management in social work. It aims to inform culturally relevant policies, improve institutional support mechanisms, and enhance both practitioner well-being and service quality in a rapidly evolving social care environment. Thus, despite the growing demand for social work in the UAE, there is a clear lack of empirical research focused on the profession's unique risk terrain. Existing literature does not sufficiently address how cultural, institutional, and environmental factors influence the risks faced by UAE-based social workers. This study aims to fill that gap by developing locally grounded evidence, informing culturally relevant policy development, and

enhancing workplace safety and support systems to improve both practitioner well-being and service delivery quality.

1.4 Research Questions

The current study problem can be represented in the following main question:

RQ1: Is there any relationship between risk in social workers practice and risk management?

RQ2: Is there any relationship between risk in social workers practice and work-life balance?

RQ3: Is there any relationship between work-life balance and risk management?

RQ4: Does work-life balance mediate between risk in social worker practice and risk management?

1.5 Research Objectives

The present study attempts to investigate the risks that social workers face while performing their job duties in the UAE. Also, the following objectives will be achieved:

1. To examine the relationship between risk in social workers practice and risk management.
2. To examine the relationship between risk in social workers practice and work-life balance.
3. To examine the relationship between work-life balance and risk management.
4. To analyse the mediating role of work-life balance between risk in social workers practice and risk management.

1.6 Expected outcomes.

The study aims to discuss the risks faced by social workers in their practice in the UAE and how to manage it. This would result in highlighting the multi-faceted risks faced by social workers and their severity in the UAE. The research results would also help in understanding how these risks at various levels affect social workers, such as their personal and professional lives. It would not only highlight the risks but also discusses and presents the best risk management practices followed around the world to protect and safeguard social workers, their effectiveness, and the possibility of their application in the UAE. Thus, helping the policymakers, social work agencies to develop measures and risk management strategies that would make social work in UAE safe.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The need to conduct this study arose from the researcher herself experiencing threats several times and witnessing many professional friends suffering from safety issues while working in the field. Knowing the risk factors faced by social workers in the area will let the social service agencies to provide guidelines for putting policies into place.

1.7.1 Significance for the Social Work Practices

This research is significant for social work practices, especially in the UAE. By examining the risks faced by social workers while performing duties (Brearley, 2023), the study contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the challenges intrinsic to the

profession. This understanding is critical for improving the effectiveness of social work practices in the region.

Examining the relationship between risk in social work practice and risk management is necessary for developing targeted approaches to mitigate potential challenges (Fraser et al., 2019). Identifying this relationship can inform the creation of more potent risk management frameworks, thereby protecting the well-being of both social workers and the individuals they serve.

Also, the study of the relationship between risk in social work practice and work-life balance highlights the personal and professional dimensions of social workers' lives. This insight is practical for promoting a supportive work environment and implementing policies that encourage a healthier balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being.

The examination of the relationship between work-life balance and risk management provides practical implications for improving the efficacy of risk management measures. Acknowledging how work-life balance affects risk management strategies allows the development of interventions that serve the holistic needs of social workers, eventually improving their resilience and job satisfaction.

Similarly, the investigation of work-life balance as a probable mediator between risk in social work practice and risk management provides a subtle understanding of the complex relationships within the profession. This knowledge can inform targeted interventions to maintain the defensive role of work-life balance in addressing and mitigating risks effectively.

Thus, this research contributes useful insights into social work practices in the UAE, providing practical implications for policymakers, organizational leaders, and practitioners. By addressing the sophistication surrounding risk, risk management, and work-life balance, the study lays the foundation for developing tailored strategies that prioritize the well-being of social workers and, thus, the quality of services provided to the community.

1.7.2 Significance for Social Workers

For professional social workers, this research has consequential significance as it directly manages the challenges (McLean et al., 2010), they overlook in their daily practice within the UAE context. First, examining the risks intrinsic to social work practice, the study suggests social workers have a deeper understanding of the distinct threats they may face while performing their professional duties. This awareness is important for promoting preparedness and stability among practitioners, allowing them to navigate potentially precarious situations more effectively.

Further, the investigation of the relationship between risk in social work practice and risk management provides skilled social workers (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015) with practical insights into how to actively mitigate and address possible threats to their protection and well-being. Understanding the interaction between risk factors and management strategies enables social workers to adopt proactive measures, thereby improving their proficiency to deliver quality services while reducing personal risks.

The study of the relationship between threats in social work practice and work-life balance is especially relevant for professional social workers, as it highlights the complex balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. (Banks

et al., 2020). By recognising the effect of work-related challenges on their overall quality of life, social workers can support organizational policies and practices that prioritize employee well-being and encourage a healthier work-life balance.

Also, the examination of the mediating role of work-life balance between risk in social work practice and risk management presents professional social workers with a complex understanding of the factors that affect their ability to effectively manage risks in the workplace. Acknowledging the importance of work-life balance as a defensive factor can empower social workers to prioritize self-care and specify healthy boundaries, eventually improving their ability to steer challenging professional environments.

1.7.3 Significance for the Policymakers

This research carries significant implications for policymakers to shape the landscape of social work practice and protect the well-being of social workers (Mathias, 2015). First, by highlighting the risks faced by social workers in their duties, the study provides policymakers with crucial insights into the occupational risks and challenges facing this professional sector (EEO, 2006). This understanding is important for reporting the development of evidence-based policies and regulations aimed at enhancing workplace safety and guarding the rights of social workers.

Furthermore, examining the relationship between risk in social work practice and risk management offers policymakers practical information for scheduling and executing effective risk management frameworks within social work organizations (Cunningham, 2004). By determining the key factors contributing to workplace risks and susceptibilities, policymakers can develop targeted interventions and protocols to mitigate possible threats and assure the safety and security of social workers in the field.

Analysing the relationship between risk in social work practice and work-life balance is also appropriate for policymakers, as it emphasizes the importance of encouraging holistic well-being and thwarting burnout among social workers. Determining the effect of work-related stressors on the mental and emotional health of practitioners, policymakers can support the implementation of supportive policies and programs that prioritize employee well-being and promote a healthy work-life balance within social work organizations.

Similarly, investigating the mediating role of work-life balance between risk in social work practice and risk management proposes policymakers practical insights into the factors affecting the effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies (Ahmed, 2021). By apprehending the interaction between work-life balance and risk management, policymakers can design policies and initiatives that enable social workers to better manage occupational risks while preserving a sustainable work-life equilibrium (Banks et al., 2020). Therefore, this research provides policymakers in the UAE with the knowledge, proof, and instruments required to legislate informed policies and practices that encourage the safety, well-being, and professional development of social workers. By handling the distinct challenges and dynamics within the social work sector, policymakers can create a supportive and facilitative environment for practitioners to succeed and resume making meaningful contributions to the interests of individuals, families, and communities across the UAE.

1.8 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to geographical scope, temporal scope, and subject scope. Geographically, the study will be limited to social service institutions in the UAE. It will cover all the seven (7) Emirates of the UAE. Temporally, the scope of this study will be carried out in 2022-2023 academic years. The period is considered adequate to collect the needed data for the study. The conceptual and subject scope of the study is limited to the investigation of various types of risks that social workers face while performing their job duties and how a robust system can be developed to manage the risks they are facing and maintain their safety while performing their jobs. Methodologically, the study will collect quantitative data and analyse it using quantitative analytical tools.

1.9 Organization of the study

The present study is systematically organized into five comprehensive chapters to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the multi-dimensional aspects underpinning the risks encountered by social workers, particularly in the context of the United Arab Emirates.

Chapter One: Introduction: The first chapter serves as an inaugural point of entry, elucidating the contextual background of the study. It delineates the research problem, explicates the objectives and research questions, and underscores the significance of the study—particularly for the social work field in the United Arab Emirates. This chapter sets the stage for the subsequent exploration and is instrumental in providing an overview of what is to be expected from the research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review: The subsequent chapter furnishes a critical examination of existing scholarly literature. This review is divided into thematic sections to offer a structured approach. Topics explored include the job responsibilities of social workers, risks and challenges they face globally and within the UAE, their effects on work-life balance, and risk management strategies. The chapter also identifies current safety protocols, if any, available to social workers in the UAE and highlights the gaps in the existing literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology: The third chapter focuses on the methodological blueprint of the research. Following the conceptual framework established by Saunders et al. (2011), this chapter delves into the techniques and procedures employed for data collection and analysis. It discusses the research design, the variables involved, sample size, and analytical techniques. The chapter also rationalizes the chosen methodologies over other alternatives and discusses ethical considerations and potential limitations.

Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis: The fourth chapter presents the findings gleaned from the quantitative data, aligned with the predefined research objectives. It offers a statistical analysis and interpretation of the data collected through surveys, elucidating the relationships between risks in social work, work-life balance, and risk management strategies.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion: The final chapter synthesizes the research findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications. It recaps the research objectives and evaluates the extent to which these objectives have been met. The chapter also enumerates research implications, provides actionable recommendations, and discusses the potential for future research in the domain.

1.10 Summary

Chapter One points out the context of the thesis, the main problem in this research, and the goals that needed to be met in research. The chapter also discusses the research content or opens the content before heading to Chapter Two, which outlines a thorough description of the literature review of the research.