

Research Article

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Role of social workers on child protection response in Hargeisa Somaliland

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Abstract

This research explores the pivotal role of social workers in child protection response in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The study emphasizes the significance of social work in identifying, preventing, and addressing child abuse, neglect, exploitation.

The research aims to investigate the role and challenges faced by social workers in providing child protection services and explore how they can strengthen child protection responses. The study begins with an overview of child protection, and the roles of social workers.

The research employed a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the role of social workers in the child protection response system. In addition, quantitative approach we used, Purposive sampling was utilized to select the sample, and questionnaires were used as the research instruments.

The first specific objective of this research is to identify the potential obstacles and challenges faced by social workers in implementing successful child protection responses and interventions in Hargeisa, Somaliland. With the overage mean of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.9132.

The second specific objective of this research is to evaluate how social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, strengthen child protection by enhancing community awareness and collaborating with local stakeholders. With the average mean of 3.424, and standard deviation of 1.1168

The third specific objective of this research is to find out how social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, influence the psychological and educational well-being of children. With the overall mean of,3.566 and overall standard deviation of 1.0864.

The findings reveal several key challenges, including limited resources, lack of trainings, weak institutional frameworks, cultural and traditional norms, limited awareness and understanding, and limited coordination and collaboration. The

Keywords

Child protection
Social work
Humanitarian
Psychological
Protection response
Community awareness
Role
Education
Maltreatment.

study also highlights how social workers can strengthen child protection responses through community awareness and education, and their influence in psychologically and educationally.

Background of the study

Child protection is a critical issue worldwide and is particularly important in regions affected by poverty and social instability, especially in third-world countries, particularly in African countries. Hargeisa, the capital city of Somaliland, faces numerous challenges in safeguarding the rights and well-being of children.

Social work is a profession dedicated to improving the well-being of individuals, families, and communities by promoting social justice, advocating for human rights, and empowering those in need. (NASW, 2021)

The role of social workers in child protection is crucial, as they play a significant part in identifying, preventing, and responding to child abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of violence. Social workers possess the knowledge, skills, and expertise to address the complex social, emotional, and psychological needs of children, while also working with families, communities, and relevant stakeholders to create a protective environment. (NASW, 2013)

Globally, the historical development of child protection has evolved over time to address the needs and rights of children. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the establishment of organizations like the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the United Kingdom and the Children's Aid Society in the United States marked significant milestones in the early development of child protection. These organizations aimed to combat child abuse, neglect, and exploitation, leading to the formulation of laws and policies to safeguard children. (Parton, 2015)

Child protection refers to the prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children. It encompasses all

efforts aimed at ensuring their safety, well-being, and development. Child protection includes measures to prevent and respond to all forms of harm, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It involves creating protective environments, (UNICEF, 2022)

Regionally In African societies, child protection is deeply rooted in cultural values, traditions, and community norms, which emphasize the importance of safeguarding children and promoting their holistic development. It recognizes that children are vulnerable and require special attention and care to thrive

The ACRWC defines a "child" as a human being below the age of 18. (OAU, 2016)

In Somaliland the Constitution of Somaliland addresses child protection in a number of articles. Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees that the State shall be responsible for the health, care, development and education of the mother, the child, the disabled who have no one to care for them, and the mentally handicapped persons who are not able and have no one to care for them. (MESAF, 2021)

Globally, the historical development of social work can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as a response to the social problems arising from urbanization and industrialization Pioneers like Jane Addams, who founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889, and Mary Richmond, who advocated for a scientific approach to social casework, played significant roles in shaping the early development of social work. (Payne, 2017)

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. (IFSW, 2017)

Regionally in Africa social work is a relatively young profession introduced in the 1960s. Although the first school of social work—the Cairo School of Social Work in Egypt, Today, one can safely conclude that social work now exists as a profession in most African countries.

In Somaliland social work is an important field that focuses on addressing the social, economic, and psychological needs of individuals, families, and communities.

In this study, we will examine, the role of social workers on child protection responses in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The study will center on the impact of challenges faced by social workers in Hargeisa, particularly delving into how social workers contribute to child protection through fostering community awareness and promoting the psychological and educational well-being of children.

Problem statement

Social workers play a crucial role in child protection by advocating for the well-being and safety of children. They are trained professionals who work in collaboration with families, communities, and other stakeholders to assess, intervene, and provide support to children who may be at risk of abuse, neglect, or harm. (NASW, 2020)

The role of social workers in child protection is a critical aspect of safeguarding children and promoting their well-being in Hargeisa, Somaliland. However, despite the recognized importance of social workers in this field, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding their specific roles, challenges, and the effectiveness of their interventions within the context of child protection in Hargeisa, Somaliland. (MESAF, 2020)

The problem arises from the absence of comprehensive research and documented information on the specific duties and responsibilities of social workers in child


protection in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This knowledge gap hampers the development of child protection responses in Hargeisa, Somaliland and also the lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of social workers on child protection in Hargeisa, Somaliland also hinders the coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders involved in child protection, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and international actors. Without a clear understanding of the specific contributions and expertise of social workers, efforts to create a unified and effective child protection system may be impeded, and also some of the biggest challenges are, Limited Resource, Cultural and Traditional Norms, Weak Institutional Framework, Stigma and Discrimination, Inadequate Training and Professional Development, (MESAF, 2020)

If the challenges faced by social workers on child protection in Hargeisa, Somaliland continue to persist, there will be several significant consequences like, Increased vulnerability of children, Weakened child protection system, Long-term societal impact. (UNICEF, 2018).

Therefore, this study will explore the role of social workers on child protection responses. This study focus will be on understanding the effects of challenges encountered by social workers in Hargeisa, with a specific emphasis on exploring how social workers play a role in child protection by enhancing community awareness and supporting the psychological and educational well-being of children.

Research Objectives

General research objectives

 The general objective of this research is to explore the role of social workers on child protection responses in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Specific research objectives

✚ To identify the potential obstacles and challenges faced by social workers in implementing successful child protection responses and interventions in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

✚ To evaluate how social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, strengthen child protection by enhancing community awareness and collaborating with local stakeholders.

✚ To find out how social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, influence the psychological and educational well-being of children.

Significance of the study

✚ **NGOs Promoting Children's Welfare: Program Optimization:** Offers NGOs working on children's welfare valuable insights to enhance their programs. Helps NGOs collaborate more effectively with social workers

✚ **Future Research Foundation Literature Review:** Serves as a comprehensive literature review and resource for future scholars.

Literature review

Challenges faced by social workers on child protection

Limited resources: Social workers often face resource constraints, including limited funding, inadequate staffing, and a lack of necessary equipment and supplies. These limitations can hinder their ability to effectively respond to child protection cases. Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland face significant challenges due to limited resources when it comes to child protection. Those struggle to provide the necessary support and interventions for vulnerable children in the region. (Ahmed A. , 2018)

Cultural and traditional norms: Cultural and traditional norms in Somaliland may present challenges to child protection efforts. Practices such as child marriage, FGM, and child labor are prevalent in some communities, making it

difficult for social workers to address these issues effectively. (Save the Children, 2019)

Social workers strengthen child protection responses

Community awareness and education: Social workers play an important role in raising awareness within the community about child protection issues. They organize workshops, and awareness campaigns to educate parents, caregivers, and community members about child rights, child abuse prevention, positive parenting techniques, and empowering the community with knowledge. (Smith, 2019)

Strengthening child protection systems: Social workers collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, (NGOs), and (CBOs), to strengthen child protection systems in Hargeisa. They participate in policy advocacy, contribute to the development of child protection, (Save the Children, 2019)

Rehabilitation and reintegration: Social workers play a crucial role in supporting children who have endured abuse, exploitation, or neglect. They provide comprehensive care, including counseling, psychosocial support, and therapeutic interventions, to help these children heal from their traumatic experiences. Additionally, social workers work diligently to reintegrate the children into safe and nurturing environments.

Psychological and education influence of children

Parental and Family Influences: The family environment is a crucial factor in shaping a child's psychological and educational well-being. Supportive and nurturing parenting practices, emotional warmth, consistent discipline, and healthy family dynamics contribute to positive outcomes, while negative or stressful family environments, such as parental conflict, abuse, and neglect, or inconsistent parenting, can have detrimental effects on a child's well-being. (Dearing, 2016)

Socioeconomic Status: Socioeconomic factors like income, education, and occupation of parents can influence a child's overall well-being. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may face barriers accessing quality education, healthcare, and resources, which can negatively impact their psychological and educational outcomes. Research has consistently demonstrated that children from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds tend to experience poorer psychological well-being and educational outcomes compared to peers from higher SES backgrounds. (Corwyn, 2017)

Media and Technology: The increasing prevalence of media and technology in children's lives can have both positive and negative effects. Appropriate and controlled use of media and technology can enhance educational opportunities, social connections, and cognitive development. However, excessive screen time, exposure to violent or inappropriate content, and

social media pressures can impact psychological well-being and educational engagement. (Austin, 2021)

Research design

The study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate and explore the role of social workers in child protection response in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Additionally, a correlational design was employed to explore the relationships between variables. Non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, was utilized to select a sample size of 80 participants, determined using the solvent formula. The research instruments will include questionnaires and observations. To ensure data quality, piloting, reliability, and validity measures will be implemented. Ethical considerations will be strictly upheld throughout the study.

Results and findings

	Demographic characteristics	Frequency	percentage	valid percentage	cumulative percentage
Gender	Male	44	54.3	54.3	54.3
	Female	37	45.7	45.7	100
Age	18-25	52	64.2	64.2	64.2
	26-35	20	24.7	24.7	88.9
	36-45	9	11.1	11.1	100
Occupation	Social worker	51	63	63	63
	Educator	3	4.9	4.9	67.9
	Health-	4	3.7	3.7	71.6
	Professional	1	1.2	1.2	72.8
	Government-Official	20	20.7	20.7	97.5
	NGO employee Other	2	2.5	2.5	100
Experience	less than 1 year	20	24.7	24.7	24.7
	1-5 years	49	60.5	60.5	85.2
	6-10 years	10	12.3	12.3	97.5
	More than 10 years	2	2.5	2.5	100
Involved in child protection Cases	Yes	74	91.4	91.4	91.4
	No	7	8.6	8.6	100

Interpretation

The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of the respondents for percentage of 64% were within the 18-25 age range, the gender distribution of the respondents was fairly balanced nearly, with 54.3% being male and 45.7% female. Most of the respondents were social workers, followed by NGO employees, In terms of years of experience, the data reveals that a significant portion of the respondents, 24.7%, had less than one year of experience in the field of child protection. This highlights the need for ongoing training, mentorship, and professional

development opportunities to ensure that social workers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their roles.

The data analysis highlights the significant contribution of social workers in safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children in need of protection. Social workers were found to be actively involved in various aspects of child protection, including assessment, intervention, and advocacy. Their expertise and commitment were instrumental in ensuring the effective implementation of child protection policies and programs but with challenges need to solve.

Challenges faced by social workers

N0	Questions	N	Mean	STD	Interpretation
1	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland face significant challenges in identifying and reporting cases of child abuse and neglect.	81	4.06	1.01	Agree
2	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland encounter obstacles in accessing necessary resources and support for effective child protection interventions."	81	4.10	.903	Strongly agree
3	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland face cultural barriers and resistance when addressing child protection issues.	81	4.02	.922	Strongly agree
4	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland experience challenges in coordinating and collaborating with 6 agencies and organizations involved in child protection.	81	4.01	.873	Strongly agree
5	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland face difficulties in providing timely and effective interventions due to limited manpower and workload.(Social workers)	81	4.11	.851	Strongly agree
Average mean		81	4.06	0.9132	Strongly Agree

Interpretation

The table presents data on the challenges faced by social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in the context of child protection. The overall average mean of 4.06, with an average standard deviation

of 0.9132, indicates a strong consensus among respondents regarding these challenges. Specifically, the first question reveals that social workers face significant challenges in identifying and reporting cases of child abuse and neglect, with a mean of 4.06 and a standard deviation of

1.017, indicating agreement. The second question shows strong agreement that social workers encounter obstacles in accessing necessary resources and support for effective child protection interventions, with a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.903. The third question highlights strong agreement on the issue of cultural barriers and resistance when addressing child protection issues, with a mean of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.922. The fourth question indicates strong agreement that social workers experience challenges in coordinating and collaborating with various agencies and organizations involved in child protection, with a

mean of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 0.873. Lastly, the fifth question shows strong agreement that social workers face difficulties in providing timely and effective interventions due to limited work force and workload, with a mean of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 0.851.

This data suggests that, on average, respondents agree or strongly agree that social workers in Hargeisa face significant challenges in their roles related to child protection. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a high level of agreement among the respondents.

Strengthen child protection

No	Questions	N	Mean	STD	Interpretation
1	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland effectively raise community awareness about child protection issues and prevention strategies.	81	3.33	1.183	neutral
2	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland actively collaborate with local stakeholders, such as community leaders and organizations, to enhance child protection efforts.	81	3.42	1.071	neutral
3	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland effectively engage families and communities in developing and implementing child protection strategies.	81	3.56	1.037	neutral
4	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland successfully establish partnerships and networks with local organizations to support child protection initiatives.	81	3.35	1.131	neutral
5	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland effectively communicate and collaborate with schools and educational institutions to promote child protection and well-being."	81	3.46	1.162	neutral
Average mean		81	3.424	1.1168	Neutral

Interpretation

The table presents data on the role of social workers in strengthening child protection in

Hargeisa, Somaliland, showing a neutral stance among respondents, with an overall average mean of 3.424 and a standard deviation of 1.1168.

Respondents indicated neutrality on the effectiveness of social workers in raising community awareness about child protection, with a mean of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 1.183. They also showed a neutral stance on the collaboration of social workers with local stakeholders, such as community leaders and organizations, to enhance child protection efforts, with a mean of 3.42 and a standard deviation of 1.071. Additionally, there is a neutral perception of the effectiveness of social workers in engaging families and communities in developing and implementing child protection strategies, with a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.037. Neutrality was also indicated regarding the successful establishment of partnerships and

networks with local organizations to support child protection initiatives, with a mean of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 1.131. Lastly, the effectiveness of social workers in communicating and collaborating with schools to promote child protection and well-being was viewed neutrally, with a mean of 3.46 and a standard deviation of 1.162.

Overall, this data suggests that respondents maintain a neutral perspective on the effectiveness of social workers in Hargeisa in strengthening child protection, with some variability in responses reflecting differing opinions.

Psychological and educational well-being of children

No	Questions	N	Mean	STD	Interpretation
1	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland play a significant role in addressing the psychological needs of children affected by abuse or neglect.	81	3.67	.962	agree
2	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland provide effective counseling and support services to enhance the psychological well-being of children.	81	3.60	1.148	agree
3	Social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland contribute to the educational development of children by providing appropriate interventions and support.	81	3.48	1.108	neutral
4	Do you agree that social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, collaborate with 6 stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, community members) to enhance the educational outcomes of children	81	3.57	1.106	neutral
5	Do you agree that social workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland, are in identifying and addressing the educational needs of children to improve their academic performance	81	3.51	1.108	neutral
Average mean		81	3.566	1.0864	Neutral

Interpretation

The table presents data on social workers addressing the psychological and educational

well-being of children in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The overall average mean is 3.566, with an average standard deviation of 1.0864, indicating a generally neutral to slightly positive perception

among respondents regarding the effectiveness of social workers in these areas. Specifically, the first question reveals that respondents agree that social workers play a significant role in addressing the psychological needs of children affected by abuse or neglect, with a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 0.962. The second question also shows agreement that social workers provide effective counseling and support services, with a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 1.148. The third question indicates a neutral perception of social workers' contribution to the educational development of children by providing appropriate interventions and support, with a mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 1.108. The fourth question reflects a neutral view on the collaboration of social workers with stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, community members) to enhance the educational outcomes of children, with a mean of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 1.106. Lastly, the fifth question also shows a neutral statement, with a mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 1.108. This data suggests that, on average, respondents have a neutral to slightly positive perspective on the effectiveness of social workers in Hargeisa in enhancing the psychological and educational well-being of children. The standard deviations indicate some variability in responses, reflecting differing opinions among the respondents.

Recommendations

1. Increase Funding and Resources for Social Workers

- Allocate additional funding and resources to strengthen child protection efforts in Hargeisa, Somaliland
- Improve access to training, materials, and support services for social workers to enhance their capabilities and effectiveness

2. Develop Culturally-Sensitive Community Education Programs

- Create educational programs to teach the community about the importance of child protection

- Challenge harmful traditional norms and practices that enable and contribute the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children

3. Strengthen the Institutional Framework for Child Protection

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of different government agencies and departments involved in child protection
- Improve coordination and collaboration between key child protection stakeholders
- Ensure that relevant laws and policies are properly enforced to safeguard children's rights

4. Enhance Professional Development for Social Workers

- Provide comprehensive training opportunities for social workers to develop their skills in areas such as case management, child and family welfare, trauma-informed care, and working with diverse communities
- Focus on building the capacity of social workers to better support the needs of vulnerable children

5. Empower Social Workers to Advocate for Vulnerable Children

- Enable social workers to effectively advocate for the psychological and educational needs of vulnerable children
- Ensure that vulnerable children have access to essential support services, including counseling, psychotherapy, tutoring, and other interventions.

6. Establish Multidisciplinary Child Protection Teams

- Bring together a diverse team of professionals, including social workers, educators, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and community leaders
- Collaborate to address complex child protection cases and develop comprehensive solutions

7. Implement Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

- Establish mechanisms to track the impact and effectiveness of social workers' efforts in protecting children
- Continuously evaluate and improve child protection strategies and policies based on the findings from the monitoring and evaluation processes.

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