



## Burnout among social workers in Kuwait

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** Burnout and job stress are major concerns for human service institutions that affect the mental well-being of social workers and negatively affect their ability to accomplish work and help clients. This study aimed to explore the prevalence of burnout and related factors among social workers in Kuwait and the demographics of affected individuals. **Method:** Three hundred thirteen social workers who lived in Kuwait were surveyed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory scale (MBI). **Results:** There was a significant difference between the Emotional Exhaustion subscale and several job-related variables, including the number of years in the current job, attending workshops, performing job tasks related to social work, performing tasks unrelated to social work, and the intention to change careers. Age had a statistically significant main effect on Depersonalization subscale. Several job-related variables showed significant differences in the Depersonalization subscale, such as the number of years in the current job, performing job tasks unrelated to social work, and the desire to change careers. There were significant differences between demographic variables such as gender and age and the Personal Accomplishment subscale among the participants. There was a significant difference between attending workshops, performing tasks related to social work, and the desire to change careers and personal accomplishment. **Conclusion:** The study indicated that the high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization experienced by social workers with less work experience are a result of a combination of emotional labor, personal conflicts, unfavorable working conditions, and psychological factors.

**Keywords:** social work, burnout, job stress

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## الاحتراق الوظيفي بين الاختصاصيين الاجتماعيين في الكويت

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### ملخص

**الأهداف:** يعتبر موضوع الاحتراق الوظيفي وضغوط العمل من الاهتمامات الرئيسية لمؤسسات الخدمة الإنسانية التي لا تؤثر على الصحة النفسية للاختصاصيين الاجتماعيين فحسب، بل تؤثر سلباً أيضاً في القدرة على إنجاز العمل ومساعدة العملاء. وقد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مدى انتشار الاحتراق الوظيفي بين الاختصاصيين الاجتماعيين في دولة الكويت، والعوامل المرتبطة به والعوامل الديموغرافية للأفراد والمعرضين له. **المنهج:** شملت هذه الدراسة 313 من الاختصاصيين الاجتماعيين في الكويت، الذين استفتوا باستخدام قائمة ماسلاش للاحتراق النفسي (MBI [Maslach Burnout Inventory]). **النتائج:** أظهرت النتائج وجود فرق كبير بين المقياس الفرعي للإنهاك العاطفي والعديد من المتغيرات المتعلقة بالوظيفة، بما في ذلك عدد سنوات الخبرة، حضور ورش العمل، أداء المهام الوظيفية المتعلقة بالعمل الاجتماعي، أداء المهام الوظيفية غير المتعلقة بالعمل الاجتماعي، نية تغيير المهن. وقد وجدت الدراسة أن متغير العمر له تأثير رئيسي ذو دلالة إحصائية على المقياس الفرعي لتبديد/إلغاء الشخصية. وأظهرت العديد من المتغيرات المتعلقة بالوظيفة أيضاً اختلافات كبيرة في المقياس الفرعي لتبديد/إلغاء الشخصية؛ مثل عدد السنوات في الوظيفة الحالية، وأداء مهام وظيفية غير مرتبطة بالعمل الاجتماعي، والرغبة في تغيير المهنة. كما أظهرت النتائج فروقاً ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المتغيرات الديموغرافية؛ مثل الجنس، والعمر، والمقياس الفرعي الخاص بالإنجاز الشخصي بين المشاركين. وأشارت النتائج أيضاً إلى وجود فرق كبير بين حضور ورش العمل وأداء المهام

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المتعلقة بالعمل الاجتماعي والرغبة في تغيير المهن ومستوى الإنجاز الشخصي.  
**الخاتمة:** تشير الدراسة إلى أن الاحتراق الوظيفي مرتبط -بشكل كبير-  
بضغوط العمل، وسنوات الخبرة، وظروف العمل، وبعض العوامل النفسية  
التي يجب التعامل معها لتجنب الاحتراق الوظيفي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العمل الاجتماعي، الاحتراق الوظيفي، ضغوط العمل

## **Introduction**

Social work is essential to every society. It aids people in need of help to overcome their difficulties and face life's challenges. Since the beginning of social work as a profession until recently, this profession has been dealing with at-risk populations, dated rules and legislation, and limited organizational resources, all of which make it a challenging job. There is the potential for social work to become overwhelming if practitioners manage a high number of cases with insufficient resources, or when there is little to no support from colleagues or supervisors. In such a scenario, burnout becomes increasingly probable, and job turnover is no surprise. Lloyd et al. (2002) indicated that social workers often feel burnt out after experiencing high-stress levels. Their results implied that the primary predictors of anxiety and burnout include work pressure, high caseloads, role ambiguity, and relationships with the supervisors.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) considers burnout an occupational disease. Thanks to this recognition of burnout as a legitimate occupational phenomenon, burnout has now become widely acknowledged. This decision by the WHO acknowledged the widespread and significant impact of burnout on individuals and societies. Those experiencing burnout often feel exhausted, cynical, and professionally less efficient, typically as a result of chronic workplace stress. To promote awareness of burnout as an occupational hazard and strategize solutions, the WHO has classified it as a workplace phenomenon to spur research into preventative measures. This growing awareness of the insidious effects of burnout represents an essential initial stride to remedy its pernicious impact on people's welfare and effectiveness.

## Study Problem

Burnout and job stress are major concerns for human service institutions that, if left untreated, not only affect the mental well-being of social workers but can also negatively affect the ability to accomplish work and help clients. As such, this study aimed to explore the prevalence of burnout and related factors among social workers in Kuwait, as well as the demographics of affected individuals. It is important to tackle this issue precisely and measure the level of experienced burnout to better understand this phenomenon and develop prevention and intervention strategies.

## Significance of the Study

Burnout is a serious issue in the field of social work (Calitz et al., 2014; Dima et al., 2021; Stanley et al., 2018). Although studies have examined burnout in many professions, research specifically investigating the prevalence of burnout among social workers in Kuwait remains quite sparse. However, studies related to burnout in healthcare professions and educational settings in Kuwait provide some insights into the prevalence of burnout and associated factors. A study on surgical specialists in Kuwait reported a general prevalence of burnout among surgeons to be 76.9% and a severe burnout rate of 14.0% (Akl et al., 2022). Another study on school counselors in Kuwait examined the level of psychological burnout among education professionals and found a medium rate with a high rate of psychological hardiness, although this differed based on gender and age (Gadelrab & Alzaid, 2022). Furthermore, research on healthcare workers in Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic explored burnout among pharmacists and found a high rate of personal, work-related, and client-related burnout for workers who were younger, female, Kuwaiti, graduates from Kuwait University, and/or less experienced (Al-Haqan et al., 2021).

While these studies provide valuable insights, more comprehensive research specifically targeting social workers in Kuwait is needed to understand the prevalence of burnout in this professional group. Social workers in Kuwait have long struggled with limited resources in workplaces, a lack of incentives, heavy workloads, and sometimes extended work hours. Alqashan & Alzubi (2009) reported that social counselors in Kuwait were not satisfied with compensation, office policies, and supervision–human relations in their workplace. These factors affect their well-being and performance at work and might lead to job turnover. Studies like these are needed to compare countries and regions, which will help us learn from others' experiences in facing these issues. Therefore, this study's significance arises from the sparse number of studies regarding burnout and job-related factors and conditions affecting the emotional distress experienced by social workers in Kuwait. Social workers often profoundly impact their clients; therefore, their own well-being and positive states of mind should be maintained so that they can better serve their clients.

### Study's Questions

- 1 - Are there significant differences between demographic variables (age and gender) and Burnout subscales among a sample of social workers in Kuwait?
- 2 - Are there significant differences between job-related variables and Burnout subscales (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment) among a sample of social workers in Kuwait?

### Theoretical Framework

This study utilized the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) theoretical framework. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) suggested that the JD-R theory can help explain and predict employee well-being,

with factors including health, burnout, work engagement, motivation, and job performance. Based on the available studies, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a frequently used and relevant theoretical framework to explain the burnout phenomenon among social workers. The JD-R model considers job demands as stressors and job resources as protective factors that influence burnout (Huang et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2021).

This study also utilized a second framework of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, based on its emphasized utility in a study that examined burnout components among social workers in China (Wang et al., 2018). A third concept including volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), was also used to discuss the challenges that social workers face, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dima et al., 2021). Although additional elements including interpersonal job demands, sick leave, long-term exposure to excessive job demands, and continuous hassles, have also been singled out as predictors of the onset of exhaustion among social workers, as noted by certain researchers (Gómez-García et al., 2019; Indregard et al., 2018; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005), while these references provide valuable insights, further research is warranted to validate and refine the theoretical framework for burnout among social workers in Kuwait specifically.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Definition of Burnout***

The term “burnout” was first used by Freudenberg (1974) when he noticed a state of mental and physical exhaustion at the workplace and defined it as “becoming exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources” (p. 159). He characterized burnout

with some physical symptoms such as fatigue, exhaustion, loss of energy, frequent headaches, and gastrointestinal problems, as well as some behavioral symptoms like anger and some level of depression. According to Maslach et al. (2001), the term began to be used in connection with human services in the United States in the 1970s. Over time, additional studies helped specify the term “job burnout” to describe a psychological syndrome caused by interpersonal stressors at work, with three important aspects: “overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399).

### ***Factors Related to Burnout***

Burnout is predicted and associated with several factors, namely: a) an imbalance between workers and their occupational responsibilities, especially when asked to do administrative work in addition to their case management tasks; b) the practitioners' control and autonomy over their decisions; c) the resources they need; d) the incongruity between their values and those of the organization; e) fairness and inequality in the workplace; f) rewards and recognition; and g) positive community relations (Wilson, 2016). It has been suggested that burnout is manifested when practitioners experience an imbalance with one or more of these factors (Wilson, 2016).

Kim and Stoner (2008) found that social workers with higher role stress experienced higher burnout levels, which increased their turnover intention. They also found that social workers have higher levels of burnout if they experience higher role stress combined with a lower level of control over their work. However, a supportive work environment was found to help social workers remain attached to their organization regardless of the role stress and burnout they might experience. Yanchus et al. (2017) confirmed these aspects, stating



that reasons for leaving the profession included impoliteness by others, low levels of autonomy, feeling emotionally unsafe at work, and perceptions of workplace inequality.

Scanlan and Still (2019) found significant relationships between burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intention in the mental health workforce of Australia. Exhaustion also had a significant correlation with occupational demands, while most job resources had an inverse correlation with disengagement. Job resources, as well as job demands, were the most reliable predictors of disengagement. Similar findings were reported by Radhwan (2019) in the sense that burnout among school social workers correlated with a high case-load, lack of resources, and lack of appreciation for hard work.

A study by Dima et al. (2021) found that social workers experienced high levels of occupational stress during COVID-19. This job stress correlated with higher levels of personal and work-related burnout, indicating that stress was caused mainly by organizational and occupational factors, such as new job legislation, workload, the vagueness of supervisory decisions, and ambiguous working procedures. These were in contrast to burnout due to client-related stressors, such as a lack of face-to-face contact with clients and the risk of infection. This indicated that limited resources with high job demands contributed to excessive burnout due to work-related factors. This finding reinforces the importance of organizational support to protect social workers from job stress and burnout.

Eriksson et al. (2009) found that 40% of humanitarian aid workers reported an elevated risk of burnout due to a lack of personal accomplishment, extreme emotional exhaustion, and/or a sense of depersonalization or distance from their clients. The noteworthy result was that only 3.6% of the participants reported high burnout on all three subscales, which could suggest that, regardless of the intense work and

disorganized environments, many workers could find ways to feel accomplishment and remain connected to others in their work. Organizational support was significantly correlated with less emotional exhaustion among workers, and team relationships, a positive organizational environment, and support from others may increase the resilience of such workers. In a separate study (Al-Rantisi, 2017), social workers moderately experienced burnout in general. Higher levels of burnout correlated with organizational lack of resources, lack of autonomy, job insecurity, and/or lack of financial rewards.

In terms of demographic variables, age was the most significant variable in many studies. Walter et al. (2020) found that younger workers, those who work in child welfare, and those who are White (in contrast to Black), tend to have less job satisfaction on account of their workload. Higher personal and work-related burnout is also correlated with these factors and with having fewer years in the current position. Farghali (2015) confirmed that older social workers were prone to lower levels of burnout. She also reported that married social workers experienced higher levels of burnout than those in other marital status categories, which agrees with AlAjmi et al. (2016) who found married social workers to have higher levels of burnout than non-married ones. AlAjmi et al. (2016) additionally reported that male social workers had higher levels of burnout than females, and social workers with more experience had higher levels of burnout than those with fewer years in the field. Similarly, Eriksson et al. (2009) reported that younger workers experienced more emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and less personal accomplishment. They speculated that older workers had more experience and skills in coping with work stress.

Contrary to previous literature, in a survey of rural social workers in the U.S. Walter et al. (2020) found social workers to be mod-

erately satisfied with their workloads and work environments and moderately committed to their current employers, with moderate levels of personal and work-related burnout, with lower levels of client-related burnout. A similar finding was reported by Al-Shoubri (2018), who found that school social workers in Egypt experienced low levels of burnout and high levels of work-life quality. The results of this study indicated no significant differences among demographic variables such as gender, age, and years of experience. However, she found that married social workers had lower burnout levels than singles, divorcees, and widows. Radhwan (2019) found no significant differences related to demographic variables except for marital status, where divorced social workers had higher levels of burnout than others.

## **Method**

### **Data Collection**

In this cross-sectional study, a questionnaire was administered online. The target population for this study was social workers who work in Kuwaiti public organizations, with a total number of 3,672 (Alrasheedi, 2021). Through the use of the nonprobability sampling technique, a group of research assistants recruited participants. Those who agreed to participate in this study received the link to the online questionnaire through WhatsApp. Online questionnaires were conducted in several public and private organizations, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Affairs, from March 25, 2023, to April 15, 2023. This study was conducted using the following procedures to avoid bias: participation was not limited to one organization but was drawn from many organizations in which social workers are employed to ensure that the participants represented the social work sector. Additionally, the

online questionnaire was anonymous. Moreover, the first section of the online questionnaire included a statement regarding the confidentiality of the participants' information and their right to withdraw at any time without consent.

## **Participants**

Three hundred thirteen social workers who lived in Kuwait participated in the study. The mean age of the participants was 35.5 years ( $SD = 8.61$ ). Females accounted for 83.3% of the participants, while males made up 16.7%. Regarding the participants' educational level, 92.9% of participants held a bachelor's degree, while 5.4% held a graduate degree (master's or Ph.D.). Few participants, 1.6%, only held a high school diploma. In general, 70.2% of participants majored in social work, followed by 16.7% in sociology, 11.9% in psychology, and 1.3% in other fields.

Most of the participants (66%) had supervisors specialized in social work, 7.4% of supervisors in sociology, 11.2% of supervisors in psychology, and 10.9% of supervisors in other fields. The remaining 4.5% of participants were unsure of the supervisors' specialty. About a third (33%) of the participants had experience ranging between 0 and 5 years, followed by 25% with 11 to 15 years, then 20.8% with 6 to 10 years, 11.9% with 21 or more years, and 9.3% with 16 to 20 years of experience.

## **Ethical Statement**

This research method followed Kuwait University rules and regulations for data collection as well as the Declaration of Helsinki 1975. In the introduction section of the online survey, there were statements regarding consent to participate, confidentiality, freedom to participate, and the right to withdraw at any time.

## Measures

### *Maslach Burnout Inventory–Human Service Survey (MBI-HSS)*

The online questionnaire consisted of two parts that started with demographic information, including age, marital status, and gender. The second part included the MBI-HSS developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). This scale contained 22 items that evaluated different factors of burnout syndrome. Three subscales are included in the MBI scale: Emotional exhaustion (nine items), personal accomplishment (eight items), and depersonalization (five items); (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 100). Emotional Exhaustion is a subscale that measures feelings of being emotionally overburdened and tired at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The Personal Accomplishment subscale measures a person's sense of competence and success in working with others (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The Depersonalization subscale measures impersonal attitudes toward care recipients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The 7-Likert scale ranges from "never" (= 0) to "daily" (= 6). Burnout is associated with low levels of personal accomplishment and high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. It has been found that the scale and its subscales are highly valid and reliable. The internal consistency reliability for the three subscales was 0.86 for Emotional Exhaustion, 0.74 for Personal Accomplishment, and 0.72 for Depersonalization (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

### *Validity and Reliability of MBI-HSS*

Due to the fact that the MBI was written in English, the scale had to be translated into Arabic to ensure its linguistic and cultural equivalence and then translated back into English by specialists to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the translation. Additionally, a panel of social work professors familiar with the study's topic from

Kuwait University assessed the scale. A pilot study was conducted on the Arabic version of the questionnaire to assess its usability, validity, and reliability before its full implementation. To evaluate the reliability of the burnout subscales, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed, and the results showed that  $\alpha$  was 0.85 for Emotional Exhaustion, 0.81 for Personal Accomplishment, and 0.63 for Depersonalization.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 25.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics were calculated for means, standard deviations, percentages, and frequencies. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the Burnout subscales. Analyzing the relationship between demographic characteristics, job-related variables, and Burnout subscales was carried out with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t tests. In addition, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction showed significant differences between some variables of the study. The significance level was assumed to be  $p$  value  $\leq 0.05$ . All results are provided with the exact level.

## **Results**

### **Emotional Exhaustion**

An analysis of variance was used to address the following research question: Are there significant differences found between the job-related variables and the Emotional Exhaustion subscale among social workers in Kuwait? The results of the ANOVA test are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Emotional Exhaustion and Job-Related Variables*

| Emotional Exhaustion Subscale                   |               |               |                    |        |           | ANOVA          |           |          |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|--------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------|
|                                                 |               |               |                    |        |           | <i>F</i> ratio | <i>df</i> | $\eta^2$ |
| Number of years in the current job              |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | 0-5           | 6-10          | 11-15              | 16-20  | 21 & more |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 33.4          | 29.6          | 28.0               | 30.1   | 30        | 2.45*          | 311       | .031     |
| SD                                              | 11.2          | 13.4          | 10.4               | 11.1   | 13.6      |                |           |          |
| Performing job tasks related to social work     |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | Never         | Rarely        | Sometimes          | Always |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 30.3          | 40.8          | 32.5               | 29.5   |           | 4.26**         | 311       | .040     |
| SD                                              | 11.1          | 11.7          | 13.1               | 11.3   |           |                |           |          |
| Performing job tasks not related to social work |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | Never         | Rarely        | Sometimes          | Always |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 24.7          | 28            | 31                 | 34.7   |           | 4.35**         | 311       | .041     |
| SD                                              | 10.3          | 10.3          | 11.7               | 13.9   |           |                |           |          |
| Attending workshops                             |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | 1-2 work-shop | 3-5 work-shop | 6 or more workshop |        |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 32.2          | 32.9          | 29                 |        |           | 3.36*          | 297       | .002     |
| SD                                              | 12.2          | 11.4          | 11.9               |        |           |                |           |          |
| Changing career                                 |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | Yes           | Maybe         | No                 |        |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 38.7          | 35            | 27.8               |        |           | 21.4***        | 311       | .122     |
| SD                                              | 13.3          | 12            | 10.5               |        |           |                |           |          |

*Note.* \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

As displayed in Table 1, the number of years in the current job was significant for Emotional Exhaustion  $F(4, 307) = 2.45, p \leq 0.05$ , and was associated with a small effect size. The results showed that social workers with fewer than five years of experience in their current jobs scored higher on the emotional exhaustion subscale than those with more years of experience in their current jobs. In addition, there was a significant difference between attending workshops and Emotional Exhaustion  $F(2, 295) = 3.36, p \leq 0.05$ , associated with almost no effect size. The social workers who attended more than six workshops scored lower on the emotional exhaustion subscale than the others. Further, an ANOVA test suggested that performing job tasks that were related to social work was significantly associated with Emotional Exhaustion  $F(3, 308) = 4.26, p \leq 0.01$ , and had a small effect size. It was found that social workers who were performing job tasks related to social work showed a significantly lower level of emotional exhaustion than those who were not performing these tasks. Moreover, an ANOVA test revealed that performing job tasks unrelated to social work was significantly associated with Emotional Exhaustion  $F(3, 308) = 4.35, p \leq 0.01$ , and it had a small effect size. It was found that social workers who performed non-social-work-related tasks were significantly more likely to report emotional exhaustion than those who did not. There was a significant difference between the desire to change careers and Emotional Exhaustion  $F(2, 309) = 21.4, p \leq 0.001$ , associated with a large effect size. Social workers who desired to change their careers as social workers showed a higher level of emotional exhaustion than those who do not. The results indicated that there were no significant differ-



ences between demographic variables and Emotional Exhaustion at  $p \leq 0.05$ . Furthermore, the results indicated that there were no significant differences between gender and Emotional Exhaustion as well as age and emotional exhaustion at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## Depersonalization

T-test and an ANOVA were conducted in order to answer the following research question: "Are there significant differences between demographic variables (age and gender) and Depersonalization subscale among social workers in Kuwait?"

Age was found to have a statistically significant main effect on Depersonalization  $F(2, 303) = 6.14, p \leq 0.01$ , associated with a large effect size. This study found that younger social workers were more likely to experience higher levels of Depersonalization than older social workers. The result showed that there was no significant difference between gender and Depersonalization at  $p \leq 0.05$ . Several job-related variables, however, showed significant differences in the Depersonalization subscale.

In this study, ANOVA was used to answer the following research question: "Are there significant differences between the job-related variables and Depersonalization subscale among social workers in Kuwait?" There was a significant difference between the number of years in the current job and Depersonalization in the ANOVA  $F(4, 307) = 3.34, p \leq 0.01$ , associated with a small effect size. Social workers who had been working in their current job for five years or less scored higher on the Deperson-

alization subscale than those who had been there for more years. ANOVA analysis indicated a significant difference between attending workshops and Depersonalization  $F(2, 295) = 7.54, p \leq 0.001$ , associated with a very small effect size. Those social workers who attended fewer workshops scored higher on the Depersonalization subscale compared with those who attended more workshops. Additionally, an ANOVA test indicated that performing tasks related to social work was significantly correlated with Depersonalization  $F(3, 308) = 9.65, p \leq 0.001$ , associated with a medium effect size. It was found that social workers who performed job tasks related to social work scored lower on the Depersonalization subscale than those who did not perform those tasks. ANOVA analysis revealed that performing job tasks unrelated to social work was significantly associated with Depersonalization  $F(3, 308) = 5.13, p \leq 0.01$ , and it had a small effect size. The results showed that social workers who performed non-social-work-related job tasks scored higher on the Depersonalization subscale than those who did not. Statistically, there was a significant difference between the desire to change careers and Depersonalization  $F(2, 309) = 17.42, p \leq 0.001$ , associated with a large effect size. Social workers with a desire to change their careers exhibited higher levels of Depersonalization than those without such a desire (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Depersonalization, Demographic and Job-Related Variables*

| Depersonalization Subscale                      |               |               |                    |        |           | ANOVA          |           |          |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|--------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------|
|                                                 |               |               |                    |        |           | <i>F</i> ratio | <i>df</i> | $\eta^2$ |
| Number of years in the current job              |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | 0-5           | 6-10          | 11-15              | 16-20  | 21 & more |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 8.60          | 6.98          | 7.56               | 7.62   | 6.10      | 3.34**         | 311       | .042     |
| SD                                              | 4.38          | 3.30          | 4.42               | 7.62   | 2.15      |                |           |          |
| Age                                             |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | 20-30         | 31-40         | 41 & older         |        |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 3.66          | 2.55          | 1.47               |        |           | 6.14**         | 305       | .101     |
| SD                                              | 4.78          | 3.99          | 2.51               |        |           |                |           |          |
| Performing job tasks related to social work     |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | Never         | Rarely        | Sometimes          | Always |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 11.22         | 12.25         | 7.90               | 7.13   |           | 9.65***        | 311       | .086     |
| SD                                              | 7.54          | 6.64          | 3.90               | 3.44   |           |                |           |          |
| Performing job tasks not related to social work |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | Never         | Rarely        | Sometimes          | Always |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 5.50          | 7.05          | 7.48               | 9.36   |           | 5.13**         | 311       | .048     |
| SD                                              | 1.16          | 3.60          | 3.64               | 5.46   |           |                |           |          |
| Attending workshops                             |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | 1-2 work-shop | 3-5 work-shop | 6 or more workshop |        |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 8.91          | 7.89          | 6.83               |        |           | 7.54***        | 297       | .005     |
| SD                                              | 4.79          | 4.33          | 3.22               |        |           |                |           |          |
| Changing career                                 |               |               |                    |        |           |                |           |          |
|                                                 | Yes           | Maybe         | No                 |        |           |                |           |          |
| M                                               | 9.56          | 9.40          | 6.73               |        |           | 17.42***       | 311       | .101     |
| SD                                              | 5.23          | 4.63          | 3.20               |        |           |                |           |          |

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

## Personal Accomplishment

To answer this research question “Are there significant differences between demographic variables (age and gender) and Personal Accomplishment subscale among social workers in Kuwait?”, a t-test and an ANOVA were employed. As shown in Table 3, there were significant differences between demographic variables such as gender, age, and Personal Accomplishment among the participants. To compare the means of two groups (males and females), the t-test was applied. The results of the analysis,  $t(310) = 2.71, p \leq 0.01$ , showed significant differences between gender and the Personal Accomplishment subscale. Based on the t-test results, male social workers scored higher on Personal Accomplishment than females. A significant difference was also found among age groups  $F(2, 303) = 4.35, p \leq 0.01$ , associated with a small effect size. One-way ANOVA results showed that social workers aged 41 and older scored higher on the subscale of Personal Accomplishment than their younger counterparts. Furthermore, there were significant differences between job-related variables and Personal Accomplishment.

To address this research question “Are there significant differences between the job-related variables and the Personal Accomplishment subscale among social workers in Kuwait?”, a one-way ANOVA was carried out, and the results indicated that there was a significant difference between attending workshops and Personal Accomplishment  $F(2, 295) = 4.31, p \leq 0.01$ , associated with a very small effect size. It was found that social workers who attended six or more workshops scored higher on the subscale of Personal Accomplishment than those who attended fewer workshops. Another significant difference was found between performing tasks related to social

work and Personal Accomplishment  $F(3, 308) = 30.50, p \leq 0.001$ , associated with a large effect size. This seems to imply that social workers who performed job-related tasks scored higher than those who did not. Additionally, a significant difference was found between performing job tasks unrelated to social work and Personal Accomplishment  $F(3, 308) = 4.53, p \leq 0.05$ , associated with a small effect size. Social workers who performed work tasks unrelated to social work scored lower on the Personal Accomplishment subscale than those who did not. Additionally, there was a significant difference between the desire to change careers and Personal Accomplishment  $F(2, 309) = 13.82, p \leq 0.001$ , associated with a large effect size. Social workers without a desire to change careers scored higher in terms of their sense of Personal Accomplishment than those with such a desire (See table 3).

**Table 3**

*Means, Standard Deviations, t-Test and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Personal Accomplishment, Demographic and Job-Related Variables*

|               | Personal Accomplishment Subscale |               |                       | F/t-test (313) |     |          |
|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----|----------|
|               |                                  |               |                       | F/t            | df  | $\eta^2$ |
| <b>Age</b>    |                                  |               |                       |                |     |          |
|               | <b>20-30</b>                     | <b>31-40</b>  | <b>41 &amp; older</b> |                |     |          |
| M             | 39.04                            | 39.31         | 42.25                 | 4.35**         | 305 | .028     |
| SD            | 7.95                             | 8.50          | 4.94                  |                |     |          |
| <b>Gender</b> |                                  |               |                       |                |     |          |
|               | <b>Male</b>                      | <b>Female</b> |                       |                |     |          |
| M             | 3.66                             | 2.55          | 1.47                  | 2.71**         | 310 |          |
| SD            | 4.78                             | 3.99          | 2.51                  |                |     |          |

**Cont. Table 3**

*Means, Standard Deviations, t-Test and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Personal Accomplishment, Demographic and Job-Related Variables*

| Personal Accomplishment Subscale                |               |              |                    |        | F/t-test (313) |     |          |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------------|--------|----------------|-----|----------|
|                                                 |               |              |                    |        | F/t            | df  | $\eta^2$ |
| Performing job tasks related to social work     |               |              |                    |        |                |     |          |
|                                                 | Never         | Rarely       | Sometimes          | Always |                |     |          |
| M                                               | 34.55         | 38.25        | 45.12              | 50.0   | 30.50***       | 311 | .229     |
| SD                                              | 12.54         | 7.08         | 7.12               | 6.37   |                |     |          |
| Performing job tasks not related to social work |               |              |                    |        |                |     |          |
|                                                 | Never         | Rarely       | Sometimes          | Always |                |     |          |
| M                                               | 45.91         | 49.17        | 48.64              | 44.73  | 4.53**         | 311 | .042     |
| SD                                              | 13.23         | 6.80         | 6.61               | 9.71   |                |     |          |
| Attending workshops                             |               |              |                    |        |                |     |          |
|                                                 | 1-2 work-shop | 3-5 workshop | 6 or more workshop |        |                |     |          |
| M                                               | 46.56         | 47.47        | 49.39              |        | 4.31**         | 297 | .008     |
| SD                                              | 8.62          | 7.74         | 6.38               |        |                |     |          |
| Changing career                                 |               |              |                    |        |                |     |          |
|                                                 | Yes           | Maybe        | No                 |        |                |     |          |
| M                                               | 43.26         | 46.26        | 49.42              |        | 13.82***       | 311 | .082     |
| SD                                              | 8.30          | 7.728        | 7.13               |        |                |     |          |

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

## Discussion

This study's results mostly confirmed the results found in previous studies. For example, the results showed that social workers

who have less work experience had higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. Also, social workers who attended more workshops had lower scores on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and higher scores in Personal Accomplishment. These results were compatible with several studies that indicated social workers with less job experience reported higher symptoms of burnout, including Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, than those with more experience (Kim et al., 2016; Kim & Stoner, 2008). They also found that professional development via workshops may prevent social workers from being at high risk of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and may promote their sense of Personal Accomplishment (Kim et al., 2016; Kim & Stoner, 2008).

Due to several variables, social workers with less job experience may experience higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. It has been discovered that emotional labor, which entails controlling and regulating emotions at work, has a detrimental effect on well-being and is positively correlated with stress brought on by the job (Karimi et al., 2013). Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion have also been connected to unfavorable workplace circumstances, such as a lack of managerial support and violent incidents (Fardous & Afzal, 2022). Working the night shift, having little social support, having a short career, and being dissatisfied with sleep are other variables that cause burnout among professionals, including social workers (Vidotti et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2022).

Additionally, it has been found that social workers' emotional health and job happiness are affected by the training they attend. According to research, participating in workshops can enhance coping, emotional health, and stress management (Bane & Haymaker, 2012; Brougham et al., 2009; Cheng & Cheung, 2005). Furthermore, it has

been discovered that workshops aimed at boosting emotional intelligence are advantageous for medical practitioners with lower emotional intelligence scores (Gribble et al., 2018). Similarly, attending workshops that allow participants to express and hear their feelings raises emotional intelligence (Abe et al., 2018). Workshops that address social workers' well-being can also enhance working conditions in the sector (Graham & Shier, 2014). Social workers should be trained and educated on how to provide services in catastrophe contexts because doing so can increase their efficacy (Kranke et al., 2020).

The study's results also showed that social workers who performed tasks related to social work scored lower in Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and scored higher in Personal Accomplishment. Conversely, it also found that social workers who performed tasks unrelated to the social work field scored higher in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and lower in Personal Accomplishment. These results are similar to previous research that elucidated how people in healthcare and social work frequently develop burnout that manifests as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal success (Budayová et al., 2023; Kang et al., 2013; Khalifa et al., 2022; Lizano & Sapozhnikov, 2018; Martínez-López et al., 2021; Mikalauskas et al., 2018; Tang & Li, 2021; Tu et al., 2022). Due to the hard nature of social work, including trauma exposure and heavy workloads, practitioners probably experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Tang & Li, 2021). However, social workers who experience personal fulfillment in their work might have more job satisfaction and resilience, which can act as a protective measure against burnout (Tang & Li, 2021). According to Martínez-López et al. (2021), elements like teleworking and psychological therapy have been proven to be indicators of emotional exhaustion among social workers.



The study's results also indicated that social workers who reported a desire to change their careers scored higher in emotional exhaustion and Depersonalization, while those who had no desire to change their careers scored higher in Personal Accomplishment. These results support other studies that found that when social workers work on tasks related to their field of expertise, they are less likely to report high levels of Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion and more likely to report higher levels of Personal Accomplishment (Kim et al., 2016; Maslach et al., 2001). Their research also demonstrated that social workers wanting to change careers are more prone to Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion, while those lacking such a desire are more likely to have a high sense of Personal Accomplishment (Kim et al., 2016; Maslach et al., 2001).

Social workers frequently develop symptoms of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion associated with burnout due to the difficult nature of their job and as a result of exposure to trauma (Neumann et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2017). The desire to change occupations may be a sign of unhappiness or a lack of fulfillment in one's current position, which can increase burnout. On the other hand, social workers who are unwilling to shift occupations may feel more personally accomplished, which reflects a higher level of job satisfaction and work fulfillment (Chen et al., 2020). Empathy and social support have been demonstrated to help social workers avoid burnout and experience greater job satisfaction (Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2011; Losung et al., 2021; Wagaman et al., 2015).

In terms of demographic variables, the study's results found that younger social workers experience higher levels of Depersonalization, while older social workers scored higher in Personal Accomplishment. Several studies support this finding as they found social workers at a young age are more at risk for burnout, including de-

personalization and intention to leave their job, compared with older social workers (Kim & Stoner, 2008).

This finding can be attributed to several factors. First, less experienced and less confident social workers may feel more insecure in their positions, which increases the risk of depersonalization (Gómez-García et al., 2019). Younger social workers could also be more vulnerable to the emotional strains of their jobs, which can lead to depersonalization (Squellati & Zangaro, 2022). However, older social workers may have more experience and coping skills from their years of work, which may provide them with a higher sense of personal achievement (Straussner & Senreich, 2020). Additionally, they may have a more robust social network, which could result in higher levels of personal achievement (Macdonald & Levy, 2016). In general, social workers' levels of depersonalization and sense of accomplishment seem to be significantly influenced by their age and experience.

The study's results also found that male social workers scored higher in Personal Accomplishment than females. This supports some investigations concerning the association between burnout and gender among social workers, which found that male social workers reported higher scores in Personal Accomplishment compared with female social workers (Maslach et al., 2001), yet other studies have not found significant differences among social workers toward Personal Accomplishment in terms by gender (Kim & Stoner, 2008).

The relevant references do not specifically address why male social professionals have more Personal Accomplishment than female social workers. However, it is important to emphasize that a variety of factors such as gender, work environment, social support, and individual traits, may affect burnout and job satisfaction (Al-Shoubri, 2018; Rizo-Baeza et al., 2017; da Silva et al., 2015). Discrepancies in job satisfaction and a sense of success may result from gender

differences in the social work profession, such as compensation gaps and leadership positions (Jabour, 2012). Personal achievement can also be impacted by how one views the value of their own efforts and chances for personal growth (da Silva et al., 2015).

## Implications

This study made a valuable contribution to scientific knowledge by examining burnout among social workers in Kuwait, an area that had not been previously explored. Previous studies focused on burnout among physicians, teachers, and surgeons (Akl et al., 2022; Alazmi & Salem, 2021; Al-Shoraian et al., 2011). This study has important ramifications, which can be categorized into three levels of social work: micro, mezzo, and macro.

At the micro level, experiencing burnout can have detrimental effects on the well-being and job performance of social workers (Jia & Li, 2022; Travis et al., 2016; Tu et al., 2022), subsequently impacting their mental and physical health, increasing stress levels, and reducing job satisfaction (Khizar et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). To prevent health deterioration and impairment of work performance, social workers must thoroughly understand their personal qualities and environmental circumstances that contribute to their burnout scenario.

At the mezzo level, it has been discovered that working with vulnerable populations such as children and disabled individuals in certain environments can lead to significant levels of stress and burnout among social workers (Alsabti, 2022; Travis et al., 2016). Therefore, leaders must establish a comprehensive written policies that focuses on preventing burnout and protecting social workers. Research has demonstrated that social workers can prevent burnout by receiving essential support from their leaders and peers in the workplace (Huang et al., 2021; Sellar et al., 2018).

At the macro level, the occurrence of burnout among social workers has a significant influence on the communities and organizations to which they provide services to. Studies suggest that burnout can result in increased fatigue, ethical dilemmas, employee attrition, sick leave, and resignations, all of which negatively affect the quality of services offered to clients, leading to a waste of resources and harm to the community's economy (Fuente et al., 2015; Kang, 2013; Pass, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to eliminate burnout among social workers to maintain the welfare and high standards of both social workers' lives and their clients (Tan & Yeap, 2022).

### Limitations

The study's results provided significant information as an exploratory study, filling an important gap in the literature review regarding burnout among social workers specifically in Kuwait. However, numerous other factors of burnout among social workers within the current literature seem to be related to this study's subject but were not investigated due to methodological considerations. Such considerations include the research design, the survey length, and the recruitment procedure. It would be helpful to study these other factors via other research methods as appropriate. Another limitation is that the phenomenon under consideration is related to human subjects. As such, many factors may be difficult to capture via quantitative methodology.

### Recommendation

Further investigation of the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, organizational culture, and leadership behavior is a must to provide more explanations underlying the study's results and further increase social workers' awareness of prevention and intervention. The recommendations may be summarized as follows:

- 1 - Future research on the link between burnout among social workers and the specific above-mentioned variables is crucial for a compre-

hensive understanding and addressing the issue, ultimately aiding social workers in avoiding or recovering from burnout.

- 2 - Further qualitative and causal research is needed to understand the factors influencing personal achievement differences between male and female social workers, as well as the underlying emotions and theoretical frameworks, beyond scales and cross-sectional research designs.
- 3 - Social workers need training on burnout indicators, consequences, and management strategies to prevent physical, mental, and psychological deficits. The profession is challenging due to heavy workloads and high-density institutions. Continuing education is essential for enhancing skills and protecting against ethical dilemmas. This policy may be formulated as an official agency policy.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the results of this study indicated that social workers with fewer years of experience, who attend fewer workshops, perform tasks unrelated to their field, and have a desire to change careers, experience high levels of Emotional Exhaustion. In addition, younger social workers, who have fewer years of experience, attend fewer workshops, perform tasks unrelated to their field, and have a desire to change careers, experience high levels of Depersonalization. Finally, social workers who are male, older, attend more workshops, perform tasks related to social work, and have no desire to change careers experience higher levels of Personal Accomplishment. These findings collectively indicate that the high levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization experienced by social workers with less work experience are a result of a combination of emotional labor, personal conflicts, unfavorable working conditions, and psychological factors.

To help remedy this, attending workshops can provide social workers with the information and abilities they need to enhance their mental health and professional effectiveness, reducing burnout. Therefore, organizations must combat burnout by offering resources and support to enhance social workers' well-being and job satisfaction (Budayová et al., 2023; Hombrados-Mendieta & Cosano-Rivas, 2011; Tang & Li, 2021).

### Data Availability

Upon reasonable request, the data supporting the findings of this study may be obtained from the corresponding author. To protect the privacy of research participants, the data are not publicly available, as they contain information that may compromise their privacy.

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