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The Professional Intervention for School Social Workers with the Phenomenon of Bullying

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. The phenomenon of bullying in schools affects not only students but also the school, family, and society. Studies show that many school-based interventions directly reduce bullying, with better outcomes when multiple disciplines are involved. This article focuses on school bullying intervention by examining types of bullying, key contributing factors, the role of school social workers in prevention and intervention, and the challenges they face.

Materials/methods. A purposive qualitative approach was used to achieve the study's objectives. The researchers interviewed 16 school social workers in schools across the Dhofar Governorate, Sultanate of Oman, to explore bullying among students.

Results. The study analyzed the main types of bullying in Dhofar schools. The results show that the intervention of school social workers becomes crucial in providing support and strategies to address these challenges effectively.

Conclusion. This study identifies physical, verbal, and social bullying as the most prevalent forms in schools. Several personal and environmental factors contribute to bullying. The findings reveal that school social workers perform various roles in supporting both bullies and victims through intervention. However, bullying remains a serious issue, and both school social workers and teachers face daily challenges in managing it. The study contributes original insights into how school social workers can collaborate with educators and implement targeted interventions to enhance school safety and address bullying.

1. Introduction and Background

School social work is a specialized field within social work. Bullying in schools, recognized as a significant social and educational issue, profoundly impacts students' physical and mental well-being and can result in significant societal implications. School bullying is a serious social problem. Social workers can help individuals to “resolve personal and social problems.” Through this method, the social workers can render counselling and victim empowerment services to the victims of bullying.

Bullying includes both direct aggressive behaviour (e.g., physical intimidation and verbal threats) and indirect aggressive behaviour (e.g., exclusion, rejection). (Evans et al. 2014). As a social dynamic, bullying involves a large proportion of elementary, middle, and high school students. Bullying is behavior by an individual or group that intentionally hurts others either physically or emotionally, usually over an extended period (Harris & White, 2013, p. 45).

Vergottini et al (2020) stated that school social work is the application of social work principles and practices within educational systems to provide holistic and supportive social work services to pupils, families, educators, and the school community. School social workers play a unique and important role as school personnel in that they can identify elements of the school environment that impede student success, advocate for the disadvantaged, and promote student achievement through their service delivery and coordination (Cuellar, Elswick, & Theriot, 2017).

Bullying continues to be a serious problem in schools. School social workers and teachers face challenges daily in dealing with bullying. This paper argues that bullying amongst learners in the school setting is a social issue and, therefore, concerns the social worker. Social workers are key professionals in facilitating the execution of anti-bullying policies and programs within educational settings. The intervention of professional social workers has become one of the effective means to prevent and solve bullying in schools.

The authors examined the types of bullying in Dhofar schools and the role of school social workers in intervening with both those who are bullied and those who engage in bullying. Through interviews with 16 school social workers, the study identifies key challenges and intervention strategies, with findings that aim to inform and improve school-based practices for bullying prevention.

2. Statement of Problem: Statement of the Research/Relationship to Social Work

Bullying is a social phenomenon. About 30% of schoolchildren are involved in bullying as victims, bullies, or bully-victims (Evans et al., 2014). Bullying is a complex, dynamic social behaviour that involves intent to harm, repetition, and power imbalance. In addition, bullying can take several forms, including physical, relational, verbal, and cyberbullying. Based on the annual educational statistics book- the number of public schools is 164, and the number of private schools is 58, whereas the number of school social workers is 148 (General Directorate of Education Dhofar, 2024, p. 78).

Because of the important roles that school social workers and teachers play in the fight against bullying, an exploration of what accounts for feelings of preparedness among these professionals is necessary to inform practice. In an investigation of the phenomenon of bullying in both girls and boys in Governate and private schools of Dhofar and the role of school social workers with this phenomenon, the purpose of this study was to explore the types of school bullying and the Intervention for school social workers.

3. Literature Review

The literature review gives a concise summary of the evolution of bullying and research on it, including definitions of bullying, various types, and the traits of both bullies and victims. It also explores recent approaches to tackling the issue and examines the readiness of school social workers

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and teachers. The review situates these discussions within the theoretical framework of social work, particularly focusing on the role of school social workers.

3.1. Bullying

Bullying in schools is a pervasive threat to the well-being and educational success of students (Hall, 2017). National Education Association (NEA, 2013) describes direct bullying as something that someone directly does to another, such as hitting, kicking, teasing, destruction of property, threatening or forcing someone to do something against their will. According to Koo (2007), Bullying is a type of school violence that has been going on for centuries.

However, most definitions include the following: intentional infliction of harm, it is repetitious, involves an imbalance of power, and can be physical, emotional, verbal, relational or sexual.

3.2. Physical Bullying

Physical bullying is any act that requires the perpetrator to do something that involves physically hurting another person (Simmons, 2019). The results of this study emphasize the need for early intervention in bullying behaviours in schools.

3.3. Verbal Bullying

Verbal bullying is another type of direct bullying and includes things like name-calling and teasing (Mishna, 2003).

Bully/victim problems have gradually been placed on the official school agenda in many countries (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is one of the most important problems that most schools all over the world suffer from, given that it is a persistent problem in schools, where indicators, statistics and evidence confirm the increase in the prevalence of this problem among bullies and victims, and on school students in general (Al Samalouti, 2009, p. 64). Bullying undeniably affects the victim; where for example, Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) found that learners who are victims of bullying bunk classes and can end up dropping out of school.

3.4. School Social Workers' Intervention

Social workers are people who follow the values of social work and use the professional methods of social work to engage in professional social services (Lai. et al., 2024). School social workers can develop and implement practices that can promote student connectedness (Creswell, 2013). The literature indicates that social workers play several roles, including the social worker as advocate, counsellor, caseworker, partner, risk assessor, care manager and agent of social control (Asquith, et al., 2005).

The roles are as follows:

A. Counsellor (or caseworker) who works with individuals to help them address personal issues.

B. Advocate on behalf of the poor and socially excluded.

C. Partner working together with disadvantaged or disempowered individuals and groups.

Bullying brings negative health consequences for both bullies and victims, and it can hurt bystanders as well (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). The social worker could engage in individual sessions with a learner who is bullying other learners, and this would assist the learners in changing their behaviour (Masilo, 2018).

According to Zastrow (2017:90), social workers are knowledgeable about evidence-based interventions to achieve the goals of clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

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School social workers have the tools to understand, develop, and implement school safety strategies with minimal harmful effects on students and the school environment (Franklin et al., 2009).

Collaboration with teachers: Studies have reported that SSWs are responsible for developing collaborative relationships with other professionals in the school setting (Kelly et al., 2016). For instance, collaboration with teachers is more likely to contribute to a positive school ethos where SSWs would train teachers on how to better care for and support children (Nguyen et al., 2022). Professional support and guidance are needed to facilitate adequate interaction between early childhood professionals and children's parents (Ward, 2018). Although collaboration with other professionals, such as psychologists, speech therapists, and nurses, fosters positive development for learners, their developmental needs will be supported and met.

School social workers provide individual and group counselling, crisis intervention, and advocacy services to ensure that students have the support they need to thrive in school. They also play a crucial role in connecting families with community resources and promoting a positive school climate conducive to learning and development. In order to involve families in schools and foster fluid collaboration, Duddy (2019) mentioned that educators must be particularly prepared to respond with appropriate strategies that make the family-school relationship viable in any situation.

The successful elements for reducing rates of both bullying others and being bullied were parent training/meetings, disciplinary methods, cooperative group work, and greater duration and intensity of the program, both for teachers and children (Smith, 2016). Smith and colleagues (2012) argue that bullying prevention programs are more effective for younger students, and that within-program comparisons are more convincing than between-study program comparisons. More variables are indeed controlled in within-program comparisons.

Bullying in schools remains a pervasive problem that threatens student well-being, yet there is a notable gap in the literature concerning the specific professional interventions of school social workers, particularly within the Middle Eastern context. Previous studies have largely emphasized teachers' roles or general anti-bullying strategies, leaving limited understanding of how school social workers engage in prevention and intervention efforts (Kelly et al., 2016; Franklin et al., 2009). This research addresses these gaps by exploring the experiences and practices of social workers in Dhofar, Oman, thus offering culturally grounded insights and evidence-based strategies to enhance bullying prevention and intervention. Furthermore, it identifies environmental, personal, and family-related factors that contribute to bullying behavior, an area often overlooked in existing research (Hong & Espelage, 2012). By doing so, this study provides a vital contribution to social work practice and educational policy development.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing an open-ended questionnaire/interview and observation for data collection. The qualitative aspect of the survey involved a single open-ended question, allowing for a flexible study design that enabled the researcher to analyze textual data from participants' responses. The participants in this study included social workers working in educational settings, specifically school social workers.

4.1. Research Questions

Research questions for this study are:

Q1: What are the most common types of bullying observed in schools?

Q2: What factors contribute to the rise of bullying in schools?

Q3: What roles do school social workers play in intervening with bullying in schools?

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Q4: What challenges do school social workers encounter within school settings?

4.2. Data Collection

Data was collected between September and November 2024 through a semi-structured interview instrument developed by researchers. School Social workers (SSW)s participants were interviewed using this semi-structured process. The interview questions were created using the research questions as a framework, and they were open-ended. Once data was collected from all participants, the responses were coded, and themes and subthemes were identified based on the study's objectives.

4.3 Population and Sampling

The researchers used a purposive sample of school social workers in the state of Dhofar in Sultanate of Oman for this research. Purposive sampling intends to gather information for a certain purpose, one that is generally specific to a particular group of persons with particular expertise (Schutt, 2004).

Social workers have a vast knowledge of evidence-based practices that aim to improve student success from a behavioural and mental health perspective (Franklin et al., 2009). School social workers can address many of the emerging themes in the qualitative analysis.

4.3.1. Population

The study population consisted of both public and private schools across all stages in Dhofar State, the number of school social workers is 148.

Table 1. The education system in Dhofar State includes the number of schools and SSWs.

Stage	Type of Schools	Number of Schools	Number of School Social Workers
	First Cycle Schools 1-4	31	35
Stage 1	Second Cycle Schools 5-10	26	33
	Continuing Schools 1- 12	101	69
Stage 2	Schools with Grades 10-12	3	6
Stage 3	Schools with Grades 11-12	3	5
Total		164	148

(General Directorate of Education Dhofar, 2024).

4.3.2. Sample

The study used a non-random sample of (16) school social workers from Dhofar, who volunteered from schools that agreed to distribute the surveys. All participants were currently working in schools.

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Table 2. Sample Demographic.

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	1.Less than 25	2	12.50
	2. 25-40	9	56.25
	3. 40+	5	31.25
Total		**16**	100%
Gender	1. Male	7	43.75
	2. Female	9	56.25
Total		**16**	100%
Social Status	1.Single	6	37.50
	2.Married	9	56.25
	3.Divorce	1	6.25
	4.Widow	0	0
Total		**16**	100%
Education Level	1.Diploma	0	0
	2.Bachelor	14	87.50
	3.Graduate Studies	2	12.50
Total		**16**	100%
Year of Experience	1.Less than 5 years	7	43.75
	2. 5 years to 15 years		
	3. Up to 16 years	6	37.50
Total			
		3	18.75
		16	100%
Type of School	1.Governate	10	62.50
	2. Private	6	37.50
Total		**16**	100%
Education Stage	1.First Stage	8	50
	2.Second Stage	8	50
Total		**16**	100%

The demographic characteristics of the school social workers involved in this study were outlined in the table, revealing that:

1. Age Distribution: The sample of 16 school social workers primarily falls between the ages of 25 to 40, comprising 56% of the participants. Those younger than 25 years old make up about 12% of the sample.

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2. Gender Distribution: Females outnumber males among the school social workers.

3. Marital Status: The majority of social workers are married (56%), followed by single individuals (37%). Divorced individuals represent a smaller percentage at 6%, and there are no widows among the participants.

4. Years of Experience: Participants with less than 5 years of experience constitute 44% of the sample. About 37% have 5 to 15 years of experience, and approximately 19% have more than 16 years of experience.

5. School Type: A significant majority of the participants (62%) work in government schools, while 37% work in private schools.

6. Career Stage: Social workers are evenly distributed between the first stage (50%) and the second stage (50%) of their careers.

5. Results

As students spend a significant amount of their time in school, building friendships and integrating into social circles, they become particularly vulnerable to peer influence. This environment can lead to various social and educational challenges, with bullying emerging as a prominent issue among them. Therefore, the intervention of school social workers becomes crucial in providing support and strategies to address these challenges effectively.

The results presented in this study are based on data collected from the participants. The first step in processing qualitative data involved coding, after which themes and subthemes were identified. The results are presented as follows.

1. Types of Bullying
- ├── Verbal Bullying
- ├── Physical Bullying
- ├── Social/Emotional Bullying
- └── Cyberbullying

2. Factors Contributing to Bullying
- ├── Personal Factors
- ├── Environmental Factors
- └── Family Factors

3. School Social Workers' Interventions
- ├── Direct Support (Direct Intervention)
- ├── Collaboration with Teachers and Parents
- ├── Therapeutic or Treatment Roles
- └── Preventive Roles (Awareness Campaigns)

4. Challenges Faced by School Social Workers
- ├── Lack of Awareness in the Community
- ├── Lack of Family Engagement
- ├── Financial and Administrative Barriers
- └── Lack of Professional Behavior by Some Teachers

Figure 1. Themes and Subthemes for the Study

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5.1. Main Theme: The Most Common Types of Bullying Observed in Schools

The research paper identifies verbal, physical, social, and cyberbullying as the most prevalent types in schools. However, some participants also reported experiencing psychological and emotional bullying. This reporting suggests that bullying in school environments encompasses a range of forms beyond traditional physical and verbal aggression, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these diverse challenges effectively.

All the participants in this study pointed out that verbal bullying is the most common, followed by physical bullying, along with the presence of other bullying forms as well.

Verbal Bullying, most participants in this study indicated that the most popular type of bullying in schools is verbal. P1 mentioned that *Verbal bullying, including actions like damaging a student's personal belongings, as well as using sarcasm, insults, and hurtful remarks, is among the most prevalent forms of bullying.*

Physical Bullying, some participants indicated that, in some cases, students hit each other and physically fight. P2 stated that *Students, especially boys between the ages of 12 and 15, hit each other, and this requires direct intervention.*

Emotional Bullying, some participants also pointed out both social and emotional bullying. For instance, P3 mentioned that *Social bullying has also become widespread, with actions like deliberately insulting or excluding a student. Additionally, emotional bullying is on the rise, involving tactics like manipulating a student's emotions or humiliating them in front of their peers.*

Cyberbullying, P3 also mentioned that *cyberbullying has become more common nowadays, such as posting offensive comments or sharing photos and audio recordings of students without their consent.*

On the other hand, P4 noted that *most reported cases of bullying involve individuals rather than groups, with verbal bullying being the most common, and physical bullying occurring in only a few instances.*

5.2. Main Theme: The Factors Contribute to the Rise of Bullying in Schools

Participants identified several factors contributing to school bullying, including students' feelings of power, jealousy, and interpersonal conflicts, as well as family-related issues. These factors highlight the complexity of bullying, suggesting that effective solutions must address both individual and family dynamics.

5.2.1. Subtheme: Personal Factors

Bullying can stem from personal factors within students, including a need to assert power over others, feelings of jealousy, and conflicts in their relationships with peers. These factors often drive negative behaviors, influencing how students interact and contribute to bullying dynamics in school settings.

P5 pointed out that *one of the causes of bullying is sudden aggression, where a student displays hostile behavior towards others as a reaction. Additionally, some students try to avoid crowded places as they prefer to isolate themselves.* P3 indicated that *Some students value authority, and bullies attempt to dominate others, often influenced by copying or imitating those around them.*

5.2.2. Subtheme: Environmental Factors

Peer support plays a significant role as part of the school environment, shaping how students interact with one another and influencing attitudes toward bullying.

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P13 mentioned that *Some students hope to gain power and believe that this happens through bullying*

Also, the classroom environment and school culture play a big role in bullying. The attitudes of the group, whether supportive or against bullying, influence how students treat those who are bullied. P11 suggests that *school pressure is a contributing factor to bullying.*

5.2.3. Subtheme: Family Factors

Bullying at school can be influenced by family factors such as poor parenting, overindulgence, family disintegration or domestic violence, all of which can impact the child's behavior at school. P10 mentioned that *Overindulgence and poor parenting can influence students' behavior at school, leading to behaviors like bullying, particularly verbal bullying.* P7 indicated that *the lack of parental involvement in the child's school life, along with a lack of communication and responsiveness to the school, increases bullying behaviours in the child.*

5.3. Main Theme: School Social Workers' Intervention

School social workers play a crucial role in evaluating and addressing problems related to school safety, such as violence and bullying. The strategies that have been proven effective in prevention and intervention programs are areas where school social workers can have a significant impact by implementing them within the school environment.

Participants in this study acknowledged that social workers play several important roles in intervention within schools, as demonstrated in the following roles:

5.3.1. Subtheme: Direct Intervention

All Participants in this study highlighted that school social workers can play a significant role in intervention when issues arise within the school. P9 stated that *We intervene directly with both victims and bullies by providing psychological support to the victims and helping them overcome negative emotions such as fear and anxiety.* Also, P6 stated that *The school social worker addresses bullying cases by providing support, conducting individual and group interviews, analyzing cases, and implementing and overseeing behavioural therapy plans.*

5.3.2. Subtheme: Cooperation-Social Workers Collaboration with Parents and Teachers

With the aim of social workers to fully carry out their roles, they must collaborate with parents and teachers to effectively intervene and resolve the issue of bullying.

P8 mentioned that *Teachers must be trained on how to deal with bullies in the classroom, and parents and guardians should be involved in addressing this issue through regular meetings in schools.* Additionally, P3 stated that *educators and parents are essential factors in helping to minimize bullying behaviour among students.*

5.3.3. Subtheme: Therapeutic or Treatment Roles

School social workers play a crucial role in ensuring students attend school regularly, supporting those at risk, helping students navigate emotional and social challenges, offering diverse programs to meet their needs, and assisting families in keeping their children engaged in education. P5 *mentioned that the school social worker actively deals with bullies by understanding the underlying causes of their aggressive behaviour and providing appropriate guidance to modify their behaviour.*

P14 *suggested that awareness campaigns should be initiated to foster a culture of respect and conduct activities to promote positive relationships among students.*

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P3 *noted that handling bullying cases involves providing support, conducting individual and group interviews, studying these cases, and implementing behavioral therapy plans, followed by monitoring progress.*

5.3.4. Subtheme: Preventive Role

Preventive interventions in school social work are essential for fostering a supportive educational environment. They include early identification of at-risk students, promoting mental health practices, building positive peer relationships, and collaborating closely with families and educators. By focusing on prevention rather than crisis response, school social workers enhance student well-being, academic performance, and overall community resilience.

P1 stated that *It is important to create comprehensive reports for each case and offer recommendations to the school to prevent similar incidents in the future. Furthermore, playing a role in establishing preventive policies to minimize bullying is vital.* P3 *stated that The social worker provides support and guidance to teachers to help them recognize signs of bullying and indicators of aggressive behaviour, as well as to prepare classroom activities to address these cases.*

5.4. Main Theme: Challenges Faced by School Social Workers in Educational Settings

School social workers face significant challenges when intervening in bullying situations. These challenges include a lack of awareness about the causes and consequences of bullying, as well as the failure of schools, parents, and communities to fully acknowledge the issue.

5.4.1. Subtheme: Lack of Awareness About the Causes and Dangers of Bullying

School social work is a specialized area of practice where social workers with specific training work within educational settings. Without widespread understanding, people may underestimate the long-term effects of bullying on both victims and perpetrators. P10 stated that *Bullying can lead to serious mental health issues, academic struggles, and a cycle of violence. If people aren't educated on these risks, bullying may be dismissed as normal behaviour.* Furthermore, P15 *pointed out that A lack of awareness about bullying within the community, along with some members viewing it as normal behaviour, contributes to its persistence. Additionally, intolerance and racism play a significant role in fueling the spread of bullying in society.*

5.4.2. Subtheme: Lack of Family Engagement

Some parents ignore and do not respond to the school social worker; parental neglect or lack of awareness can be a huge barrier. P7 mentioned that *If parents don't acknowledge the severity of bullying or refuse to work with specialists (e.g., school counsellors, psychologists), their child might not get the support they need to address the issue, whether they are bullies or being bullied.*

Moreover, P4 *mentioned that the lack of cooperation from some parents with teachers and social workers amplifies the bullying problem. Additionally, when parents fail to respond to the school administration in certain cases, it exacerbates the situation.*

5.4.3. Subtheme: Financial and Administrative Barriers

The results of this study indicate that several challenges are associated with financial and administrative issues. For example, there is a need for designated spaces for school social workers, increased funding for bullying prevention programs, and a balanced ratio of social workers to students.

P8 mentioned that *we, as school social workers, face weak financial resources available for specialists and a lack of support to implement comprehensive anti-bullying programs.*

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P2 noted that *some procedural obstacles refer to the implementation of some therapeutic and preventive programs and plans* P3 pointed that *the administration's lack of attention in providing resources for the social worker, along with assigning additional responsibilities, affects the social worker's ability to focus on the bullying issue.*

5.4.4. Subtheme: Lack of Professional Behavior by Some Teachers

Regarding the lack of professional behaviour by some teachers, P11 stated that *the refusal to accept the presence of a social worker in the school and the lack of understanding of their key role reduces the effectiveness of collaboration between the social worker and the teacher.* Also, P5 *pointed out that the lack of coordination and interaction between the social workers and teachers in identifying behaviours that indicate bullying reduces the ability to develop an effective treatment plan.*

6. Discussion

This qualitative exploratory study aimed to fill the gap in research on the roles of school social workers in addressing bullying and the challenges they face within schools. To achieve the study's objectives, data were collected from participants in schools in Dhofar. Once the data were collected, the responses were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were manually coded to identify emerging themes and subthemes. The coding process followed a deductive approach, aligned with the study's objectives. Additionally, an inductive approach was employed, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. After organizing the codes, the themes were refined and validated to ensure they accurately represented the participants' perspectives.

The four themes that were developed through analysis were: (a) the most common types of bullying observed in schools, (b) challenges Faced by School Social Workers, (c) Intervention: school social workers' role in addressing bullying in schools, and (d) challenges faced by school social workers in educational settings. Each of the themes had subthemes as well.

6.1. Theme 1: The Most Common Types of Bullying Observed in Schools

The findings of this research study highlighted the prevalent types of bullying in schools. Participants identified several forms of bullying practiced within schools, including verbal, physical, social, and, more recently, cyberbullying.

Victimization is a major childhood risk factor that uniquely contributes to later depression, even controlling for many other major childhood risks (Ttofi et al., 2011). Bullying is a complex, dynamic social behaviour that involves intent to harm, repetition, and power imbalance. In addition, bullying can take several forms, including physical, relational, verbal, and cyberbullying (Evans et al., 2014). Also, the result of this study agree with Lai & Ding (2024), they indicated that school bullying is defined as an incident in which one party (individual or group) among classmates intentionally or maliciously carries out bullying and insults through physical verbal and cyber means on a single or multiple occasions, resulting in physical injuries, property losses or mental damages, etc.

6.2. Theme 2: The Factors Contributing to the Rise of Bullying in Schools

This study indicates that various factors contribute to the prevalence of bullying in schools. These factors can be categorized into personal, environmental, and familial influences. Personal factors include traits such as an aggressive personality, which may contribute to bullying behaviour. Environmental factors encompass peer dynamics, such as the influence of classmates on one another's behaviour. This finding agrees with the study of Olweus (1993), which stated that when bullying occurs in school, the bullied often choose to talk to their friends, but the friends of the bullied often lack the experience and methods to deal with bullying in school.

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As well as classroom conditions, such as overcrowded classes or a teacher's inability to manage the class effectively. The classroom system and school climate have an important influence on school bullying, and the collective bullying attitudes of most class members are reflected in the beliefs of the group that supports or opposes bullying behaviour and the attitudes of the group that protects or excludes those who are bullied (Jones et al., 2011).

Additionally, family-related factors, such as domestic violence or limited parental involvement, may also play a role in the development of bullying behaviors. Youths who bully also face psychosocial difficulties; These youths often grow up in harsh social environments with few resources (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Parents of bullies might be in denial about their child's behaviour, while parents of victims might be concerned about the stigma or emotional impact on their child (Lamont-Mills et al., 2018).

6.3. Theme 3: Intervention-School Social Workers' Role in Addressing Bullying in Schools

The findings of this research highlight the various roles that school social workers play, particularly in addressing bullying. Participants discussed the diverse functions of social workers in schools, emphasizing their intervention efforts in tackling the different forms of bullying. The specific function of School social workers (SSWs) may differ depending on the context; but they typically include providing direct one-on-one counselling and family intervention, organizing and facilitating group work, conducting home visits, advocating for learners and schools, coordinating inter- and multidisciplinary teams, and developing preventative initiatives in classrooms (Allen-Meares, 1996).

Additionally, the participants in this study emphasized the role of school social workers in collaborating with parents and teachers to address and prevent all forms of bullying. This result agrees with the study by Alhajjaj (2020), which stated that Family involvement in education and school activities has demonstrated a significant impact on a child's well-being and academic achievement. Hall (2017) also stated that educators play a key role in reducing bullying behaviour among students.

To ensure learner academic support, the article by Bulanda and Jalloh reflected that SSWs would collaborate with teachers and school administrators on best practices for helping learners, and in their example, SSWs could help teachers talk to learners with behavioural problems and ensure that the learners are treated with respect (Bulanda & Jalloh, 2019). Educators in schools with bullying policies were more likely to enlist the help of parents and colleagues in responding to a bullying incident and were less likely to ignore bullying (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa., 2008).

Moreover, participants highlighted the role of school social workers in preventing bullying and reducing its effects. Social work competencies are directly related to the purpose of the profession, which is “actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally (CSWE, 2015). School Social Worker Role as Bullying Educator. The definition of a school social worker who is acting in an educator role is; the school social worker who provides support and training to teachers and other school staff in the area of bullying. The school social worker may provide workshops or materials or work with teachers and staff individually to help in bullying intervention and prevention (Simmons, 2019).

6.4. Theme 4: Challenges Faced by School Social Workers in Educational Settings

Findings from this study show that school social workers face numerous challenges, some related to community perceptions of bullying, and others linked to family factors that may contribute to bullying. Family disintegration can have profound psychological and emotional consequences for

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learners, including feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and depression. Parental involvement in discipline can significantly influence learners' behaviour and academic performance (Olsen & Mikkelsen, 2018).

On the other hand, some challenges are connected to the environment, such as financial and administrative barriers. School social work is an advanced practice specialization in which specially trained social workers practice within a host educational environment. School social workers encounter many challenges in the education environment (Simmons, 2019).

At the same time, social workers can organize training courses to enhance the awareness and ability of teaching staff to deal with the problem of bullying in schools and to strengthen their sensitivity and coping skills.

7. Conclusion

Bullying is an important social problem; this study offers a thorough analysis of the various types of bullying in both private and public schools in Dhofar. The findings reveal that bullying manifests in several forms, including verbal, physical, social, and cyberbullying, which affect academic achievement and highlight the complexity and widespread nature of this issue in educational settings. The findings of this study indicate that while bullying manifests in different forms, verbal bullying is the most common type in schools.

Consequently, this study identifies the factors that contribute to the rise of bullying in schools. Understanding these underlying causes can assist school social workers in enhancing their interventions and prevention efforts. These factors may include personal, environmental, and financial influences.

The results indicate a distinct pattern in the role of school social workers in addressing the issue of bullying and contributing to its resolution. As such, bullying children would require social work services. Additionally, the social worker needs to render victim empowerment services to the victim of bullying. Bullying is a problem that cannot be addressed or dealt with in isolation. Therefore, the social worker who is operational in the school setting needs to work towards preventing and addressing bullying via educational and empowerment services by engaging school educators, learners, parents, and external stakeholders. Furthermore, the study highlighted that intervention plays a crucial role for school social workers in addressing bullying situations; the role of supporting victims, social workers can use professional skills such as empathy to listen to their stories, understand their feelings, and guide them to find positive ways of coping. Social workers can also raise young people's awareness of bullying in schools.

School social workers collaborate with teachers, parents, and administrators to address various challenges that students face, such as mental health issues, family problems, behavioural concerns, and learning disabilities. In a modern educational system, parent-school relationships must be understood as proactive cooperation established between families and teachers to promote the integral development of children (Otero-Mayer et al., 2021).

School social workers focus on supporting students' academic success and social-emotional well-being within educational settings. Schools, like other systems in the community, are grappling with various challenges, one of the most prevalent being bullying.

These findings raise concerns about the possibility that peer interventions may reinforce the aggressive behaviour of school bullies and promote a cycle of violence (Ttofi & Farrington, 2012). Implementing sanctions to deal with school bullying is a usual school policy, especially when tackling more serious cases. Also, social workers can work together with schoolteachers to raise awareness by holding thematic class meetings. At the same time, social workers can also organize mutual help groups in classes through the establishment of mutual help groups so that students can share each

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other's experiences and feelings and support and help each other in the groups. At the end, bullying can significantly impact students' academic performance and, in some cases, may lead to students dropping out of school due to fear or feelings of hatred.

8. Suggestion

This study was exploratory in nature and designed to provide information that may be useful to social work and teacher education programs, based on the qualitative findings of this study such practices might help schools promote and maintain safety, particularly in schools that might rely on the use of authoritarian strategies.

Furthermore, social workers should actively contact schools and public welfare organizations in the society, and introduce professional psychological counseling agencies and social work agencies to provide professional psychological support and intervention services for bullies and victims.

Educators: They should receive training to effectively identify and address bullying behaviours. Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment is essential for reducing bullying incidents.

Social Workers: They should increase awareness of bullying and provide counseling services for both victims and perpetrators. Collaboration with schools, public welfare organizations, and psychological agencies is critical to offering comprehensive support.

Policy Makers: Policymakers should establish and enforce clear anti-bullying policies. Ensuring adequate resources, such as social workers and mental health services, is essential for effective intervention.

Researchers: Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches to gain a deeper understanding of bullying trends and the long-term impact of social worker interventions.

9. Limitations

1. Sample Size and Representation: The study included only 16 school social workers, which limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of social workers across different regions and school types.

2. Data Collection Method: The study relied on self-reported data from interviews and surveys, which can be influenced by social desirability bias. Participants may have been reluctant to report negative experiences or may have presented their views in a way they felt was expected, leading to potential inaccuracies in the data.

3. Contextual Factors: The study's findings are based on a specific cultural and geographical context, which may limit their generalizability to other regions or cultural settings. Further research in diverse environments is needed to better understand how different factors influence bullying and the role of school social workers.

Declarations

Author Contributions. Alhajjaj, H. A.: Abstract, Statement of the problem, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Results, Discussion, Conclusion, Suggestions, revise-writing. Foda, M. M.: Introduction, Literature Review & Collecting data. ALSaiari, N. A: Revising citations and references, suggestions, revising writing & limitations. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article

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Ethical Approval. All participants were fully informed about the aims and procedures of the study and provided their voluntary, written informed consent prior to participation.

Data Availability Statement. Data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon formal request.

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