Research Article

The spiritual and mental health assessment of social workers working for Internally Displaced Persons during Covid-19 in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This study utilizes the spiritual assessment viewpoint to analyze the spirituality of social workers who are working for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Kachin and Northern Shan State, Myanmar where the working situation is stressful, and security is not guaranteed. The data is collected online during the pandemic and military, in April 2022. It is a quantitative research assessment and the form of Spirituality Assessment of Social Workers Working for IDPs (SASWWIDPs) is designed as three dimensions of SASWWIDPs: Healthy self-awareness (HSA), healthy relationship (HR), and healthy feeling (HF). The accumulated data is interpreted using SPSS 22.0 for statistical analysis. Most of the participants are female (66%) and 34% are male. The results of the three dimensions of the SASWWIDPs are different from their social characteristics: in gender, females' HF in self-care and managing stress is higher than males ($t=-3.21**$). In terms of religion/faith, the group Buddhism's HF is higher than Christianity on the benefits of religion in managing stress ($t=-2.833**$). Regarding working years, people who have been working for 2 years have a more positive mindset on their work than those for 3 years above in HSA ($t=2.918**$); in terms of age, there is no difference among the different age groups. However, both groups agree the role of friends and families is vital to overcoming challenges and stress.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid spreading of Covid-19 has been affecting people around the world and its consequences are tremendous since it affects not only the health and economic sectors but also education, transportation, and social problems. With the pandemic, the styles of living, production modes, means of transportation, and learning methods are significantly changed. The changing situation brings forth huge challenges in people's daily life since it is not comfortable and easy to adopt the new normal living style. More or less, people from all levels suffer from the myriad effects of Covid-19 (Haleem et al., 2020). People have to live with fear, uncertainty, and anxiety as they are afraid of their losing their future regarding jobs, families, and financial shortages (Matos et al., 2021). In addition, Covid-19 also hinders social work such as the provision of humanitarian assistance, and health services due to lockdown, quarantine, and insufficient protective pieces of equipment.

However, in Myanmar, the Burmese suffer not only the Pandemic but also a military coup on Feb 1, 2021. To fight against the military, many civilian staffs, especially medical and educational staff join Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM), and, within a short period of time, health and education pillars collapsed. To treat down the rebels, the military uses four cuts and burnt down the villages that causing many people to flee. Besides, transportation is limited, communication is cut in some areas, and permission needs to be applied if field trips want to be made. That causes difficulties for social workers to go to the communities and deliver social services. As evidence, two ICRC staff are killed while providing services for people in need (The Guardian, 2021).

The combination of the pandemic and military coup afflicts the Burmese both in physical and mental aspects. It is true to say that the daily life of the Burmese is difficult, and social workers who deliver services to communities are also facing challenges due to strict checkpoints. As human beings, social workers are burned out amidst difficulties and hindrances as well as time pressure, they are doing their best to deliver social services. Thus, this study plans to use spiritual assessment to see how social workers working in Kachin and Northern Shan apply spirituality in their daily life and workplace to cope with the challenges.
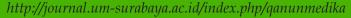
LITERATURE REVIEW

Spirituality

The word spirituality is a Latin word that originates from "Spiritus" which means the breath or breath of life. It is a source of life that gives breath to all creatures to move on. In fact, the word spirituality appears together with Christian tradition though other religions present the word "Spirituality" in their literature. Later, the concept of "spirituality is also used for non-material parts of human beings and regarded as the source of emotions, feelings, psyche, characters, and the connection to divine power which cannot be tested and touched. However, the term "spirituality "is wider than religion since it mentions the non-physical and untouchable human dimension (ten Have and Patrão Neves, 2021). Elkins et al. apply a humanistic approach and categorized spirituality into eight characteristics: the supernatural view, meaning in life, operation in life, the holiness of life, physical tangible values, humanity, being aware of the catastrophe, and benefits of spirituality (Loue, 2017).

Nevertheless, Wolff (2020) points out that the term "spirituality" is generic and there is no exact definition for it. He believes that "spirituality" comes from the Christian society that has a confined definition. He assumes spirituality is

more than religion and it has multi-dimensional concepts, but religion is easier to define than spirituality. Commonly, spirituality and religion seem the same, but they are different. Snyder and Lopez say that sometimes the two words: religion and spirituality seem to have the same and people get confused about it (Foster & Wall, 2020). Actually, they have different definitions since religion is related to praying, reading the bible, and belief in divine power whereas spirituality is one's strength of mind to expose meaningful life through the practice and the way he/she lives and works. Gisinger et al., add that spirituality is also a way of intellectual self-evaluation to seek a meaningful life (Wolff, 2020). Nonetheless, it is not so sure to include religious thinking. Skrzypinska states that spirituality can be defined as a source of inspiration that motivates us and helps us to build self-confidence to pass through challenges (Wolff, 2020). Though the two words are differentiated, there is no separation in the African American community. Phipps and Benefiel say that spirituality is like a tree and religion is one of the branches (Peltonen, 2017).

To sum up, Hart defines that the clarity of spirituality relies on one's perception since it will be different based on the context one is going to use (Wane et al.,2011). For adults, it will focus on contemplating and religion, but for the workplace, it will be based on the working dynamic. In addition, it would be changed for the children's viewpoint as well.

Spirituality, Religion, and Social work

Greater attention is now paid to researching the association among spirituality and religion, and their impacts on social work. Furman et al. noted that more consideration is put to spirituality and religion in the 1980 and mid of 1990, then it has been increasing until the Council of Social Work Education has to reinstate to refer religion and spirituality in the social work program in 1995 (Furness, 2016). Furness and Gilligan declare that legal acknowledgment should be given to study the significance of religion and spirituality in the field of social work and professional development (Furness 2016). Furthermore, consideration should also be put into the assessment, intervention, and practices.

Holloway and Moss identify that some people accept that spirituality has the feature of religion, but it also covers the identification of religion as one of the subdivisions of spirituality (Furness, 2016). The intertwined connection between religion and spirituality is complex. Nevertheless, careful consideration is needed to take religion and spirituality into account since the unawareness of those in social work will cause huge devastating impacts. It is instrumental for social workers to accept clients' religious beliefs and cultural practices because social workers have to deal with clients in their daily life during the time of good and also at the time of suffering. It is easy to proceed with social work at the time of flourishing, but staff would get tired of working at the time of tribulation. Whether the situation is good or bad, social workers have to draw attention to clients' inward strengths in a proper way so that they can help clients to overcome challenges and comprehend their clients' future expectations (Furness, 2016).

Graff (2007:248) conducted research on social work students and found that the majority of the students reported that spirituality is a vital component of human beings, and social workers are necessary to recognize more about the different religions of clients. The knowledge of knowing clients' religion and spirituality is crucial for social workers to deliver competent services as well as it is also a component that highlights the core value of social work. In addition, there is a huge dominance of clients'

religion in the outcome of social work practice because their beliefs and practices help them to their well-being and construct a sound relationship with others.

Spirituality and Mental Health

The consequences of Covid-19 afflict people who have already had the psychiatric condition and those who did not previously have it. No one is exempted. Notably, the issue is significant among health workers who manage the high risk of Covid-19. The burnout consequences of Covid-19, emotionally and psychologically affect Social (health) workers and unfortunately, it can affect the healthcare system and patient safety (Menon and Bhagat, 2021). However, Jankowski et al. (2022) discovered that there is a reasonable connection between Religion/Spirituality and mental health during the pandemic. Engagement in Religion/Spirituality is one of the protective measures against pandemic-related mental illness. A stronger Religion/Spirituality commitment helps people to pass through adversity and functions well in the healing process.

The working contexts of social workers are different based on the field they choose. More or less, there are challenges and stress. However, social workers working in the context of conflict-affected areas are more challenging than in other contexts since social workers have a high potential and can become victims easily. Furthermore, work must be done under time pressure and the guarantee of security is uncertain. Ozcan et al. (2021) stated that a religion-oriented and spiritual method is a good mechanism since it helps social workers to be calm amidst chaos and helps them to resist direct and secondary trauma. Through this approach, social workers gain motivation, and resilience to fulfill work

demands, and the people they serve as well as their personal needs. Importantly, using this approach to be more effective, the aspects of social connectedness and their mindset toward religion and spirituality are fundamental.

Concurrently, Dhami et al (2021) also discovered that there is a strong linkage between spiritual intelligence and mental health. Spiritual intelligence works as an agent that causes psychological well-being to enhance the ability and boost motivation to achieve lifegoal. Owing to this, people possess a life that can resist stress, anxiety, and fear as well as improves spiritual growth that enables them to process their works more effectively and meaningfully.

Spirituality and Social Connectedness

According to Wane et al. (2011, 23), the spiritual connection can be classified into four components: connection to societies, connection to the previous time, connection to bigger frameworks, systems, or ambiguities, and connection to a person's entire life. Dei says that individual grows their spirituality with the connection with social communities, civilization, and nature interaction (Wane et al., 2011). So, it is clear to see that human beings cannot stay outside the community within the framework of relation and social connection. Spirituality is developed by networking, and it has vice-versa effects. Badri et al. (2021) also posit that there is a linkage between depression and social connection by researching adolescents' depression. The factors that cause loneliness and depression include less receiving trust, engagement in social activities with friends, and limited time spent with family. However, those who have regular connections with friends and have more interaction and valuable time with family are less likely to have depression and that increases their well-being.

METHOD

Research Design and data collection

This research is a quantitative study of spiritual assessment in social work. A set of questionnaires which is called the Spirituality Assessment of Social Workers Working for IDPs (SASWWIDPs) is designed as three dimensions of SASWWIDPs: Healthy self-awareness (HSA), healthy relationship (HR), and healthy feeling (HF). The 10 questions are designed as a Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire is prepared in the Burmese language. Data were collected in April 2022 by using Google Forms.

Location and Participants

This research has been done in Kachin and Northern Shan states. To conduct this research, participants who are from different backgrounds, sex, ethnicities, religions, and positions are selected but specifically those who are working for IDPs in Kachin, and Northern Shan in international and local non-profit organizations. However, Yangon-based staff who are working for IDPs in Kachin and Northern Shan in coordination roles are counted for this research as well. There are 50 participants in this research.

Data Analysis

The collected data are checked and interpreted using Social Science Statistics Software (SPSS) 22.0. The variables are explained using numbers, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The independent sample t-test is used to test the significance of Healthy self-awareness (HAS), healthy relationship (HR), and healthy feeling (HF) in terms of gender, working years, and religion.

Ethical Consideration

In the first part of the questionnaire, there is a declaration related to asking for the consent of the participants. It is clearly explained why data is collected, where they are going to be used and all the information/ data provided will be kept confidential. Participants are given full rights to withdraw participation if they feel uncomfortable. The contact email is also provided to reach the data collector in case they have any questions.

RESULT

Participants' Social Characteristics

There are 50 participants in this study. The majority are 30 to 39 years old (48%) and the least percentage (2%) are 50 years and above. Most of the workers (52%) have working experience ranging from 5 to 9 years, whereas, working experience under five years follows at second place and above 10 years are at 14%. In this study, females occupy (66%) of the highest number. In terms of location, the social workers from Kachin state stand at 48%, followed by 40% of northern Shan and Yangon at 12%. Then, 84% of the respondents follow Christianity, and Buddhism followers are 16%. With regards to position, 22% of participants hold the position of project coordinator and the lowest 2% are financial controllers. The detail can be seen in the following table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of three dimensions of SASWWIDPs

The three dimensions of the Spirituality Assessment of Social Workers Working for IDPs (SASWWIDPs) are HSA (Healthy Self-Awareness), HR (Healthy Relationship), and HF (healthy Feeling). Their descriptive statistics are the mean value for HAS is 4.13 and SD is 0.56; the mean value for HR is 4.21 and SD is 0.66; and the mean value for HF is 3.48 and SD is 0.67 (see Table 2).
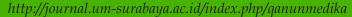
Table 1. Participants' social characteristics

Items	Numbers	(%)	Items	Numbers	(%)
Age			**Religion/Faith**		
Under 30 y/o	18	(36)	Christianity	42	(84)
30-39 y/o	24	(48)	Buddhism	8	(16)
40-49 y/o	6	(12)	Position		
About 50 y/o	2	(4)	Program Coordinator	5	(10)
Gender			Project Coordinator	11	(22)
Male	17	(34)	Field officer	4	(8)
Female	33	(66)	Area Coordinator	5	(10)
Years of working for IDPs			Community facilitator	6	(12)
Under 5 yrs	17	(34)	Financial controller	1	(2)
5-9 yrs	26	(52)	Accountant	5	(10)
Above 10 yrs	7	(14)	Cashier	4	(8)
Area of working			Monitoring and evaluation coordinator	4	(8)
Kachin	24	(48)	Volunteer	2	(4)
Northern Shan	20	(40)	Other	3	(6)
Yangon	6	(12)			

Table 2. The descriptive statistics of three dimensions of SASWWIDPs

Items	Mean	SD
I. Healthy Self-Awareness (HSA)	4.13	0.560
1.1 I satisfy the work I have done for IDP.	4.18	.850
1.2 I am sure that I had the right mindset toward my work.	4.60	.535
1.3 I have one motivational quote/word in my everyday life that makes my day happy.	4.06	.956
1.4 I can control my wrath	3.68	.957
II. Healthy Relationship (HR)	4.21	0.660
2.1 I always try to maintain a good relationship with my family.	4.32	.844
2.2 My friends always encourage me to deal with challenges.	4.04	.856
2.3 The role of friendship is important to enhance spiritual growth.	4.08	.986
2.4 I always keep good relationships with my friends.	4.38	.725
III, Healthy Feeling (HF)	3.48	0.670
3.1 I use a self-care method to deal with my anger.	4.06	.935
*3.2 I have a great fear of any challenges that I am facing and will face in my daily work.	2.90	1.165

Note: * Item 3.2 is the opposite question

Table 3. The participants' t-test for the dimensions of the SASWWIDPs

Items	HSA			HR			HF		
	mean	SD	t-value	mean	SD	t-test	mean	SD	t-value
Gender			1.647			.568			-3.21**
Male	4.31	.54		4.28	.62		3.12	.52	
Female	4.04	.56		4.17	.68		3.67	.67	
Religion/Faith			-.830			.371			-2.833**
Christianity	4.10	.57		4.22	.64		3.37	.63	
Buddhism	4.28	.49		4.13	.78		4.06	.62	
working years			2.918**			.193			-.217
Below 2 yrs	4.61	.45		4.25	.43		3.43	.67	
Above 3 yrs	4.05	.54		4.20	.69		3.49	.68	

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Participant's t-test for the Dimensions of SAS-WWIDPs
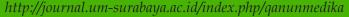
The t-test results of the three dimensions of SASWWIDPs are different from their social characteristics. The types of gender: males and females are significantly different in HF of SASWWIDPs (t=-3.21**), the mean value of females is higher than males. However, in HAS and HR, there is only a slight significance between males and females. In terms of religion/faith, the group "Christianity" is significantly different from the group "Buddhism" in HF (t=-2.833**) and the mean value of Buddhism get higher than Christianity. Nevertheless, there is no significance both in HAS and HR. With regards to working years, people who have been working for 2 years are significantly different from those who have more than 3 years of working experience in HSA (t=2.918**). But there is insignificant in HR and HF (see Table 3.).

DISCUSSION

This study discovers that social workers satisfy their work for having done something good for IDPs. Taking pleasure in the works that have been done for needy persons is one of the effective ways to reduce stress encountered in everyday life. However, the right attitude towards work is vital to encourage their selves for what they are doing whenever they suffer challenges. Social workers believe that reciting a quote that strengthens their spirituality is also required to make them feel who they are. Furthermore, the role of friends and family is also important to maintain a good mental status. Social workers believe that supports received from friends and families are valuable to deal with challenges. In addition, maintaining a good association with friends and families is instrumental to enhancing spiritual growth (Badri et al., 2021) However, regarding managing anger, females are better than males. Female social workers possess healthier minds than male social workers. But then, social workers do not fear facing any challenges they are facing and will be facing regardless of gender.

Social workers believe that religion is one of the factors that helps them to resist the downfall. Religion directs them to have the right mindset on their work and to work more for those who need help since they are good actions. It has been also found that having a good relationship with divine power is a valuable resource to face stress (Dhami et al., 2021). In terms of the finding, Buddhists agree that religion helps them to have more positive feelings than Christianity.

In relation to working experience, those who have below 2 years of working experience have more satisfaction with their work than those who have work experience above 3 years. Regarding the relationship with friends and families, both groups affirm that the role of friends and families play an important role to overcome challenges. However, those who have less than 2 years of work experience take more advice from friends than above 3 years. Likely, the two groups, regardless of working experience, are not afraid to take risks. Nevertheless, constraining anger does not depend on working experience and the self-caring method is crucial to handling stress.

LIMITATION

This study has been done during Covid-19 and the military coup in Myanmar. Data has been collected using an online google form. However, in some areas, internet connection and transportation are restricted. Therefore, only 50 participants could be recruited and that is a relatively small number. Most of the participants are Christians and more Buddhists are still needed to be included. To be inclusive, other religions and more number should be recruited.

CONCLUSION

The threat of covid-19 upon people's daily life is huge and significantly changes their lifestyles. This study points out the spiritual need of workers working for IDPs. Difference social characteristics have different mean values of three dimensions of SASWWIDPs. Self-evaluation is very important to know who we are and for whom we are working. This is a radical source to identify yourself and work through challenges. Next, the role of family and friends cannot be ignored. Handling stress requires their support. Finally, religion is one of the effective treatments to deal with stress. In it, people find solace and strengthen themselves.

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