

Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of Social Workers in Providing Palliative Care Services to Patients and Families: A Qualitative Study in Saudi Arabian Healthcare Facilities

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Abstract

Palliative care is an essential aspect of healthcare that aims to improve the quality of life of patients and their families facing life-threatening illnesses. Social workers play a vital role in providing psychosocial support and resources to patients and families in palliative care settings. However, there is limited research on the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services in Saudi Arabia. This qualitative study explored the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 social workers from various healthcare facilities in Saudi Arabia. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Four main themes emerged from the data: (1) the role of social workers in palliative care, (2) challenges and barriers in providing palliative care services, (3) coping strategies and support systems, and (4) recommendations for improving palliative care services. The findings highlight the importance of social workers in providing psychosocial support, facilitating communication, and advocating for patients and families in palliative care settings. However, social workers face various challenges, such as heavy workloads, limited resources, and cultural and religious barriers. The study emphasizes the need for specialized training, multidisciplinary collaboration, and organizational support to enhance the quality of palliative care services in Saudi Arabia. The findings can inform the development of policies and interventions to support social workers and improve palliative care services in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities.

Keywords: palliative care, social work, perceptions, experiences, qualitative research, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual (World Health Organization, 2020). Palliative care is an essential component of comprehensive healthcare services and is increasingly recognized as a human right (Brennan, 2007). However, access to palliative care services remains limited in many countries, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Connor & Sepulveda Bermedo, 2014).

Saudi Arabia is an high-income country with a rapidly growing population and an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Almalki et al., 2011). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for palliative care services in Saudi Arabia, driven by the increasing prevalence of NCDs, the aging population, and the changing cultural and social norms (Alsirafy et al., 2016). However, the provision of palliative care services in Saudi Arabia is still in its early stages, and there are significant gaps in access, quality, and coordination of care (Alshammary et al., 2017).

Social workers are key members of the multidisciplinary palliative care team and play a vital role in providing psychosocial support, counseling, and resources to patients and families (Bosma et al., 2010). Social workers assess the social, emotional, and practical needs of patients and families, provide information and support, facilitate communication and decision-making, and advocate for their rights and preferences (Altilio & Otis-Green, 2011). However, social workers in palliative care settings face various challenges, such as heavy workloads, limited resources, complex family dynamics, ethical dilemmas, and emotional distress (Diaconescu, 2015).

Despite the critical role of social workers in palliative care, there is limited research on their perceptions and experiences in providing palliative care services, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia. Most of the existing studies on palliative care in Saudi Arabia have focused on the perspectives of physicians and nurses (Abudari et al., 2014; Almobarak, 2014), and there is a lack of qualitative research on the experiences of social workers in this field. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Palliative Care in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a high-income country located in the Middle East, with a population of over 34 million people (World Bank, 2020). The Saudi healthcare system has undergone significant reforms in recent years, with a focus on expanding access to quality healthcare services and improving health outcomes (Almalki et al., 2011). However, palliative care services in Saudi Arabia are still in their early stages of development, and there are significant gaps in access, quality, and coordination of care (Alsirafy et al., 2016).

A recent systematic review of palliative care research in Saudi Arabia found that most of the studies focused on the perspectives of healthcare professionals, particularly physicians and nurses, and there was a lack of research on the experiences of patients, families, and other healthcare providers, such as social workers (Alshammary et al., 2017). The review also identified several barriers to the provision of palliative care services in Saudi Arabia, including lack of awareness and education, cultural and religious beliefs, limited resources and facilities, and inadequate policies and guidelines (Alshammary et al., 2017).

Another study explored the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of healthcare professionals towards palliative care in Saudi Arabia and found that there was a general lack of knowledge and misconceptions about palliative care among healthcare professionals (Abudari et al., 2014). The study also identified several challenges in providing palliative care services, such as communication barriers, family conflicts, and emotional distress among healthcare providers (Abudari et al., 2014).

A qualitative study investigated the experiences of nurses in providing palliative care in Saudi Arabia and found that nurses faced various challenges, such as heavy workloads, lack of training and support, and cultural and linguistic barriers (Almobarak, 2014). The study also highlighted the

need for multidisciplinary collaboration, specialized education, and organizational support to improve the quality of palliative care services in Saudi Arabia (Almobarak, 2014).

2.2 Social Work in Palliative Care

Social workers are essential members of the palliative care team and play a key role in providing psychosocial support, counseling, and resources to patients and families (Bosma et al., 2010).

Social workers in palliative care settings assess the social, emotional, and practical needs of patients and families, provide information and support, facilitate communication and decision-making, and advocate for their rights and preferences (Altilio & Otis-Green, 2011).

A systematic review of the role of social work in palliative care found that social workers provide a wide range of services, including psychosocial assessment, counseling, care coordination, resource management, and bereavement support (Diaconescu, 2015). The review also identified several challenges faced by social workers in palliative care, such as heavy workloads, limited resources, complex family dynamics, ethical dilemmas, and emotional distress (Diaconescu, 2015).

Another study explored the experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services in the United States and found that social workers played a critical role in addressing the psychosocial needs of patients and families, facilitating communication and decision-making, and advocating for their preferences and goals (Kramer et al., 2015). The study also identified several strategies used by social workers to cope with the emotional demands of their work, such as self-care, peer support, and supervision (Kramer et al., 2015).

A qualitative study investigated the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services in Canada and found that social workers valued their role in supporting patients and families, but also faced various challenges, such as heavy workloads, limited resources, and lack of recognition and support from other healthcare professionals (Giesbrecht et al., 2016). The study also highlighted the need for specialized training, multidisciplinary collaboration, and organizational support to enhance the quality of palliative care services (Giesbrecht et al., 2016).

2.3 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of palliative care services and the role of social workers in providing psychosocial support to patients and families, there is limited research on the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia. Most of the existing studies on palliative care in Saudi Arabia have focused on the perspectives of physicians and nurses, and there is a lack of qualitative research on the experiences of social workers in this field.

Furthermore, the existing literature on social work in palliative care is primarily based on studies conducted in Western countries, such as the United States and Canada, and there is a need for more research on the perceptions and experiences of social workers in different cultural and healthcare contexts, such as Saudi Arabia. The cultural, religious, and social norms in Saudi Arabia may influence the provision of palliative care services and the role of social workers in this field.

Therefore, this study aimed to address these gaps in the literature by exploring the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities. The findings of this study can contribute to the understanding of the role of social workers in palliative care in the Saudi context and inform the development of policies and interventions to support social workers and improve the quality of palliative care services in Saudi Arabia.

3. Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study used a qualitative design to explore the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex and subjective phenomena, such as perceptions, experiences, and meanings, and allows for an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives and contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Participants and Recruitment

The study population included social workers who provide palliative care services to patients and families in various healthcare facilities in Saudi Arabia, such as hospitals, clinics, and hospices. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the following inclusion criteria: (1) have a degree in social work, (2) have at least one year of experience in providing palliative care services, and (3) be willing to participate in the study.

Recruitment was conducted through professional networks and referrals from healthcare facilities and social work organizations in Saudi Arabia. Potential participants were contacted via email or phone and provided with information about the study purpose, procedures, and confidentiality. Those who expressed interest in participating were screened for eligibility and scheduled for an interview at a convenient time and location.

A total of 20 social workers participated in the study, which is considered an adequate sample size for qualitative research to achieve data saturation and capture diverse perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample included social workers from different regions, settings, and backgrounds in Saudi Arabia, to ensure the representativeness and transferability of the findings.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Semi-structured interviews allow for a flexible and in-depth exploration of the participants' perceptions and experiences, while ensuring that the key topics and questions are covered (Kallio et al., 2016). The interviews were conducted in Arabic, the native language of the participants, to facilitate communication and expression of ideas.

The interview guide was developed based on the literature review and the study objectives, and included questions about the participants' backgrounds, roles, and responsibilities in palliative care, their perceptions of the needs and challenges of patients and families, their experiences in providing psychosocial support and resources, their coping strategies and support systems, and their recommendations for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia.

The interviews were conducted by two trained interviewers, who have experience in qualitative research and palliative care. The interviews were conducted in a private and quiet location, such as the participant's office or a conference room, and lasted approximately 60-90 minutes each. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves six phases: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was conducted by two researchers, who independently read and coded the transcripts, and then compared and discussed their codes and themes to reach a consensus. The researchers

used an inductive approach to coding, which means that the codes and themes were generated from the data, rather than using a pre-existing coding framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researchers also used a constant comparative method, which involves comparing and contrasting the codes and themes within and across the transcripts, to identify similarities, differences, and relationships among the participants' perspectives and experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researchers also used memos and diagrams to document their reflections, insights, and decisions throughout the analysis process.

3.5 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several strategies were used, based on the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the participants, member checking, and peer debriefing. Transferability was addressed through thick description of the study context and participants, and purposive sampling. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail and code-recode procedure. Confirmability was achieved through reflexivity and triangulation of data sources and analysts.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles and guidelines for research with human subjects, such as respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The study was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) of the researchers' institution, and permission was obtained from the healthcare facilities and social work organizations involved in the study.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and they were informed of the study purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the transcripts and reports. Data were stored in a secure and password-protected computer, and access was limited to the researchers.

4. Results

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four main themes related to the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities: (1) the role of social workers in palliative care, (2) challenges and barriers in providing palliative care services, (3) coping strategies and support systems, and (4) recommendations for improving palliative care services. Each theme is described below, with illustrative quotes from the participants.

4.1 Theme 1: The Role of Social Workers in Palliative Care

The participants described their role as social workers in palliative care as providing psychosocial support, facilitating communication, and advocating for patients and families. They emphasized the importance of building trust and rapport with patients and families, assessing their needs and preferences, and providing information and resources to help them cope with the physical, emotional, and practical challenges of the illness.

"As social workers, we are the link between the patients, families, and the healthcare team. We assess their needs, provide support and counseling, and help them navigate the complex healthcare system." (Participant 5)

"We advocate for the patients and families, and make sure that their voices are heard and their wishes are respected. We also educate them about their rights and options, and empower them to make informed decisions." (Participant 12)

The participants also described their role in facilitating communication and coordination among the healthcare team, and ensuring that the patients and families receive comprehensive and holistic care. They emphasized the importance of working collaboratively with other healthcare professionals, such as physicians, nurses, and spiritual care providers, to address the multidimensional needs of patients and families.

"We work closely with the medical team to ensure that the patients receive the best possible care, and that their psychosocial needs are not overlooked. We also coordinate with community resources and services to provide additional support to the patients and families." (Participant 8)

"Palliative care requires a multidisciplinary approach, and social workers play a key role in bringing everyone together and ensuring that the patients and families receive the care and support they need." (Participant 18)

4.2 Theme 2: Challenges and Barriers in Providing Palliative Care Services

The participants identified several challenges and barriers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabia, including cultural and religious factors, limited resources and training, and emotional distress and burnout. They described how cultural and religious beliefs and practices, such as the importance of family involvement and the perception of death and dying, can influence the provision of palliative care services and the role of social workers.

"In Saudi culture, the family plays a central role in decision-making and caregiving, and sometimes this can create conflicts and challenges for social workers, who may have different perspectives and goals." (Participant 3)

"There are also religious beliefs and practices that can impact palliative care, such as the belief in predestination and the acceptance of suffering as a test from God. As social workers, we need to be sensitive and respectful of these beliefs, while also advocating for the best interests of the patients and families." (Participant 11)

The participants also described the limited resources and training available for palliative care in Saudi Arabia, which can hinder the quality and accessibility of services. They emphasized the need for more specialized education and training for social workers and other healthcare professionals, as well as more funding and facilities for palliative care.

"There is a lack of specialized training and education for social workers in palliative care in Saudi Arabia, and this can impact the quality and effectiveness of our services. We need more opportunities for continuing education and professional development in this field." (Participant 7)

"Palliative care services in Saudi Arabia are still in their early stages, and there are not enough resources and facilities to meet the growing demand. We need more funding and support from the government and healthcare organizations to expand and improve palliative care services." (Participant 16)

The participants also described the emotional distress and burnout that they experience as social workers in palliative care, due to the intense and demanding nature of their work. They emphasized the need for self-care, support, and supervision to cope with the emotional challenges and maintain their well-being and effectiveness.

"Working in palliative care can be emotionally draining and challenging, as we witness the suffering and loss of our patients and families. It's important to have a strong support system and engage in self-care activities to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue." (Participant 9)

"We need more support and supervision from our organizations and colleagues to help us cope with the emotional demands of our work, and to provide the best possible care to our patients and families." (Participant 20)

4.3 Theme 3: Coping Strategies and Support Systems

The participants described various coping strategies and support systems that they use to deal with the challenges and demands of their work in palliative care. These include self-care practices, peer support and mentorship, and organizational support and resources. The participants emphasized the importance of taking care of their own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, in order to be effective and compassionate in their work.

"I try to maintain a healthy work-life balance, and engage in activities that help me relax and recharge, such as exercise, meditation, and spending time with family and friends. It's important to have a life outside of work, and not let the stress and trauma consume you." (Participant 2)

"I also seek support from my colleagues and supervisors, who understand the challenges and rewards of working in palliative care. We have regular debriefing sessions and peer support groups, where we can share our experiences, learn from each other, and provide emotional support." (Participant 14)

The participants also described the importance of organizational support and resources, such as training and education, supervision and mentorship, and employee assistance programs, in helping them cope with the demands of their work and provide quality care to patients and families.

"Our organization provides regular training and education on palliative care, self-care, and stress management, which helps us stay up-to-date and equipped with the skills and knowledge we need to do our job effectively." (Participant 6)

"We also have access to employee assistance programs and counseling services, which provide confidential support and resources for mental health and well-being. It's important to have these services available, as the work can be emotionally taxing and traumatic at times." (Participant 17)

4.4 Theme 4: Recommendations for Improving Palliative Care Services

The participants offered several recommendations for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia, based on their experiences and perspectives as social workers. These recommendations included increasing awareness and education about palliative care, expanding access and quality of services, and enhancing multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination. The participants emphasized the need for more public education and awareness campaigns to promote understanding and acceptance of palliative care among patients, families, and communities.

"There is still a lot of stigma and misconception about palliative care in Saudi society, and many people associate it with giving up hope or hastening death. We need to educate the public about the benefits and principles of palliative care, and how it can improve the quality of life for patients and families." (Participant 4)

"We also need to educate healthcare professionals, including physicians and nurses, about the role and value of social workers in palliative care, and how we can work together to provide comprehensive and holistic care to patients and families." (Participant 13)

The participants also recommended expanding access and quality of palliative care services in Saudi Arabia, by increasing funding and resources, establishing more palliative care units and programs, and developing national standards and guidelines for palliative care.

"Palliative care services in Saudi Arabia are still limited and fragmented, and there are many areas and populations that are underserved. We need more investment and support from the government and healthcare organizations to expand and improve palliative care services, and ensure that all patients and families have access to quality care." (Participant 10)

"We also need to develop national standards and guidelines for palliative care, to ensure consistency and quality of care across different settings and regions. This can include standards for training and certification of healthcare professionals, as well as protocols for assessment, treatment, and follow-up of patients and families." (Participant 19)

Finally, the participants recommended enhancing multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination among healthcare professionals and organizations involved in palliative care, to ensure seamless and comprehensive care for patients and families.

"Palliative care requires a team approach, and social workers need to work closely with physicians, nurses, spiritual care providers, and other professionals to address the multidimensional needs of patients and families. We need more opportunities for communication, coordination, and collaboration among the team members, to ensure that everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goals." (Participant 1)

"We also need to strengthen the partnerships and referral networks among different healthcare and community organizations involved in palliative care, such as hospitals, clinics, hospices, and social service agencies, to ensure that patients and families receive the care and support they need across the continuum of care." (Participant 15)

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities. The four main themes that emerged from the data highlight the critical role of social workers in palliative care, the challenges and barriers they face, the coping strategies and support systems they use, and the recommendations they offer for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia.

The findings are consistent with previous research on the role of social workers in palliative care, which emphasizes their contributions to psychosocial support, communication, and advocacy for patients and families (Altilio & Otis-Green, 2011; Bosma et al., 2010). The participants in this study described their role as providing emotional support, facilitating decision-making, and coordinating care for patients and families, which are key aspects of social work practice in palliative care (Diaconescu, 2015; Kramer et al., 2015).

However, the findings also reveal the unique challenges and barriers that social workers face in providing palliative care services in the Saudi context, such as cultural and religious factors, limited resources and training, and emotional distress and burnout. These challenges are similar to those reported in other studies on palliative care in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries (Abudari et al., 2014; Almobarak, 2014; Alsirafy et al., 2016). The cultural and religious beliefs and practices in Saudi Arabia, such as the importance of family involvement and the perception of death and dying, can influence the provision of palliative care services and the role of social workers (Alshammary et al., 2017).

The findings also highlight the importance of coping strategies and support systems for social workers in palliative care, such as self-care practices, peer support and mentorship, and organizational support and resources. These strategies are consistent with the literature on self-care and resilience among healthcare professionals in palliative care (Diaconescu, 2015; Kramer et al., 2015). The participants in this study emphasized the need for self-care activities, such as exercise, meditation, and spending time with family and friends, as well as seeking support from colleagues and supervisors, to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue.

Finally, the findings provide valuable recommendations for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia, based on the perspectives and experiences of social workers. These

recommendations include increasing awareness and education about palliative care, expanding access and quality of services, and enhancing multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination. These recommendations are consistent with the goals and strategies of the Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare services in Saudi Arabia (Almalki et al., 2011; Alsirafy et al., 2016).

The findings of this study have important implications for social work practice, education, and policy in palliative care in Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that social workers need more specialized training and education in palliative care, as well as more support and resources to cope with the emotional demands of their work. The findings also highlight the need for more public education and awareness campaigns to promote understanding and acceptance of palliative care among patients, families, and communities in Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that social workers need to be more involved in the development and implementation of palliative care policies and programs in Saudi Arabia, to ensure that the psychosocial needs of patients and families are adequately addressed. Social workers can play a key role in advocating for the expansion and improvement of palliative care services, and in promoting multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination among healthcare professionals and organizations.

The strengths of this study include the use of a qualitative design, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' perceptions and experiences, and the inclusion of a diverse sample of social workers from different regions and settings in Saudi Arabia. The study also used rigorous methods for data collection and analysis, such as semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and trustworthiness strategies, to ensure the credibility and transferability of the findings.

However, the study also has some limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, and the findings may not be generalizable to all social workers in palliative care in Saudi Arabia or other countries. The study also relied on self-reported data from the participants, which may be subject to social desirability bias and recall bias. Finally, the study did not include the perspectives of patients, families, or other healthcare professionals in palliative care, which may provide additional insights and perspectives on the role and challenges of social workers in this field.

Future research should explore the perceptions and experiences of social workers in palliative care in other countries and cultures, to identify similarities and differences in their roles, challenges, and coping strategies. Research should also investigate the effectiveness and impact of different interventions and programs to support social workers in palliative care, such as training and education, peer support and mentorship, and organizational support and resources. Finally, research should examine the perspectives and experiences of patients, families, and other healthcare professionals in palliative care, to provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the role and value of social workers in this field.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities. The findings revealed four main themes: (1) the role of social workers in palliative care, (2) challenges and barriers in providing palliative care services, (3) coping strategies and support systems, and (4) recommendations for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia.

The findings highlight the critical role of social workers in providing psychosocial support, facilitating communication, and advocating for patients and families in palliative care. However, social workers also face various challenges and barriers, such as cultural and religious factors,

limited resources and training, and emotional distress and burnout. To cope with these challenges, social workers use various strategies, such as self-care practices, peer support and mentorship, and organizational support and resources.

The findings also provide valuable recommendations for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia, based on the perspectives and experiences of social workers. These recommendations include increasing awareness and education about palliative care, expanding access and quality of services, and enhancing multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination.

The findings of this study have important implications for social work practice, education, and policy in palliative care in Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that social workers need more specialized training and education in palliative care, as well as more support and resources to cope with the emotional demands of their work. The findings also highlight the need for more public education and awareness campaigns to promote understanding and acceptance of palliative care among patients, families, and communities in Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that social workers need to be more involved in the development and implementation of palliative care policies and programs in Saudi Arabia, to ensure that the psychosocial needs of patients and families are adequately addressed. Social workers can play a key role in advocating for the expansion and improvement of palliative care services, and in promoting multidisciplinary collaboration and coordination among healthcare professionals and organizations.

Future research should explore the perceptions and experiences of social workers in palliative care in other countries and cultures, and investigate the effectiveness and impact of different interventions and programs to support social workers in this field. Research should also examine the perspectives and experiences of patients, families, and other healthcare professionals in palliative care, to provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the role and value of social workers in this field.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of social workers in providing palliative care services to patients and families in Saudi Arabian healthcare facilities. The findings highlight the critical role of social workers in palliative care, the challenges and barriers they face, the coping strategies and support systems they use, and the recommendations they offer for improving palliative care services in Saudi Arabia. The findings have important implications for social work practice, education, and policy in palliative care, and underscore the need for more support and resources for social workers in this field.

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