Religious Practices in the Effectiveness of Social Service Workers: A Subjective Assessment

Walaa Elsayed1 · Konstantin Sokolovskiy2 · Yulia Gavrilova3

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to consider social workers’ subjective assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of engaging with their personal religious and spiritual experiences in social services provision. The total sample of respondents involved 760 social workers from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation who assessed the extent to which incorporating their religious beliefs into the working practice might benefit its effectiveness. The distribution of the answers turned out to be statistically close to the normal distribution, which may indicate the insignificance and randomness of the impact of religious beliefs.

Keywords Faith-based organizations · Migration · Minority suppression · Religion · Secularization · Social work

Introduction
Social work and religion are closely linked by historical ties and origins. In the US and Europe, social support for those in need almost entirely relied on religious organizations and was either supervised by them entirely or inspired by religious and spiritual ideas (Pentaris, 2020; Waldon, 2017). Personal beliefs and religious practices are often the reason for choosing a career in social work. Researchers note
that at the micro- and meso-level, social work proceeds from a set of principles that correspond to Christian and Muslim doctrines and are religious in their very nature (Pentaris, 2020; Zavos, 2017).

The importance of the relationship between religiosity and social services has been recently emphasized by global migration processes and the accelerated formation of a multicultural and multi-religious urban environment (Gavrilova et al., 2018). Discrimination and pressure on the Muslim diaspora due to the public fear of terrorism and prejudices have become a serious problem in developed Western countries (Kwon et al., 2020). As a result of this increased pressure, we see the intensification of the feelings of helplessness, anger, despair, and, correspondingly, exaggeration of the need for social assistance among the depressed minorities.

The diversity of ethnic minority groups in a developed urban society complicates the work of social workers, for whom the establishment of trust and mutual openness with the service recipients becomes critical (Rusch et al., 2019). Openness and communication often determine whether the person in distress will seek help and expect it from responsible social organizations. In this context, the effects of help rejection on the part of those in need are as important as the effects of rejection on the part of those who can provide it (Pentaris, 2020). Research shows that refusal to help is mostly associated with traditional rhetoric and socialization of population groups more heavily engaged in religious organizations. Despite the fact that the church itself may not support the position of refusal, for example, to needy Muslims or the LGBT community, the traditional rhetoric of the church forms a certain template among the believers, which then becomes an unconscious choice (Djupe et al., 2021).

The religious factor in social assistance provision can be manifested in two types: social work organized by the state or public institutions (secular social workers) and similar assistance from faith-based organizations that seek to implement the behavioral standards and ethics of their religion (Davie & Wilson, 2019). State-sponsored social assistance establishments and private for-profit companies providing a range of paid services similar to those given by social service agencies can be defined as secular organizations. However, there is a notable difference between faith-based and secular social services in terms of the types of assistance they provide, geographical distribution of the prevalence of certain assistance types, as well as the degree of involvement of religious organizations in such activities (Bartkowski & Grettenerberger, 2018).

Recent empirical field research is increasingly focused on the importance of engaging with the religious beliefs and ideas of the people in need when providing them with social assistance (Rusch et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2019; Tan et al., 2021). These beliefs are important not only within the dynamics of the provision and acceptance of various types of social support but also in the economic policies of various countries (Enosh et al., 2018; Kwon et al., 2020; Zavos, 2019). Currently, there is a positive connection between racial, ethnic, and religious characteristics of social groups, in which religious factors act as objective group markers. Correspondingly, these factors facilitate identification, intragroup trust, and support (McKinnon, 2017), as well as create the effect of the attractiveness of “ours” and the rejection of the “alien.” Social services now are ipso facto forced to be very sensitive to the religious beliefs
of minorities in order to include them in the general processes of assistance and analysis of their needs (Kwon et al., 2020).

The importance of effectively organized social work has increased significantly due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the need to help people who are isolated and unable to take care of their needs on their own (Tan et al., 2021). During the pandemic, there has been an increase in both situations in which the intervention of social workers was necessary and the number of social groups that were in need of it (Amadasun, 2020). Being the direct outcome of the pandemic impact, this situation forced isolation on mental health and the capabilities of previously fully functional people (Golightley & Holloway, 2020).

Self-assessment of the effectiveness, necessity, and applicability of religious experience and beliefs in the provision of social services by social workers have not been properly studied and are still underestimated (Waldon, 2017). At the same time, it is social workers who represent the most important link in determining the value of certain practices or the significance of specific problems for increasing the integration of society and the well-being of minority groups, particularly migrants.

**Literature Review**

Researchers point out that in developed economies, the provision of social services is a rather diversified and complex process involving many organizations (Ince & Akyüz, 2018; Johnson et al., 2021). These organizations can be classified into four basic categories: secular social organizations, faith-based organizations, commercial social services, and government-funded social services (Bartkowski & Grettenberger, 2018). As indicated by empirical evidence from the US and European countries, practices that have been used by all types of organizations for decades have different dynamics (Zavos, 2017, 2019). However, unfortunately, available research on the matter failed to identify significant differences between practices involving religious thinking or those of secular and faith-based organizations (McKinnon, 2017; Oman & Brown, 2018; Pavolini et al., 2017).

Social services formed by various religious institutions often use points of assistance to spread faith, attract worshippers, involve believers in social activity, and put religious ethics into practice. At the same time, they frequently distance themselves from using their characteristic religious symbols, rhetoric, or even religious identification of their activities (Pentarís, 2020). On the other end of the spectrum of social service organizations, secular social workers focus on their clients’ religiosity to improve their care (Rusch et al., 2019). Thus, in the context of the complex multicultural and multi-ethnic urban environment, a great deal of dedicated training aids, regular promotion courses, and various forms of counseling are created for social workers (Enosh et al., 2018; Weng, 2017).

In the US, there is a geographic distribution of social assistance types across different organizations (Bartkowski & Grettenberger, 2018). For example, while in a number of large cities or states, social assistance provided by faith-based organizations is prevalent, in others, there are primarily social services of a secular origin. Likewise, the distribution of free food and regular meals to the homeless is carried out primarily by religious organizations, while career counseling and housing are the
responsibility of secular social service agencies (Bartkowski & Grettenberger, 2018; Hagan & Straut-Eppsteiner, 2019). This reflects a kind of struggle for the market as the number of people in need of help is limited, and only a few organizations can come up with help for them.

One of the pressing problems with social assistance is the definition of a new religiosity and a new irreligiousness, which is also taking on completely new forms (Gavrilova et al., 2018; Pavolini et al., 2017). Practical research suggests that in emergency cases and under pressure, commitment to religion increases drastically, and individuals become more likely to cooperate on the basis of religious motives (Sullivan, 2019; Waldon, 2017; Zavos, 2019). In many societies, turning to social services for mental health care assistance, for example, is socially unacceptable and can negatively affect interpersonal connections and social life of the turner. For these particular reasons, religious organizations often come to the fore (Weng, 2017; Zavos, 2017). Meanwhile, one should not forget that destructive effects of traditional religious practices and beliefs are quite common these days due to circumstances requiring rational evidence-based behavior. A good example of this would be the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Malaysia due to mass gatherings of Muslims (Tan et al., 2021).

Classical forms of religiosity are strongly associated with certain social behavior, which can become destructive. The response to this is the emergence of a “new irreligiousness,” especially among Millennials and those coming of age behind them. The rejection of strict religious practice and belonging is accompanied by the preservation of faith in luck, fate, magical and supernatural forces and phenomena, as well as the spread of folklore not associated with the personal ethnicity of the Millennial (Herbert & Bullock, 2020). This “irreligiousness” is accompanied by the New Age dictionary and the presence of stable ideas about the cosmic connection between phenomena, people, etc., which corresponds to a certain type of religiosity.

It can be extremely challenging for social services to deal with this expanding unstable group of people as, characterized by secular behavior, they have an inclination toward religious practice, and if their life becomes more complex and their well-being drops, there is every likelihood that they would join the most extreme religious groups (Crompton, 2017; Djupe et al., 2021).

Most available research is represented by qualitative studies that are mainly based on semi-structured or unstructured interviews with social workers (Bartkowski & Grettenberger, 2018; Davie & Wilson, 2019; Enosh et al., 2018; Herbert & Bullock, 2020; Ince & Akyüz, 2018). This type of investigation ensures a primary response to basic problems and provides and classifies information to assess current challenges or questions to be answered. However, the wide gap in accurate empirical quantitative studies on subjective assessment of social protection processes involving social workers leaves room for theorization and speculation when a more accurate and convincing representation of reality is needed. By subjective evaluation, in this case, researchers mean a research situation in which respondents self-evaluate certain variables or categories based on their personal opinions, impressions, or experiences. This situation is opposed to objective evaluation, which involves an external measurement of variables or categories, protected from interference by the subjectivity of the participants in the process. Especially true this is for developing economies,
where social services are less advanced, and experience with social services outside public policy remains a new field. This gap must be bridged, which is the main intention of this study.

**Problem Statement**

This research aimed to solve the problem of the relationship between the personal and religious beliefs of social workers and their clients. The research question was whether the religious beliefs and practices of social workers contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of social assistance delivery and whether there is a link between the beliefs and experiences of social workers and the effectiveness of engaging their clients’ beliefs in the provision of social assistance to them.

**Methods and Materials**

For the study, countries were taken in which the religious situation is ambiguous and, at the same time, the sphere of social work is significantly inferior to the examples of developed Western states (Zavos, 2017). With a less effectively organized system of social work, the role of religious institutions in helping those in need may be noticeably higher, and in weakly religious countries, personal religious practices as a factor in motivating and boosting the effectiveness of social work may be more clearly distinguished (Pentaris, 2020; Rusch et al., 2019). This scope of research is of practical importance for the development of social work in such states as Kazakhstan and Russia, as well as other developing nations in a similar situation.

**Sampling**

The sample of social workers invited to participate in the study included individuals from Russia and Kazakhstan. In total, two samples were formed, 380 people each. The participants were selected on the basis of random sampling, excluding any other criteria in order to make the sample as representative and relevant as possible. Participants’ selection was carried out on the basis of official reports of social work organizations provided by the state authorities of Russia and Kazakhstan pursuant to the alphabetical list of social workers of these organizations. The volume of the general sample was determined according to the official statistical data reported by the state statistical authorities of both countries (the number of social workers in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan as of October 2021 was about 630,000 and 11,600, respectively). The demographic characteristics of the sample are given in Tables 1 and 2.

As indicated by the data above, the majority of social workers are women and people aged 36+ with a vast experience in the field (more than 10 years). The large number of participants with little work experience (less than one year) may indicate that most volunteers and qualified social workers drop out and leave the job earlier than expected. This may evidence, in particular, the relatively low prestige of the job of a social worker in both countries under consideration and the low level of material
security in this field. A significant number of young people implies that social work does motivate and attract youth, but there are several weighty factors contributing to their leaving in the future.

Taking into account the statistical data on the total number of social workers in the countries under analysis, the margin of sampling error for the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan is 1.03% and 0.78%, respectively, at a confidence level of $p = .05$. Thus, both samples can be considered representative.

### Research Design

The basis for this work was an email-distributed survey. Hence, emails with the explanation of the research procedure, objectives, as well as the request for consent to participate were sent during the first study stage. After receiving consent and notification that the terms of the study were clear, the participants were emailed survey forms to be filled out and sent back. All respondents were warned to adhere to tight deadlines – the entire procedure took 12 days.

Each form sent asked respondents to complete two tasks. The first was to answer the question: “To what extent does your personal religious experience and participation in religious practice increase the effectiveness of your work in the field of social assistance?” The answers to be given were assessments on a 5-point Likert scale, where:

1 – “does not help at all; never use it”;
2 – “helps to some extent; sometimes I use my own spiritual experience and practice in my work”;
3 – “there are often cases when personal religious and spiritual experience helps me; in some cases, I use it in my work”;
4 – “mostly helps; I often use my personal spiritual experience in my work”;
5 – greatly helps; I constantly use my personal experience in my work.”

The second task within the form was to complete the Religious/Spirituality Integrated Practice Assessment Scale (RSIPAS) test. RSIPAS test is divided into four subscales by different factors that influence the integration of the personal religious

| Experience | Kazakhstan Men | Kazakhstan Women | Russian Federation Men | Russian Federation Women |
|------------|----------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <2 years   | 55             | 53               | 53                     | 59                      |
| 2–5 years  | 35             | 36               | 30                     | 42                      |
| 5–10 years | 31             | 46               | 32                     | 53                      |
| >10 years  | 61             | 63               | 55                     | 56                      |

### Table 1 Research sample distribution by age

| Age    | Kazakhstan Men | Kazakhstan Women | Russian Federation Men | Russian Federation Women |
|--------|----------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 18–25  | 35             | 33               | 33                     | 39                      |
| 26–35  | 43             | 44               | 34                     | 43                      |
| 36–45  | 59             | 61               | 54                     | 68                      |
| >45    | 55             | 50               | 51                     | 58                      |

### Table 2 Research sample distribution by experience
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and spiritual experiences of social service clients into the activities of social service workers. Its advantage is high reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.96$ in the initial and follow-up assessment) and validity; it also fully corresponds to the objectives of this work (Oxhandler & Parrish, 2016; Oxhandler, 2019).

Overall, this study concentrates upon a subjective social workers’ assessment of the application and relevance of their own religious experience in the context of social work and the religious beliefs and experiences of their clients. This was done by analyzing the main demographic factors in the sample of social workers (country of origin and work, age, experience, gender, religious affiliation) and correlations between the survey results and the mean scores in each demographic category in the context of each RSIPAS subscale.

Data Analysis

As a means of statistical analysis, this study benefited from Pearson’s correlation coefficient calculation presupposing a preliminary sample check for normal distribution using the chi-squared test. Table 3 demonstrates the average test results for each gender by subscale.

The null hypothesis ($H_0$) of this research assumed the absence of a statistically significant difference between test scores for each of the studied demographic factors (age, gender, etc.). This conjecture was tested using a two-tailed Student’s t-test, which confirmed $H_0$ for all demographic factors and RSIPAS subscales. The obtained correlation values for each RSIPAS subscale with respect to each of the studied demographic factors turned out to be almost identical and did not have statistically significant differences within the p-value of 0.05. For example, for the gender factor, the correlation values for RSIPAS subscales were distributed as follows: self-efficacy – 0.781, attitudes – 0.778, feasibility – 0.784, engagement – 0.789. Therefore, to reduce the paper volume, it was decided to present only the total average correlation values for the factor as a whole without subscale division (Table 4). Table 4 shows the average correlation for each of the demographic factors for the full RSIPAS test.

| Table 3 | Religious/Spirituality Integrated Practice Assessment Scale (RSIPAS) results by subscales |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|
|         | Kazakhstan                                   | Russian Federation |
|         | Men          | Women         | Men          | Women         |
| Self-Efficacy | 4.32  | 4.48  | 3.18  | 4.01  |
| Attitudes   | 4.06  | 4.15  | 3.11  | 3.98  |
| Feasibility | 3.88  | 3.91  | 2.96  | 3.16  |
| Engagement  | 4.11  | 4.29  | 2.54  | 3.06  |

| Table 4 | Pearson’s correlation between demographic characteristics (factors) of the sample |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|
| Factor  | $r$                                           |
| Gender  | 0.781                                         |
| Age     | 0.371                                         |
| Experience | 0.211                          |
| Country | 0.328                                         |
| Religion| 0.014                                         |

Kazakhstan

Russian Federation

Men  | Women
---|---
Self-Efficacy | 4.32  | 4.48  |
Attitudes   | 4.06  | 4.15  |
Feasibility | 3.88  | 3.91  |
Engagement  | 4.11  | 4.29  |

Men  | Women
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Engagement  | 2.54  | 3.06  |

By comparing the results with the objectives and hypotheses of this research, it can be concluded that the application of religious and spiritual practices in the work of social service workers is significant and requires further study.
A similar distribution of the values is observed in the context of the other studied factors. This may indicate that the consistency of the answers to the questions of each test subsection is rather high; that is, the opinion of the respondents is highly consolidated.

**Statistical Processing**

The statistical data were processed with the help of SPSS 26.0. Data visualization was done by means of Microsoft Excel 2019.

**Ethical Issues**

The completed questionnaires were received from anonymous email addresses specially created by respondents themselves. Each research participant reported that their responses were submitted. In this way, the confidentiality and anonymity of participation were guaranteed, and research accuracy was ensured. No personal data of the persons enrolled were collected, stored, or used in the course of the study.

**Research Limitations**

Although this study is representative in terms of sample sufficiency and accuracy, it covers only two countries with rather similar historical and socio-economic conditions. Thus, the collected findings can hardly be extrapolated to other developing countries characterized by similar conditions and roles a religion play. In addition, the study is a one-time analysis, even though it is more feasible to conduct a dynamic analysis. This, however, might become the focus of subsequent studies.

**Results**

As the outcomes of the RSIPAS test are more conclusive in terms of statistical validation, they will be considered first. Results of the Pearson’s correlation test show that women in both countries gave much higher assessments to each of the test subscales. As further correlation studies show (Table 4), this gender difference in assessment is statistically relevant and should be taken into account.

The most important problem of social work manifests itself in the results of the correlation analysis; however, no statistically significant correlations were found between demographic factors and the test scores. The practice shows that in developing countries, social work practices are about the same. Though, as far as this research concentrated on the religious affiliation of the social worker, its participants encompassed Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Buddhists, and Muslims. On line with this, almost half of the participants identified themselves as people who do not belong to any church or participate in religious services (49.8%).

The performed calculations revealed that test responses correlated with not a single social workers’ religious affiliations. What is more, the level of correlation in the context of religion was, on average, the lowest among the factors analyzed (r=.014).
The only exception to this trend was significant gender differences ($r = .781$), which means that female social workers are more likely to involve clients’ religious experiences in social work practice. This result is equally relevant for both countries under study.

The results of the survey (the first task of the study) seeking to find out the attitude of social workers toward the use of personal religious experience or practices in social work demonstrated the distribution of answers on the Likert scale that is close to the normal distribution (Fig. 1). Between one-third and two-fifths of the participants rated the usefulness of their personal religious experiences as moderate and stated that they use them in some cases only. It should be noted that very few people claimed to take advantage of this kind of experience on a regular basis – within 6% for both countries (4.18% of men and 6.28% of women in Kazakhstan and 4.4% of men and 5.92% of women in Russia). These data suggest that religious considerations are not a strong motivator for participation in social work and do not determine it. The number of social workers who rated the involvement of their own religious experience in work and its effectiveness as minimal was almost three times higher than the number of those who gave it the highest assessment (17.23% of men and 11.59% of women in Kazakhstan and 18.21% of men and 15.15% of women in Russia).

Regrettably, there is no reliable possibility of a clear explanation for this distribution of estimates. A possible determining factor can be religious diversity and the mismatch between social workers’ personal religious practices and the practices and beliefs of their clients. In addition, in the case of the Russian Federation, ethnic factors may have an influence: the country’s multi-ethnicity is tightly linked to the distribution of religious preferences of the population and ethnic groups, so a social
worker’s personal religious beliefs may rather difficulties rather than provide support in a given situation. Even though Kazakhstan is largely mono-ethnic as well, it is also multi-religious, which can lead to the same complications.

The results of the RSIPAS test (Table 3) unveiled fairly high scores for the inclusion of personal social service clients’ religious values, experiences, and attitudes in both countries. However, significant concerns about the weighted assessment of the results of this test are present as different subscales produce relevantly different results. The highest scores were given by participants to self-efficacy (4.32 for men, 4.48 for women in Kazakhstan; 3.18 for men and 4.01 for women in Russia). That is, most social workers surveyed were confident in their knowledge, skills, and ability to recognize their clients’ beliefs and religious experiences and their ability to integrate these experiences in one way or another into the social assistance processes. This assessment generally coincides with the fairly high level of education in Kazakhstan and Russia and the assessment of the level of education among the population. It should be borne in mind, however, that in this case, we are dealing exclusively with a subjective assessment of the knowledge and skills discussed rather than an objective one. The responses to the question about the applicability and helpfulness of personal religious experiences suggest that social workers relatively rarely face the need to use them and therefore rarely need to recognize their clients’ experiences as, according to available research, these two aspects are closely linked in social work processes.

Some trends in the responses to the test are particularly noteworthy. Thus, a majority of participants ranked the feasibility of incorporating clients’ religious experiences into social assistance practice lowest (2.96 for males and 3.06 for females in Russia and 3.88 for males and 3.91 for females in Kazakhstan). This may hint at the fact that while clients’ religious experiences and beliefs can be easily recognized by social workers, it might be challenging to actually implement them. The underlying reasons for this reside within the content of individual questions in this test subscale, in particular, lack of time to assess the client’s background, lack of time to assess the strength and orientation of these beliefs or related problems, and lack of adequate specialized training for interacting with religious beliefs of various origins. Generally, the three most probable causes for this relatively low assessment can be the workload of social workers, the lack of specialized religious and cultural training, and the lack of tools for proper assessment and decision-making in this sensitive area, which makes social workers simply avoid it.

Another important difference lies in the engagement subsection. Here, the Kazakh participants demonstrated much higher scores compared to the Russian respondents (4.11 for males and 4.29 for females in Kazakhstan and 2.54 for males and 3.06 for females in the Russian Federation). This subsection collects information on how often a social worker takes specific steps in order to integrate and use their religious and spiritual experience when providing assistance to the client, that is, seeks advice, collects the necessary information, attracts the community and religious leaders of the client to help them solve their problems, etc. Another interesting outcome is that while Kazakh participants’ high level of competence self-assessment practically coincides with the subjective assessment of their efforts in engagement, for Russian participants, there is a significant gap between these indicators. Presumably, this is due to the much greater importance of traditional family upbringing in Kazakhstan.
and a more prominent role of the traditional way of life maintained in many regions. Again, when evaluating this factor, it is critical to keep in mind that researchers are dealing with subjective assessment. In this case, a paradoxical situation is possible when less effort is assessed by participants as high and sufficient, while objectively greater effort by another group of participants may be considered insufficient, as they assess themselves according to more demanding criteria. Currently, no precise benchmarks are set for this, and finding one is a matter of future research.

**Discussion**

Research into the personal religiosity of social workers and the involvement of their personal religious experience in professional activities is somewhat blurred. In most cases, such studies focus on the relevance and balance of the involvement of faith-based organizations and secular social services and their contribution to helping people in need (Bartkowski & Grettenberger, 2018; Chau, 2020; Tan et al., 2021). In this aspect, it is difficult to detect personal preferences or the dynamics of using one’s own skills, knowledge, or peculiarities of the approach based on the personal spiritual experience of a secular social worker. A significant but also poorly studied issue in modern literature is the matter of training such specialists. In developed states, in particular, in the US and those located in Europe (the UK, France, Germany, etc.), social workers receive special cultural and religious training that is constantly updated in accordance with new academic data and changes in real social and ethnic situations in the respective countries (Davie & Wilson, 2019; Enosh et al., 2018; Ince & Akyüz, 2018). In concurrence with this, there are compelling reasons to doubt that such training is adequately provided in developing states (Idler et al., 2017; Kim-Prieto & Miller, 2018). In our study, the responses of social workers are clearly relevant and demonstrate that the lack of such training significantly reduces the quality of the involvement of clients’ religious experience in social assistance.

A number of sources indicate that in many cases, people with a strict religious affiliation are inclined to seek help from religious organizations precisely because they meet their personal religious expectations and will be respectful of their beliefs and behavior (Weng, 2017). It is easier for a religious person to get help from a believer regardless of their religious identity rather than from a non-religious secular social assistant or government-supported agency (Kvarfordt & Herba, 2018; Waldon, 2017; Weng, 2017). According to the available empirical field research, this trend may not apply to all countries, yet our research suggests that it may well be characteristic of the post-Soviet space as a whole.

In contrast to the present study, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with social workers in the US and Europe show that personal religious beliefs and practices tend to be an important factor in promoting social worker careers (Herbert & Bullock, 2020; Pentaris, 2020; Sullivan, 2019). Multiple examinations of the behavior and positioning of social workers and faith-based organizations in American cities demonstrate that there are no relevant differences in the use of personal beliefs in social assistance (Rusch et al., 2019). Some social workers and members of religious organizations emphasize their religiosity and use it to convince clients, while oth-
ers, on the contrary, distance themselves as much as possible from their own beliefs or convictions. Likewise, there is no relevant distribution of this characteristic by areas of assistance: food provision, housing for the homeless, career counseling, etc. (McKinnon, 2017; Oman & Brown, 2018; Rusch et al., 2019). This is fully in line with our observations.

The dominance of women among social workers is observed in many countries and in different social situations (Pavolini et al., 2017; Rusch et al., 2019). In our study, this dominance in the sample is statistically significant. Curiously enough, this phenomenon can be explained by the presence of hidden gender discrimination as a low social rank and a low material status of social workers are acceptable for women and at the same time seems unattractive to men, who, in the eyes of traditional societies, should provide for their families and earn more money (Bartkowski & Grettenberger, 2018; Crompton, 2017; Sullivan, 2019). This may also be the reason for the shift in the age of social workers and their number reduction with work experience gaining, which is evident from the demographics of the sample of this study. The higher assessment of the involvement of religious factors in social assistance processes found in the research is partially confirmed by other studies (Pentarlis, 2020). Therefore, it can be considered that this is not a local phenomenon but a widespread one.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to consider social workers’ subjective assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of engaging with their personal religious and spiritual experiences in social services provision as well as their attitude toward the use of the religious beliefs of clients while providing social assistance. The novelty of this work lies in the fact that it is one of the first empirical quantitative studies based on controlled sampling in the area that traditionally relies on qualitative methods and interviews. The research process involved two groups of 380 social workers from Kazakhstan and Russia selected randomly. The key research tool was an online survey involving the assessment of one question on a Likert scale and the Religious/Spirituality Integrated Practice Assessment Scale (RSIPAS) test. Based on their outcomes, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated for separate demographic factors of the sample. The results showed that the assessment of the effectiveness of the use of personal religious beliefs by social workers is close to the normal distribution, with a minimum number of those who noted a high level of effectiveness (6%) and a twofold number of those who reported the lowest effectiveness (at least 14%). No statistically significant correlations were found between separate demographic factors of the sample and the assessment of the involvement of religious practices and beliefs of social service clients except for a strong correlation among female workers ($r = .781$). In practice, these findings can be used to improve training and retraining programs for social workers, address the problem of professional crisis among social workers, as well as attract, retain, and motivate specialists in the field.
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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

Informed Consent The completed questionnaires were received from anonymous email addresses specially created by respondents themselves. Each research participant reported that their responses were submitted. In this way, the confidentiality and anonymity of participation were guaranteed, and research accuracy was ensured. No personal data of the persons enrolled were collected, stored, or used in the course of the study.

Ethical Approval The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles approved by the Ethics Committee of Ajman University.

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