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# THE IMPACT OF RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY ON SOCIAL WORKERS' DAILY PRACTICE

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# THE IMPACT OF RELIGION/ SPIRITUALITY ON SOCIAL WORKERS' DAILY PRACTICE

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## Abstract

*Although social work can trace the roots of its establishment as a profession to religion/spirituality, the relationship between social work and religion/spirituality has deteriorated due to the former's professionalisation and secularisation. Nevertheless, religious/spiritual values are important for many social work services and for the practice of the profession. It is, hence, worth demarcating the role of religion/spirituality for frontline social workers. In the current qualitative study, repeated interviews were conducted with 11 Chinese social workers from diverse social work settings. It was noted that Eastern and Western religion/spirituality can instil meaning and value in the profession's nature.*

Key words:
religion, spirituality, social work practices, cognitive framework, spiritual sensitivity.

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion/spirituality (RS) and social work has long been paradoxical (Furness and Gilligan, 2010.a), although they have been closely linked throughout contemporary human history. While the former once nurtured the profession, the latter has removed its religious/spiritual garb as required by the process of professionalisation

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and secularisation (Belcher and Mellinger, 2016.; Sherr and Straughan, 2005.). In fact, some researchers use a secular interpretation to distinguish religion from spirituality (Plante and Sherman, 2001.; Yonker, Schnabelrauch and Dehaan, 2012.). However, religion and spirituality are manifestly overlapped and interrelated in terms of their cultural, theological and historical origins (Koenig, 2009.). It is apparent that the use of secular interpretations of spirituality (such as life satisfaction and psychological well-being) to separate it from religion is problematic, as such interpretations can only account for the emotional and dispositional spheres, not the theological roots that support religion and spirituality in human societies (Davis et al., 2017.; Moreira-Almeida, Neto and Koenig, 2006.). Pertinently, Koenig (2009.) mentioned that religion and spirituality are theological concepts that are theoretically and coherently correlated. Religion refers to systematically organised beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designated to facilitate closeness to or linkage with God or the sacred, and spirituality refers to the personal quest for understanding of questions about the meaning and purpose of life, as well as the ultimate truth in relation to God or the sacred. In light of this, we adopt the concepts of religion and spirituality together to reflect the beliefs of a group of frontline social workers who have faith in a religion and explore the roles and functions of their religion/spirituality in their daily clinical interventions and services.

According to the belief-based theory, what we believe to be universally true and of ultimate value may profoundly shape our understanding and interpretation of the objects and experiences around us (Yeung and Chan, 2014.). Indubitably, RS can robustly formulate people's cognitive schemata (James and Wells, 2003.), which may directly shape their psychological stances and behavioural choices (Richards and Bergin, 2006.). Conceptualising RS as formative of cognitive schemata may thus allow us to comprehend how social workers' own religious/spiritual beliefs affect their professional practice. This research direction should be beneficial to the advancement of the profession in terms of the (re)incorporating of RS into social work education and its development, as well as the consolidation of religious values and human dignity (Hill and Donaldson, 2012.). Given that social work is rapidly developing as a profession in China, it is also imperative to understand the impact of RS on social work practice in the Chinese context.

Explicitly and empirically, the role of RS in psychotherapy and clinical practice has recently gained more attention (Frunza, Frunza and Grad, 2019.; Richards and Bergin, 2006.). There has been a significant increase in published psychological research on RS in recent decades (Oman, 2013.). Generally, clinicians and practitioners take two approaches to incorporating RS in their practices or interventions: the analysis of the inextricable connection between practices and RS and the episodic intersection

of practices and RS (Florence, McKenzie-Green and Tudor, 2019.; Frunza, Frunza and Grad, 2019.). Regardless of the approach, elements of RS have been applied in different intervention models, such as music therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (Lauzon, 2020.; Pearce et al., 2015.). The clientele of practices or interventions with RS elements is various and includes students, psychiatric rehabilitants, chronically ill patients, drug addicts and families as service units (Butkovic-Andelic, 2018.; Pearce et al., 2015.; Pearson, 2017.; Smothers et al., 2019.; Subica and Yamada, 2018.).

Nevertheless, this development has mainly occurred in the West, and the influences of RS in Eastern culture are still insufficiently researched (Yeung, 2016.). Much of the focus has been on acknowledging clients' religious/spiritual needs as part of a holistic approach for service delivery, whereas the religious/spiritual beliefs of social workers have been overlooked (Oxhandler and Pargament, 2014.). Current guidelines for the use of spiritually oriented activities in social work practice are also insufficient (Canda, Nakashima and Furman, 2004.). Nonetheless, social workers' religious/spiritual beliefs may significantly affect their practice (Kwan and Chui, 2020.). Social workers have a responsibility to be aware of how their own beliefs affect the way they serve their clients (Darrell and Rich, 2017.). Wiggins (2009.) identified several situations in which harmful countertransference may occur due to therapists' own religious/spiritual beliefs. Social workers' own religious/spiritual beliefs should be respected, but not at the cost of their faith constituting a violation of clients' human rights.

## AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The present qualitative study aimed to explore and investigate how the RS of Chinese frontline social workers frames their cognition, sways their interpretations of the profession and relates to their reactions and responses by guiding their choice of services and interventions pertinent to their clients' needs.

Applying the belief-based theory to the frontline practices of social workers, it is plausible that their religious/spiritual beliefs become a cognitive framework for interpreting their professional identities and duties. These identities and duties, along with this cognitive framework with religious/spiritual undertones, play a role in their assessments, responses and interventions when addressing the problems, natures and needs of their clients. Hence, it is anticipated that RS will prove to be an influential cognitive framework in which the beliefs and value orientations that a social worker holds generate cognitive schemata to steer working relationships and interventions with clients. In our study, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the religious/spiritual values derived from social workers' faith, and why may these be considered relevant to their social work practices?
2. What are the pertinent values and cognitive frameworks derived from social workers' faith that construct their interpretation of the nature of social work as a profession?
3. How do these interpretations contribute to social workers' assumptions about their profession's roles and duties, formulations regarding their responses to clients' needs and interventions in their social work practices?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a former British colony, Hong Kong is influenced by both Western monotheism in the form of Christianity and Eastern religious/spiritual traditions. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Hong Kong Basic Law, and there is a diverse range of religions in Hong Kong. Therefore, Hong Kong provided an appropriate context for researchers to study the influences of RS on social work practices.

This study is a qualitative inquiry based on the interview data collected from 11 frontline social workers in diverse fields of social work services in Hong Kong. These 11 social workers were recruited mainly through the first author's professional networks. Social workers who had initially reported that they had a religious/spiritual affiliation were selected. Participants were informed of the general purpose of the study, which was to improve social work practices by understanding the role of practitioners. Interviews were designed to help the participants review their religious/spiritual beliefs and discuss how their beliefs might have shaped their cognitive lens.

Determining how and why frontline social workers incorporate RS elements is the main focus of the current qualitative study. A three-interview structure was adopted (Seidman, 2006.). In the first interview, the social workers were asked to describe their biographical backgrounds, including their religious/spiritual beliefs. Before attending the second interview, they were asked to select two or three episodes from their practical experience. These episodes were chosen to exemplify challenging moments in their practices that had made an impression on them and usually required decision-making. In the second interview, they described the details of these episodes. Questions related to RS were asked to explore the effects of RS on the participants' practices and interventions. In the third interview, the focus was on understanding the meaning of the participants' practical experiences mentioned in the previous sessions.

The participants were all registered social workers (RSWs) under the Hong Kong Social Workers Registration Board with substantial frontline experience. As shown

in Table 1, seven of the participants were women and four were men. Six participants were Protestant, two were Catholic, one was Buddhist, one was a member of *Sōka Gakkai* International (a Buddhist organisation), and, notably, one described himself as half-Christian, half-Buddhist. The organisations they worked for were faith-based NGOs, secular NGOs and the Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong government. Among the participants, one was working in counselling, one in family services, two in rehabilitation services, three in youth services and three in community services; the remaining participant was working in financial social work services. In terms of practical experience, three of the participants had 10 years or less, five had 11 to 20 years and the remaining three had 21-30 years.

**Table 1.** Social Worker Participants' Background Information (N = 11)

| Participants | Age range | Gender | Religious affiliation | Field of practice | Types of organization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Worker A | 31–40 | Male | Protestant | Rehabilitation | Faith-based |
| Worker B | 21–30 | Female | Protestant | Rehabilitation | Secular NGO |
| Worker C | 31–40 | Female | Protestant | Youth service | Secular NGO |
| Worker D | 31–40 | Male | Half-Christian and Half-Buddhist | Family services | Social Welfare Department |
| Worker E | 31–40 | Female | Protestant | Youth service | Faith-based NGO |
| Worker F | 21–30 | Male | Protestant | Community work | Faith-based NGO |
| Worker G | 41–50 | Male | Protestant | Counselling | (Self-employed) |
| Worker H | 41–50 | Female | Catholic | Community work | Secular NGO |
| Worker I | 41–50 | Female | Buddhist | Community work | Secular NGO |
| Worker J | 21–30 | Female | Buddhist (Sōka Gakkai) | Financial social work | Faith-based NGO |
| Worker K | 31–40 | Female | Catholic | Youth service | Secular NGO |

The qualitative interviews were conducted in Cantonese with reference to an in-depth semi-structured interview guide, which focused on the social workers' religious/spiritual beliefs in relation to their social work cognitions, practices, and experiences. Sample interview questions included »What are your religious and

spiritual beliefs?«, »Can you explain your religious commitment?«, »Could you please tell me what impact do your personal, religious and spiritual beliefs have on your life?«, and »Could you please tell me how your religious beliefs may affect your professional practices?«.

Ethics approval for conducting the study was obtained from The University of Hong Kong. All participants gave their consent to participate in the study voluntarily. The qualitative interviews were conducted at the university or their workplaces. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes. As we had three interview sessions with each research participant, we were able to check the consistency of the findings. Member checks were also conducted for all of the cases after the interviews; these checks aimed to ensure the quality of the data (Anney, 2014.).

A six-phase thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006.) was used. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were written in Chinese and then translated into English by the first author. While carefully reading the transcripts, initial codes were generated to indicate relevant meaningful units. After incorporating participants' feedback, the interview data sets were analysed by organising the codes. Common themes among the 11 participants emerged as a result. Before writing the final report, these themes were reviewed and renamed for clarity.

# RESULTS

The findings based on the qualitative data generally showed close and coherent relationships between the social workers' RS and their social work practices. In general, these relationships were mainly related to 1) shaping a specific cognitive framework through the lens of RS, 2) understanding the nature of the profession, 3) shaping the role they need to perform in social work, 4) interpreting clients' problems and needs and 5) deciding which appropriate intervention strategies to provide as a response. We found these thematic areas to be mutually reinforced.

## Religion/spirituality as a cognitive framework for understanding the world

The participants reported that they used a religious/spiritual cognitive framework to understand the world. This framework represented certain fundamental assumptions about life, including a relationship with God and others. Several of the social workers worked from a Christian perspective and often used phrases like

»everything is under God's control« and »God has his plan«, indicating that they recognised the presence of their God as a supernatural agent. They also spoke about how their God treats them: »I realise that I too have made a lot of mistakes and need acceptance, but Jesus accepts me« (Worker A). They adopted pertinent values to understand their working relationships with others. As they viewed themselves as »sinners« who are saved by the grace of God, they did not consider themselves superior to their clients and thus worked with them on the basis of equal status. For instance, »beareth all things« was a life motto that Worker A had learned from the religious/spiritual teachings of the congregation to which he belonged. According to Worker A, he was more accepting and less judgmental of other people, including his clients, because of his religious/spiritual experiences. Worker F also reported that his religion directed his focus towards »love and relationships« rather than merely »right or wrong«.

In addition, we found that the Christian social workers used their religious/spiritual perspective to make sense of moral issues in daily life. For example, Worker G believed that the world God created should be shared by all of us and that the idea of individualism, or self-seeking behaviour, was ethically problematic. His perception of »normal« and »abnormal« was also largely influenced by his religious/spiritual views of Christianity. He considered being transgender »problematic« because he thought that »people are created by God and the gender of people is God's choice« (Worker G). Hence, he considered being transgender a violation of nature's law.

The cognitive framework of the participants with Eastern religious/spiritual affiliations, such as Buddhism, was also coloured by their religious/spiritual traditions. Unlike the Christian social workers, they did not believe that there is a supernatural transcendent God overseeing human beings. They tended to consider that people should have a strong internal locus of control. For instance, Worker J, a follower of *Sōka Gakkai*, considered that »all human beings have a Buddha nature«. She believed that the most important task for human beings is for them to develop their Buddha nature, their internal resources and energetic potential. Instead of blaming the external environment, she emphasised the importance of individual responsibility and initiative; this had become her attitude towards life.

In sum, we found that religious/spiritual beliefs and experiences naturally formulate the cognitive frameworks of frontline social workers which guide their interpretation of, and attitudes and responses to, the experiences they have in their professional practices and everyday lives. These interpretations in turn have profound implications for their communication and interactions with, and the interventions provided for, their service recipients.

## Religion/spirituality and the nature of the profession

Moreover, the qualitative data we obtained informed us that RS plays a part in shaping social workers' understanding of the nature of social work. For example, some of the Christian social workers considered their profession to be »God's calling«. They were generally loyal to their God first and their profession second. Worker G, for example, used the term »missionary« to describe his work and considered God to be his master. These social workers viewed their profession as a platform on which to practise their religious/spiritual beliefs. Another participant, Worker C, regarded herself as a tool of God in serving young drug abusers. She would not be frustrated when her clients relapsed because she believed that any change in the clients' circumstances or conditions was »God's work«. However, while the Christian social workers generally regarded their religion as closely related to social work, the Buddhist social workers did not connect their religion to the profession explicitly. Hence, on the basis of these findings, it is thought that monotheistic religions like Christianity that have concrete religious/spiritual teachings regarding interpersonal relationships and personal duties have a greater influence on social workers' interpretation of the nature of the profession. However, believers of Eastern religions (e.g. Buddhism) who place more emphasis on self-transcendence and spiritual enhancement are less inclined to relate their beliefs to their professional practice (Oxtoby, Amore and Hussain, 2014.).

## Religion/spirituality as social workers' lens for practising their social work

The participants' religious/spiritual beliefs and their role in social work were closely connected. As expected, the qualitative data revealed that the religious/spiritual beliefs and traditions of the participants affected their attitudes and responses in their social work role with clients. For example, the Christian participants generally said that their role in social work should be filled and fuelled with »love«, which revealed a strong Christian theological stance that is consistent with what the Bible says: »Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins« (1 John 4:10). Hence, these Christian social workers believed that they had a strong obligation to »share love and walk with« their clients. In one case, Worker B showed that as she had experienced the »unconditional love of Jesus«, she should not give up on any of her clients. In addition, the pursuit of »justice« was upheld by some of the Christian

social workers as a duty they must perform in their roles as social workers. Worker D, who described himself as half-Christian, half-Buddhist, believed that a social worker's role was primarily to »fight for the best for his client« and »serve the poorest and most disadvantaged«:

> *Jesus served the poorest, not the richest. He helped, for example, people who could not walk to walk again and people who could not see to see again … He did not discriminate against someone because of his or her background. That is simple. What my religion has given me, to be honest, is a simple way to let me know what a good social worker is. (Worker D)*

Worker J, influenced by *Sōka Gakkai*, considered that every social worker had the responsibility to make a meaningful difference in society. She was particularly influenced by the »stand-alone spirit« promoted by her religious/spiritual leader. She therefore emphasised that social workers should not underestimate the power of an individual. Despite external constraints, a social worker can influence and change the environment by taking the initiative to make those changes.

## Religion/spirituality as the basis of understanding and interpreting clients' problems and needs

Another theme that emerged from this study was that the participants tended to understand and interpret their clients' problems and needs through their religious/spiritual perspectives. For example, although the Christian participants stressed that they should fill and fuel their social work with God's love, they also acknowledged that people were »sinners«. Accordingly, they ascribed certain problems and needs of their clients to their deviation from »God's plan«. For instance, these participants considered »changing one's gender« and »having conflict with others« as things running counter to »God's plan«.

In contrast, the participants with Eastern religious/spiritual affiliations tended to see their clients' goodness rather than their evil. Those with a Buddhist background interpreted clients' problems as »insufficient attention to oneself«. Worker D recalled his clients in a boys' home:

> *I don't think the children are naughty, as many others might assume. What they lack is a kind of tolerance … tolerance for silence. They are impulsive, so I taught them one thing: »to purify yourself«. When they misbehaved, instead of punishing them, I patiently asked them to close their eyes and listen to the voices from their heart and then to express themselves regarding what they really wanted. (Worker D)*

## Religion/spirituality and social work intervention

Explicitly, the findings of this study showed that almost all of the participants applied their religious/spiritual values to their social work practices. The Christian social workers reported that they gave more attention to »sharing love and acceptance«. For example, Worker E reported that she followed the Bible's teachings to help her accept some of her young clients with challenging behaviours, who were »hard to love«. Furthermore, »following God's plan« was a crucial principle incorporated into their practices. Worker G considered being transgender to be inappropriate, as human gender is God's decision. He wanted to help one of his clients to »become normal«, but this client insisted that changing his sex was what he wanted. It turned out to be an ethical dilemma for Worker G. He finally stopped serving this client because of the conflict of values, an action that may be ethically questionable.

In addition, one Christian and one Buddhist participant considered that their religious/spiritual beliefs »softened« their radical stance on social work practices. Both Worker I and Worker F had been active in mobilising clients to fight for their rights. Worker I reported that Buddhism allowed her to focus on self-discovery and respect her clients' own choices, and Worker F learned from her faith's teachings that closer relationships among people and individual growth are important and therefore changed her focus from macro advocacy to micro practices.

In fact, the participants used their religious/spiritual practices as social work practices to help their clients. Worker C, for instance, recalled that she prayed spontaneously with a client who was a drug abuser:

> *I saw the client was down and out. She sought help and said »I am in pain; please help me«, showing that she really wanted to stay away from drugs. She wanted to give up drugs, but had no strength. At that time, I thought I had served this client for four years and had tried different ways to help her, but there had not been any progress. I didn't know what else I could do for her. Then I blurted out the idea of praying to God. (Worker C)*

Worker C proposed to the client the idea of praying, an action that may be controversial. The client said she did not know how to pray and wanted Worker C to guide her. Consequently, Worker C held her hands and prayed with her, and both got teary-eyed. When asked about the rationale behind this action, Worker C said that »man's deadlock is the beginning of God's work«.

The use of some Eastern religious/spiritual practices was also reported. As overcoming »*dukkha*« (suffering) is a major concern of Buddhism (Harvey, 2000), Worker D reported that he commonly used the Buddhist teachings of »non-attachment«, »acceptance«, and »letting go« to help some of his clients with chronic illnesses to

reduce their pain. He stressed that he did not merely conduct relaxation exercises; rather, he attempted to help his clients to reflect deeply and gain »insight« to awaken them to reality.

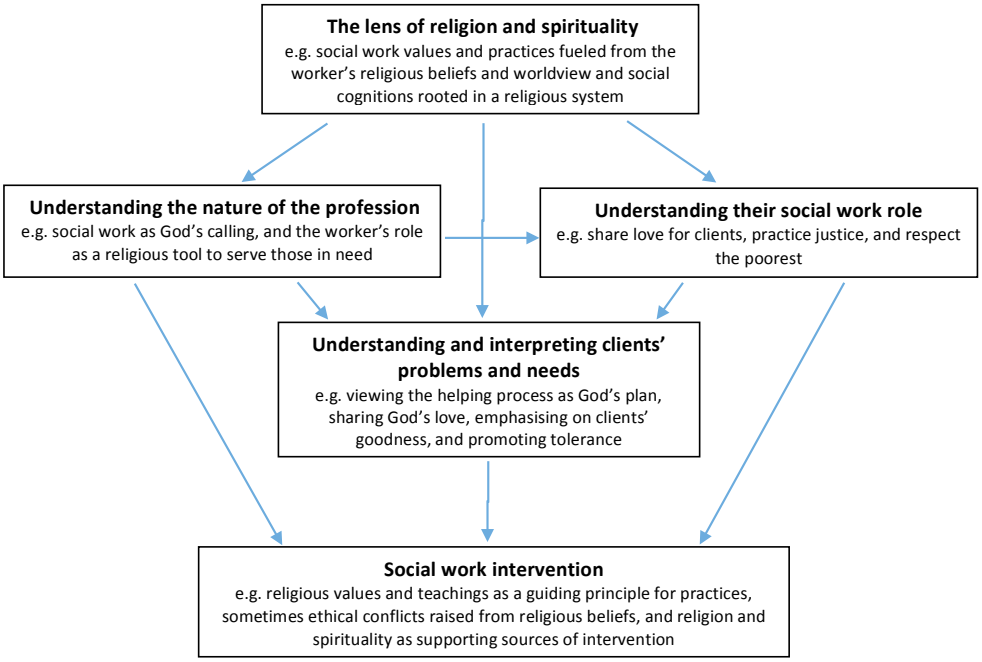


**Figure 1.** The influence of social workers' religion/spirituality on their practices

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study attempted to identify the relevance of social workers' religious/spiritual beliefs to their professional practices. Our findings are consistent with those of Larsen and Rinkel (2016.), who suggested that religions can influence social workers' practices. We found that religious/spiritual influence also exists among Hong Kong Chinese social workers, including those affiliated with Eastern religious/spiritual traditions. The findings also suggest that social workers' RS can influence their practices implicitly as they make sense of the world. These findings precipitated a valuable insight with important implications for social work training and supervision in the Asia-Pacific region.

The way in which social work practitioners make decisions has recently gained attention (Taylor and Whittaker, 2018.). Kwan and Reuper (2019.) suggest that social

work practitioners' professional judgements are largely influenced by their personal backgrounds. As this study shows, social workers' own religious/spiritual beliefs may influence how they perceive the world. Therefore, more attention should be given to understanding and regulating religious/spiritual influences. Although some scholars believe that it is unusual for social workers to discuss religious/spiritual ideas with clients (Oxhandler et al., 2015.), this study demonstrates a significant influence of social workers' RS on their practice. According to those interviewed, social workers' religiously and spiritually informed lens affects the way they perceive their profession, their role and their clients. For example, some considered that the role of a social worker is to practice justice and respect the poor, while other social workers emphasised their clients' goodness. These perceptions influence the courses of action they take in their social work practice (Figure 1).

According to those interviewed, there is some evidence that social workers can use their religious/spiritual beliefs in their practices. For example, as the pursuit of justice is considered to be a Christian responsibility (Mott, 2011.), Christian social workers may make efforts to fight for the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable in society. Similarly, Christian social workers can realise »love«, an essential Christian moral principle (Mott, 2011.), by serving their clients. For Buddhist social workers, the Buddhist notion of overcoming *dukkha* (suffering) (Harvey, 2000.) is revealed in some of their practices. Although comparing the influences of Western and Eastern RS goes beyond the scope of this study, it would be safe to say that social workers' practices can manifest the core values of their different religious/spiritual traditions.

There has been some discussion about the appropriateness of social workers using religious/spiritual practices in their social work practices (Mattison, Jayaratne and Croxton, 2000.; Sheridan, 2008.). According to the findings, it is not uncommon for religious social workers to use religious/spiritual practices (e.g. prayer, mindfulness) in their social work. As the use of religious/spiritual practices tends to be observable, it may be identified and regulated if necessary. Importantly, however, the findings suggest that the influence of social workers' RS on their social work practices can be implicit; the influence can still be in play even if the social worker never mentions religious/spiritual matters in front of their clients. This would make it harder for social workers and their supervisors to identify the possible influence of their RS on their social work practices.

The findings have important implications for professional development, training and supervision of social workers. As noted in the findings reported above, social workers' religious/spiritual beliefs and social work practices are not separable. Indeed, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for social workers to leave their beliefs at home. Hence, their religious/spiritual beliefs are not merely personal, but also

positively or negatively related to the social work service their clients receive, which may generate critical ethical issues that deserve attention in the supervision of social workers.

It is generally believed that social workers should not impose their own religious/spiritual beliefs on their clients (Guttmann, 2006.; Sheridan, 2008.). Yet, allowing the influence of RS to be felt implicitly in social work practice without the necessary monitoring would be equally problematic. To provide social services ethically, social workers should »have a responsibility to be very mindful of how these beliefs can influence judgments and actions« (Furness and Gilligan, 2010b.: 2198.). To achieve this goal, more effort should be made by social work educators and supervisors to support frontline social workers in addressing their religious/spiritual issues. Supervision support should be given to social workers (and social work students) to articulate and critically review the possible influences of their own religious/spiritual beliefs on their social work practices.

In many countries, religious/spiritual matters have rarely been mentioned in social work training (Garcia-Irons, 2018.); however, on the basis of the insights we gained from this study, a sufficient acknowledgement of the relevance of RS to social work practices seems necessary. Spiritual sensitivity should be incorporated into a cultural competence practice model (Worland and Vaddhanaphuti, 2013.). Social workers' RS should also become a standard topic in social work classes and supervision sessions (Dudley, 2016.).

There are several limitations to this study. As the study relied on self-reports from social workers, selective memory biases and social desirability may affect the results. The sample size was small (n = 11), and the professional experiences of the participants were broad. Similarly, due to the small sample size, this study did not attempt to compare the impacts of Eastern and Western RS on social work practice, although there are marked differences between them; for example, Buddhism promotes self-reliance while Christianity promotes reliance on a supernatural power (Wilson, 2012.). Such differences may generate different impacts on the practice of social work.

## CONCLUSION

This study paid particular attention to the religious/spiritual aspect of social workers' practice, showing how Western and Eastern RS-informed worldviews affect the way social workers practise. The research framework we proposed can serve as a theoretical lens for understanding the complexity of religious/spiritual influences on social work practices. As religious/spiritual beliefs are implicitly incorporated into

social workers' personal cognitive frameworks, the influences may go unnoticed. More attention should be paid to enhancing social workers' awareness of their possible religious/spiritual-related biases.

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# *UTJECAJ RELIGIOZNOSTI I DUHOVNOSTI NA SVAKODNEVNU PRAKSU SOCIJALNIH RADNIKA*

## *SAŽETAK*

*Iako se uspostavljanje socijalnog rada kao profesije temelji na religioznosti/duhovnosti, odnos između socijalnog rada i religioznosti/duhovnosti narušen je zbog profesionalizacije i sekularizacije socijalnog rada. Usprkos tome, religiozne/duhovne vrijednosti važne su za mnoge usluge socijalnog rada i za praksu socijalnog rada kao profesije. Stoga je važno utvrditi ulogu religioznosti/duhovnosti za najizloženije socijalne radnike. U ovom kvalitativnom istraživanju provedeni su ponovljeni razgovori s 11 kineskih socijalnih radnika iz različitih područja socijalnog rada. Uočeno je da istočnjačka i zapadnjačka religioznost/duhovnost mogu unijeti značenje i vrijednost u prirodu profesije.*

**Ključne riječi:** *religioznost, duhovnost, prakse socijalnog rada, kognitivni okvir, duhovna osjetljivost.*

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