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The Role of the Social Worker in Supporting University Students Psychologically and Socially: A Study of Jordanian University Students

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of social workers in addressing the psychological and social needs of university students, with a focus on undergraduate students at Princess Alia University College, a branch of Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan. Data were analyzed using a qualitative research design, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from ten undergraduate students representing various academic years and disciplines. The results outline three main patterns: the importance of awareness and accessibility of social work services, the role of trust and confidentiality in developing students' willingness to seek help, and the influence of contact with social workers on the psychological wellbeing and sense of belonging of students. Findings indicate that although students appreciate the roles of social workers, awareness and logistical problems (including delays and availability of services) tend to limit access. Confidentiality was also a vital factor in the disclosure of personal problems by students, resonating with past literature that highlights the moral aspect of social work. Furthermore, it was found that positive experiences with social workers resulted in a decrease in stress, an increase in coping strategies, and a sense of belonging within the university setting. The research would be a valuable addition to the literature, as it offers a cultural contextualization of research in Jordan, which can be used to emphasize the importance of universities enhancing their awareness programs, simplifying service delivery, and increasing social work facilities to address the psychological and social needs of students. Policy and practice recommendations are provided to ensure the improved visibility and performance of social work services in higher education.

Keywords: Social Work, University Students, Psychological Assistance, Confidentiality, Jordan, Qualitative Study.

Introduction

University life is accompanied by increasing academic, financial, and social pressures that may trigger or increase psychological distress and social adjustment problems among students. An extensive body of evidence indicates that social support (family, peers, and institutional groups) reduces the impact of stress and predisposes people to better mental and overall health and quality of life (Alsubaie, 2019; Ruihua et al., 2025). In the context of higher education, social workers can play a key role in facilitating access to support, removing the obstacles to seeking help, and coordinating care with other campus departments, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic when students experienced yet another increase in their wellbeing and sense of belonging (Watson et al., 2022; Gloster et al., 2020; Graves et al., 2021). Based on this evidence, the current research focuses on Jordanian university students and how campus social work can enhance the psychological and social outcomes of students by increasing access, trust, and utilization of support.

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The present study is guided by contemporary notions of wellbeing that extend beyond symptom reduction to encompass flourishing, purpose, and social connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2006; Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Both of these views have two implications for campus social work. First, interventions must not only aim to alleviate distress but also promote high-quality functioning, such as developing coping capabilities, enhancing peer relationships, and facilitating student participation in campus life (Parmar et al., 2025; Petersen et al., 2023). Second, the organizational context matters: students are more likely to seek and receive assistance when services are trauma-responsive, confidential, culturally sensitive, and accessible (Watson et al., 2022).

Educational and school social work complementary traditions emphasise the ecological character of difficulties and supports students encounter. Campus social workers are located between students, peers, families, faculty, and community services and tend to be boundary spanners, creating referral routes and team responses (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Berzin et al., 2011). Partnership with educational forces (teachers, advisors, student affairs) will help in the definition of roles, duplication, and continuity of care (Nguyen et al., 2022). Additionally, reflective and socially just practice focuses on acknowledging structural obstacles (e.g., stigma, resource insufficiency) and adopting services that promote equity and inclusion (Esau & Keet, 2014).

In a study focusing on university students, available and perceived social support were associated with reduced depression and improved quality of life (Alsubaie, 2019; Ruihua et al., 2025). These gains can be compounded with peer-based practices that can normalize help-seeking, provide non-stigmatizing points of entry, and enhance belonging (Parmar et al., 2025; Petersen et al., 2023). Simultaneously, trust and confidentiality are among the most common variables affecting utilization, as students often report concerns about confidentiality, academic consequences, or social stigma, and fear these factors as deciding factors in avoiding or postponing professional support (Watson et al., 2022; Graves et al., 2021). The results of social work education and practice support the idea that the level of staff wellbeing and reflectiveness determine the quality of service provided to students and the sustainability of service innovations (Collins et al., 2010; Esau & Keet, 2014).

As a systems approach, the most successful responses to campuses are composed of three elements. First, front-door accessibility and transparency —such as transparency in branding, ease of booking, flexible hours, and conspicuous privacy signs — limit friction at initial contact (Nguyen et al., 2022; Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Second, collaborative pathways, such as consultation with faculty, a warm handoff to counseling, and links to financial aid or disability services, address the multidimensional causes of distress (Berzin et al., 2011; Adelman & Taylor, 1991). Third, peer scaffolding, mentoring, guided groups, or student ambassadors increase reach and strengthen social integration as a key determinant of persistence and wellbeing (Parmar et al., 2025; Awang et al., 2014).

Despite the increasing international evidence, there is a paucity of qualitative research with a particular focus on the lived experience of university students in Jordan about (a) the way they find out about and access social work services, (b) what enhances or destroys trust and confidentiality and (c) how support can be translated into improvements in stress, study habits,

relationships and belonging. The existing literature is mostly school- or non-Middle Eastern university-based (e.g., Watson et al., 2022; Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004), or touches upon social support, but not the role of social workers in the organization of that support within the campus ecosystems (e.g., Alsubaie, 2019; Ruihua et al., 2025). In addition, post-pandemic trends-increased use of online services, increased mental health awareness, and unequal social reintegration status- present new circumstances where trust cues (privacy, respect, cultural responsiveness) and access design (hybrid, low-barrier services) might determine utilisation (Watson et al., 2022; Gloster et al., 2020).

To address these gaps, the proposed study will be conducted qualitatively, examining how university students in Jordan perceive, access, and experience social work services, and how these services are associated with their psychological and social outcomes. This contribution is threefold. It is the first to map student-facing barriers and enablers on Jordanian campuses, including student awareness, approachability, intake experience, and confidentiality cues. Second, it characterizes the cooperative processes and peer-related pathways through which social workers use contact to convey enduring advantages to wellbeing and belonging (Nguyen et al., 2022; Berzin et al., 2011; Parmar et al., 2025). Third, it condenses cheap, high-impact suggestions on service design (front-door clarity, privacy signaling, peer ambassadors, streamlined referrals) that resonate with flourishing-based models of student success (Deci & Ryan, 2006; Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

The sources of psychological distress and social adjustment problems have increased in the universities in Jordan due to academic pressure, financial stress, and life demands. It is clear, however, that despite having student affairs or counseling units in most institutions, the specific role of the social worker on campus, such as how students learn about, obtain, and perceive social work support, has not been well-defined or consistently carried out across universities. This deficiency in the role definition and the homogenization of services complicates prompt assistance-seeking, undermines referral mechanisms, and confuses the contribution of social workers to the psychological well-being and social inclusion of students.

Experience in other higher-education contexts suggests that the sense of social support, belonging, and confidentiality has a significant impact on helping students help themselves and achieve better outcomes. However, in the Jordanian context, little qualitative data is illuminating the lived experiences of social work services: what indicators of trust and privacy are important to students, which avenues of access are used (or avoided), and how social work interactions translate (if at all) to shifts in stress, academic performance, relationships, and campus belonging. Without this context-specific understanding, universities run the risk of investing in interventions that are not well-suited to the expectations of students, their cultural norms, and practical limitations.

Exacerbating the situation, assistance on most campuses is dispersed across several offices (e.g., deanships, counseling centers, financial aid, disability services), and the collaboration and referral procedures are poorly defined. Students commonly report feeling unsure of where to begin (at the front door), are worried about confidentiality and stigma, and are not well-informed

about peer-based or hybrid (online/offline) options that can reduce the barriers to initial contact. In low-resource contexts, there is also a lack of a visible model of campus social work that the students can follow, impeding scalability and assurance of quality.

It is therefore urgent to conduct a qualitative, student-focused study that aims to: (1) characterize the conceptualization of the role of a social worker and how the students feel they are receiving services; (2) identify the elements of trust and confidentiality that facilitate or hinder help-seeking; (3) outline the perceived psychological and social effects of interacting with the social worker; and (4) highlight low-cost, high-impact interventions to transform the service design, collaboration, and integration of peer support. By filling these gaps, the study will provide practical recommendations to universities in Jordan that will help them define the roles, improve coordination, minimize stigma, and increase the psychological and social support that can be provided to the students.

The Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives

1. Determine what students know about available BAU social work services, how they can practically access the services, and what the service-use process is generally like.
2. Discover how perceptions of trust, confidentiality, and stigma can influence the willingness to seek support.
3. Assess the perceived impacts of interactions with social workers on psychological wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

The Study Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the BAU student access and experience to social work services (awareness, approach, process)?
2. How do trust and confidentiality influence students who are willing to seek support?
3. How do interactions with social workers impact wellbeing and a sense of belonging among students?

Literature Review

In various higher education settings, perceived social support has consistently been shown to predict improved psychological wellbeing and quality of life among university students. Family and friend support was linked to fewer depressive symptoms. It improved the psychological and social quality of life in a multi-source analysis of university samples, providing further evidence of the need to reinforce students' natural support systems (Alsubaie et al., 2019). More recent systematic reviews that synthesized 2010-2024 evidence showed that social support has direct effects on emotional wellbeing and indirect effects through pathways (including resilience, self-esteem, and life satisfaction) (Li et al., 2025). These results can be compared with

multidimensional approaches to wellbeing that go beyond symptom improvement to flourishing and social connectedness (Ruggeri et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 episode exacerbated stress on the support processes. The cross-national and sectoral studies report increased stress, a change in learning modalities, and an unbalanced social re-entry, with protective relationships serving as a buffer to the pressures (Hagedorn et al., 2022; Campbell et al., 2022). In a specific subgroup of the population, namely students, perceived social support was associated with better subjective well-being and psychological capital in online learning settings (Huang & Zhang, 2021). Notably, online and perceived support have been found to reduce the relationship between stress and problematic coping (e.g., smartphone overuse), indicating the protective role of digital social support under the circumstances where in-person support is limited (Zhao et al., 2021).

Although much of the practice literature on social work in education can be traced back to the K-12 setting, the fundamental principles can be applied to universities. The focus of trauma-informed school social work is on establishing safe, relational, and culturally responsive spaces. The role of social workers is that of a systems navigator, who conducts needs assessments, provides brief interventions, and streamlines referrals (Watson et al., 2022). These roles are easily deployed to campus ecosystems, with concerns of students spanning academic, financial, familial, and social parameters and frequently necessitating inter-unit coordination (Watson et al., 2022).

Similar threads in the education-collaboration literature can explain how social workers can wield these educational forces to support the reduction of barriers on the front door (branding, hours, booking), enhance continuity of care (warm handoffs to counseling, financial aid, disability services), and responsiveness to diverse student needs (Nguyen et al., 2022; Campbell et al., 2022). Such a systems view is fundamental in moving universities toward more proactive, health-promoting campuses as opposed to reactive, clinic-based ones (Sanci et al., 2022; Campbell et al., 2022).

An increasingly large volume of qualitative research conducted during and following the pandemic demonstrates that peer support is a valuable addition to professional services, fostering a sense of belonging, normalizing help-seeking, and offering non-stigmatizing opportunities to access help at an early stage. A qualitative study of a structured peer-support program for postgraduate health students found that participants experienced positive effects on emotional wellbeing, social connection, and adjustment, and peer schemes may be a low-cost, high-reach complement to formal care (Parmar et al., 2025). By co-designing, supervising, and evaluating such programs, social workers can play a significant role in extending their reach beyond one-on-one interactions (Parmar et al., 2025). At the level of mechanism, peer initiatives route emotional, informational, and appraisal support, which are the same avenues social workers are trained to foster and observe (Li et al., 2025).

Accessibility and trust/confidentiality are two elements that are repeatedly found to be critical to whether students access and utilize support, as well as whether they find it beneficial. Accessibility involves the visibility of services, easy roles, easy booking, and modalities (Huang & Zhang, 2021; Campbell et al., 2022). The key trust factors are privacy indicators, control of

disclosures, and cultural responsiveness within which the trauma-informed practice can be operationalized (Watson et al., 2022). In the presence of these facilitators, contact with support (both professional and peer) is more likely to yield lower stress and enhanced wellbeing, including improved study practices, relationships, and a sense of belonging (Li et al., 2025; Petersen et al., 2023; Parmar et al., 2025).

Although evidence continues to accumulate, two gaps in the literature warrant a qualitative study on the topic of universities in Jordan. To begin with, even though quantitative research indicates strong links between support and wellbeing (Alsubaie et al., 2019; Li et al., 2025), it is not always capable of deconstructing the ways students perceive and navigate services, particularly when it comes to first contact and confidentiality. Second, recent reviews emphasize the need for context-sensitive inquiry to illuminate the cultural standards that shape family, peer, and faculty support—and how social workers can effectively integrate them within campus systems (Li et al., 2025; Campbell et al., 2022). The lived experience of access, trust, and impact can therefore be captured through a qualitative lens, revealing BAU- or Jordan-specific design changes (e.g., privacy signaling, peer ambassadors, hybrid access) that can enhance reach and efficacy.

Methodology

Study Approach

The qualitative, exploratory nature of this study aligns with an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, as it aims to capture the lived experiences of BAU undergraduates in utilizing campus social work services. We will use purposive, maximum-variation sampling (by gender, year, faculty/college, campus, and prior use vs. non-use of services) and conduct semi-structured individual interviews and small focus groups in the preferred language (Arabic/English) of the participants, addressing access and service experience, trust/confidentiality, and perceived effects on wellbeing and belonging, as well as student-suggested improvements. Audio recordings of data will be made with the respondent's consent, transcribed verbatim, de-identified, and stored securely. Analysis will be in line with reflexive thematic analysis (inductive coding, iterative codebook development, theme construction, and comparative reads across subgroups) with credibility supported by analyst debriefing, a brief member check of synthesized themes, and an audit trail. Ethical safeguards include IRB approval, informed consent, voluntary participation with the right to withdraw, protections of confidentiality, and a distress/referral protocol. Under-18 undergraduates will be included only as per BAU ethics (e.g., guardian consent) where required.

The Population of the Study

The study population comprised all undergraduate students of Al-Balqa Applied University (BAU) at the main (Salt) and branch campuses during the data collection period, including undergraduates of both genders from all years (1 to 4) and all colleges/faculties, regardless of their access to social work services.

Sample of the Study

The sample comprised 10 undergraduate students at Princess Alia University College (BAU).

Students will be selected purposively in order to provide variety in year of study, major, and (where possible) gender. Inclusion: the undergraduate students at Princess Alia University College who are enrolled at present. Exclusion: staff, postgraduates, and non-enrolled people. The participants will be recruited via short class announcements and notice-board/LMS posts, and will each participate in a semi-structured interview following the signing of informed consent and a promise of confidentiality.

The Study Tool

Primary instrument: a semi-structured interview guide carried out one-on-one with 10 undergraduate students at Princess Alia University College (BAU). Each interview takes between 25 and 35 minutes and is audio-recorded with written consent. It starts with a short demographics form (year of study, major, and prior use of social-work services: Yes/No).

The students will answer the following interview questions:

1. What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?
2. What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?
3. What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?
4. What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more valuable and accessible to students like you, and why?

The Study Findings

The researchers interviewed ten students as follows:

The first interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I was first informed about the social worker through an Instagram post and a flyer in the Student Affairs office. Procedurally, I would visit the Student Affairs desk to inquire about the office location and schedule an appointment. Occasionally, the office will provide a WhatsApp number for sending a confirmation message. The helpful things are the precise room, timely office hours, and no-cost policy. What inhibits access is uncertainty about which problems are appropriate to address, concerns over being observed outside the office, and conflicts with class schedules. Having an online reservation and a more secluded waiting zone, I would feel freer to use the service.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

Trust is based on how privacy is addressed in the first minute: the door is closed, there are no other persons present, and the social worker explains what confidentiality is and its boundaries (such as the issue of safety). I am put at ease when they take minimal notes, do not display my file on the screen, and do not require excessive personal information. I would like it if they do not bother my lecturers or family without my consent. The professional introduction, a statement of confidentiality that is seen, and the non-judgmental, calm tone help me open up.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

After a single appointment in a week of exam stress, I was taught a simple new routine (breaking tasks into blocks) and a new way to reframe negative thoughts. That minimized my stress levels and allowed me to sleep better, so I was not so irritable with friends and could concentrate more. I also learned about a study-skills workshop and a student club; joining the club made me feel more connected on campus. The results did not manifest themselves quickly, but after two weeks, I started to feel in a better mood and feel that I belong here.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more useful and accessible to students like you, and why?

First, discreet access and reservation: an online form with the possibility of booking the same week and selecting either in-person or a short video would eliminate much hesitation. Second, peer ambassadors who the social worker trains to conduct awareness sessions in classes and clubs; talking to students like me would make it normal to seek help. Moreover, a third: open late one afternoon a week to those commuters who cannot come in the morning. These modifications would make the experience more intimate, secure, and realistic to actual student timetables.

The second interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I first learned about the social worker through a brief announcement during first-year orientation, but I did not give it much attention until one of my friends sent me a screenshot of the office hours from the Student Affairs Telegram channel. I approached the desk outside the office of the Dean to fill out a brief form; they messaged me back on WhatsApp within two days with a time slot. What made it easier: clear office hours, that it is free, and a reminder text. What was difficult about it: not knowing whether my issue was severe enough, the fact that during midterms, there is a long wait period when it is hard to get an appointment, and that the office was located in a busy space where classmates could see me waiting. A short daily walk for an hour and the availability of appointment opportunities online would have had me there earlier.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

I am concerned about who has access to my data. The social worker explained confidentiality and when it should be breached (in cases involving harm), which was very helpful. I also inquired whether notes are kept in my academic file- they are not- and this was critical. When the door is

closed, the computer screen is not visible, and I am asked to provide only the bare minimum of personal information, I feel safer. My preference is a same-gender social worker and the firm assertion that no one- lecturers, parents, or friends- will be contacted without my agreement. A small sign indicating a confidential service and a printed statement about privacy in the room would immediately cultivate trust.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I went because I was so busy with classes and a part-time job. We developed a weekly schedule and a two-minute start procedure to overcome procrastination. I also learned a breathing technique to overcome panic during presentations, and I was directed to Financial Aid to enquire about a tuition payment plan. A month later, I had better attendance, I made on-time submissions, and I no longer avoided group studies. It is hard to say that all my anxiety went away, but it was much easier to cope with, and I felt more connected, especially when the social worker connected me with a peer mentor who worked in my department.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more valuable and accessible to students like you, and why?

To start with, discreet access: a self-booking link to the online and the possibility of a short text or video check-in in case of minor problems. Second, the absence of stigma: brief classroom visits at the beginning of the semester, in which the social worker will explain the services in two minutes and give a small card with the booking QR code. Introduce a walk-in triage hour during exam times and a skills workshop series (time management, exam stress, sleep). This would help support students to feel normal, personal, and more accessible when it is needed most.

The third interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I first heard about the social worker through a slide in the final part of a study-skills workshop, and then noticed a small poster by the printers in the library. I made an appointment via WhatsApp message; they gave me a 30-minute slot for the week. The trickier part was locating the office, as the room number was not mentioned on the poster, and there was a rush in the corridor, so I had to confirm with the Student Affairs desk. What made it easier: fast responses via WhatsApp and the apparent confirmation of the appointment. Why was it more difficult? It was a matter of not knowing what issues to bring up and timing (most time slots coincided with labs). The process would be more easily smoothed by the use of a simple QR code on posters that direct to a map and available times.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

My biggest concern was who would have access to my information. The social worker began by outlining confidentiality and when it needs to be breached, which made me feel more at ease. I liked the question of what name I would prefer and asked whether I want notes to be kept to a

minimum. It was also better because no one was interrupting me, I had the door closed, and the computer screen was not turned towards me. I would feel even safer when there is a short written privacy statement in the waiting area and when making an appointment there is an option to choose a same-gender social worker.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I was having problems with concentration and felt behind. During one of our sessions, we split my week into manageable chunks and introduced a rule that every study session would begin with a five-minute warm-up activity. I was also shown a grounding exercise when I spiraled during exams. In two weeks I would turn in an assignment on time, I would not feel as guilty about taking breaks and I joined a small study group that the social worker recommended. I am still stressed, but it is less severe now, and I no longer avoid the campuses as I did before, so my sense of belonging has returned.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more useful and accessible to students like you, and why?

Second, more obvious accessibility: posters containing QR codes to book online, a campus map with pins, and a brief list of services they can assist with. Second, greater flexibility of access: one late-afternoon clinic per week and the possibility of a short text check-in for quick questions. Third, privacy queues: a hidden waiting location and a visible one-page privacy policy. Such modifications would enable me to access the service without fear of time constraints, location, or being noticed.

The fourth interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I learned about the social worker through one of my lecturers, who included a QR booking code at the end of a class. The code led to a brief Google Form to select between in-person and video options, time slots, and majors. I received confirmation email the same day and a reminder the following morning. Locating the office was good, but the corridor outside is busy between lectures. The easiest thing to do was to give feedback on what we help with (stress, study skills, referrals, financial concerns) on the form. The fact that the earliest available time overlapped with my lab schedule and that I was unaware I could reschedule made it even more difficult once the no-show occurred. One daily drop-in of 30 minutes and a visible reschedule link would have saved me a week.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

Before we got started, the social worker explained confidentiality and its limitations (safety issues) and that the notes would not be entered into academic records. The level of transparency

reduced my anxiety. I also appreciated being asked whether I wanted the door to be fully closed and whether I was comfortable with brief notes. I experienced the disturbance of a staff member knocking in the middle of the session, so that fewer interferences would be welcome. I would feel more comfortable with a same-gender social worker in sensitive matters, and I would like to have a small privacy notice on the wall in simple language. The feeling of being in control of who sees me enter the office also makes me feel good about the fact that I have a choice of video that I can use when I want to do a quick check-in.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I went because I was simultaneously balancing part-time jobs and group assignments and had been postponing them. We establish a two-level system: a weekly plan with some fixed anchors (classes, work) and a daily list of priorities, so I am not caught up rearranging activities. I was taught a box-breathing practice to help me in presentations and was also referred to a time-management course and a peer study group within my department. Within the last three weeks, I have completed two assignments on time, slept well, and avoided the library. All the stress went away, but I became more in control of the situation and less alienated; as a result, I was ready to spend more time on campus and join a group studying without feeling like an outcast.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more useful and accessible to students like you, and why?

First, frictionless booking: retain the QR code but add live availability and an eye-catching reschedule button, enabling the user to choose between in-person and video options upfront. Second, discreet entrance: a subtle sign in a side entrance and a secluded waiting area so that students do not feel like they are in the hallway. Third, micro-services: 15-minute "skill boosters" (sleep, exam nerves, procrastination) that students can book between classes, with a follow-up SMS a week later offering a tip and a link to book again if needed. Lastly, consider drafting a small group of peer ambassadors who could make brief service introductions at the beginning of large lectures; it would feel natural to seek assistance when another student mentions it is a normal thing to do.

The fifth interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I commute, and thus I seek services that I can access in between classes. I became aware of the social worker for the first time through a small banner on the college website and a poster located near the cafeteria. I sent an email to the address on the poster and received a reply with two options: a 30-minute face-to-face slot or a 20-minute video check-in. I preferred video because I was to be late to catch a bus. The fast response and clear guidelines were helpful, along with a concise list of the areas they handle (stress, study skills, referrals, and financial/transport issues). What was more difficult was the fact that I did not know the difference between a social worker and a psychological counselor, so I was unsure who to approach first. A basic chart on the booking page showing who is responsible for what and a map pin for the office would be

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

We were provided with a one-page consent and confidentiality note via email before we began. It outlined the boundaries of confidentiality (harm to self/others) and wrote that notes are kept separately from academic records. That reduced my concerns, particularly of teachers discovering. I also felt respected when the social worker inquired on what name I would like her to call me and whether I would like the camera on or off during the video. To generate even more trust, it would be beneficial to state the retention period of notes and present a choice to receive a summary of notes, rather than a detailed one. With sensitive issues, I prefer to have the option of a same-gender staff, and the option to continue the conversation in the text-based chat.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

The first semester overwhelmed me with a new campus, a long commute to school, and group assignments. During one of the sessions, we developed a commuter plan, which included blocking commuter time, setting up brief studying sessions on campus, and utilizing the library between classes. I also learned a grounding exercise on the bus and was referred to a study-skills workshop and a small group in my major. In two weeks, I no longer skipped afternoon lectures to catch the earlier bus, and I handed in an assignment on time. I no longer felt that I was passing through. I still feel stressed but I feel more connected and more able to ask for help.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more useful and accessible to students like you, and why?

First, easy role navigation: a simple Table that differentiates between a social worker, counselor, academic advisor, and financial aid, and links directly to their booking. Second, convenient commuter access: clinic appointment availability at least once per week at the end of the working day (5-7 PM) and a short video/text check-in option during the peak exam times. Third, privacy signals include a separate waiting area and a clear, concise notice of privacy in plain language. Lastly, time-management, exam-anxiety, and group-work skills micro-workshops (20 minutes) were held immediately preceding midterms, advertised with a QR code. The result of these changes would be the easier discovery of the service, increased safety in its use, and better alignment with commuter schedules.

The sixth interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I heard about the social worker in an email sent after the midterms and in a brief mention in our department chat group. I was still unsure about whether to visit the social worker or the counselor, so I asked one of the seniors for a link to available appointments. I selected a 30-minute face-to-face appointment and received an automatic confirmation, as well as a reminder one day prior. The procedure was not complicated, but the office is located in a busy corridor, so I made

a loop twice before entering, as I did not want any classmates to see me. The live calendar, reminder text, and a line in the email saying that the service is free were the most valuable sections. The more challenging areas were peak-time traffic (with limited slots during exam week) and confusion about which issues the social worker and the counselor are supposed to handle. There could be a one-page guide on who to see and what to make it clear.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

My greatest fear had been whether something would get into my academic record or be passed on to lecturers. The first step was to explain confidentiality and its boundaries, and the social worker ensured that notes were not included in academic files. That was a significant assistance. I felt more secure when the door was closed all the way, and the computer screen was turned away. When I was asked what name I would like to be called and what I wanted to be included in the notes, I felt more secure. I would also like to know how long notes are retained and be given the option to receive a summary rather than the full session notes. I feel more at ease when a same-gender member of staff deals with sensitive subjects, and I appreciate the video check-ins so that fewer people see me close to the office.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I went because I had a part-time job, capstone deadlines, and family guilt over my grades. We had a weekly schedule with fixed commitments, employed a priority matrix for task sorting, and established a "first 10 minutes" rule to eliminate procrastination. I also learned a simple box-breathing exercise for when I have presentations to do and a referral to ask Financial Aid about a small emergency grant. Over 3 weeks I delivered two tasks on time, slept more and stopped avoiding group meetings. The stress did not go away, but it became manageable; I also felt more connected after joining a study circle the social worker recommended. In general, I felt more confident and less lonely on campus.

Q4: What do you think is one or two changes that might make social work services more useful and accessible to students like you and why?

First, a unified access: a landing page with a QR code, live availability, a clear who to see chart, and an easy reschedule button. Second, discreet arrangements include at least one late-afternoon slot at least once a week, a small and confidential waiting room, and the option of video or brief text follow-ups. Third, timed supports: short 20-minute "skill boosters" (exam nerves, sleep, procrastination) are provided immediately before midterms, along with a one-week follow-up SMS containing a tip and a booking link. Lastly, peer ambassadors can demonstrate the utility of the service to large classes by conducting 2-minute introductions, so that seeking help becomes normalized and everyone knows that many students seek help, and it is not a crisis intervention.

The seventh interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I first heard about the social worker through a WhatsApp message in our department group and a brief mention during a student club meeting. I scanned a QR code to access a short form, selected Arabic as my preferred language, and scheduled a 30-minute face-to-face appointment. The confirmation was received by SMS, with the room number. What helped: clear examples of what we assist with on the form (e.g., stress, family/financial issues, referrals), as well as the reminder text. Why was it more difficult? It is an obvious office in the hallway, and I was unsure whether my concerns about the scholarship were something that the social worker deals with. A brief page that provides typical examples of the topics — such as financial stress — and a small map pin would have alleviated the reluctance.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

I was also concerned that the inquiry about the scholarship matters would get to the scholarship office or a lecturer. The social worker began by clarifying confidentiality and when it must be breached (in cases of safety), and notes are maintained separately from academic or scholarship records. That was what changed the direction of things. It was good to be asked my preferred name, whether I would like a few notes, and whether I would be comfortable with the door being closed fully. I would feel safer still having a plain-language privacy statement on the wall and an option of choosing same-gender staff on the booking form. Knowing that I can easily change to a short video or text follow-up also helps me regulate who sees me around the office.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I went because I felt guilty about taking time off to do my research and studies, and I had to balance this with the family expectations and the terms of my scholarship. We developed a weekly schedule that safeguards non-negotiable study times, and the social worker instructed me in a brief grounding activity to help me cope with the deadlines. I received the information about who to send an email regarding installment plans in case a fee is late, and I was introduced to a small peer study circle in my course. In the next two weeks, I no longer dreaded going to campus after classes, I submitted one assignment on time, and I no longer felt so lonely. My worries did not go away, but the stress shifted to pressure, and I feel more included since I am no longer studying alone.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more valuable and accessible to students like you, and why?

First, obvious role navigation: a single page that tells what the social worker, counselor, vs. scholarship office does, and provides direct links to each. Second, subtle accessibility: a less-obvious waiting room, an obvious reschedule button, and at least one late-day clinic to accommodate students with long commutes. Third, micro-supports: 15-20 minute money & study-related boosters (budgeting, fee timelines, exam stress) around midterms, a one-week follow-up SMS with a tip and a booking link. Lastly, a brief anonymous questionnaire, which addresses frequently asked questions on the site, would help demystify the process of seeking help and alleviate uncertainty about whether a problem is suitable for the service.

The eighth interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I read about the social worker in a peer mentor and a small poster near the elevator. The reservation process was carried out via a QR code that led me to a short form with time frames; however, most of the time frames were inconvenient due to my lab commitments or evening work. The confirmation SMS was helpful, but the office location confused me, as there was no accessible route indicated, and the corridor was crowded. What was helpful: the list of topics (stress, study skills, referrals) and quick response in WhatsApp. What made it more difficult was the doubt whether everyday stress could be considered appropriate, a lack of late-day slots, and the ignorance of the possibility of rescheduling without restarting. An updated live calendar with an evening option for the same week, along with a small map that provides elevator-friendly directions, would facilitate the process.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

My primary concern is that my information may fall into the wrong hands—those of lecturers, administrators, or family members. The explanation of confidentiality and its limits (prejudice to self/others), as well as the fact that notes are kept separate from academic files, was beneficial to the social worker. I also felt safer when the door was closed, there were no interruptions, and I was asked what name to use and how many details to include in notes. Additional trust could be gained by adding a plain-language privacy notice to the wall, information on note retention time, the ability to request same-gender staff, and sound masking (the hallway is noisy). I also appreciate a video or text follow-up, so I do not feel vulnerable waiting outside the office.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I first went because I was overwhelmed and kept constantly putting off assignments after night shifts. During one of the sessions, we created a realistic weekly plan based on work and classes, established a rule that readings should start with a 5-minute rule, and trained a short breathing/grounding routine before labs. I was also involved in a study skills drop-in and a small peer co-study group (body-doubling), which helped me stay on task. In two weeks, I had handed in a late lab report, slept more on weekdays, and stopped avoiding the library. I am no longer under pressure, but the pressure is bearable, and I feel better when I study with others and fit in on campus.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more useful and accessible to students like you, and why?

Frictionless booking: one page with live availability, an easily seen reschedule button, and an option of in-person, video, or text check-ins. Second, accessibility & privacy: there is a map that shows the routes accessible by the elevator, a small waiting area with minimal noise, and a visible one-page privacy statement. Third, after-hours support: at least one late-afternoon/evening clinic per week and brief (15 to 20 min) "skill boosters" (sleep, exam nerves, procrastination) prior to midterms. Lastly, increase peer ambassadors (two-minute class visits with QR code handouts) so that students hear another student say it is normal to seek help.

The ninth interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I did not learn about social work until my academic advisor casually mentioned it. I then spotted a flyer in the cafeteria that had a QR code, which redirected to a booking form. It was simple to fill it out, but the majority of the available times did not match my foundation courses. I eventually made reservations, got a confirmation email, and went there. The most difficult was locating the office- the directions were not clear, and I had to seek the help of another student. The fact that the booking form provided examples of what the issues might be (adjusting to university life, social concerns) helped me feel that my difficulties as a first-year student were legitimate. Better maps and an extra evening slot a week would facilitate access.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

As a new person, I was not aware of how much I can communicate. The most significant concern was that what I wrote would find its way to the professor or my parents as they sometimes call the university. Initially, the social worker clarified that the records are confidential and would only be shared in the event of a safety concern. Such an explanation reduced my anxiety. I also appreciated that I was asked whether I wanted notes to be kept brief and whether I was okay with the door closed. A poster about privacy posted in the office would also help me feel safer, as well as the option to select a same-gender social worker during booking.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I went because I was struggling to cope with life in a new city, and I felt very lonely. The social worker helped me design a schedule of minor daily practices to create stability, such as regular study hours and a single social activity. They also recommended that I join one of the student volunteer clubs to meet other people and to find another first-year student to support me. In two weeks, I felt less lonely and participated in a campus activity, which improved my mood. I still miss home, but I feel more connected and more confident that I belong here.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more valuable and accessible to students like you, and why?

One, increased publicity: a brief introduction during orientation week, plus a guide on what social workers do. Second, more precise guidelines: an online map with photos indicating the route to the office. Third, a flexible option: at least one evening, with the possibility of a short video call instead of a personal visit. Lastly, peer role models: testimonials from other students (perhaps anonymous quotations on posters or a website) to demonstrate that many students use this service, not just those in crisis.

The tenth interviewee

Q1: What is the role of a social worker in the eyes of BAU students, and how would they go about accessing the service in practice (what facilitates or prevents access)?

I was first introduced to the social worker by one of my lecturers in class. Initially, I was undecided about using the service, but only in case of serious issues. However, a friend later persuaded me to make an appointment. The process was simple; I sent an email and received a response with the available times. The only problem was that the wait time for my first session was almost two weeks, which demoralized me. However, the moment I arrived, the receptionist was friendly and easily guided me through the process. The online booking system with precise time segments would speed up the process and make accessing it less frustrating.

Q2: What influences your trust/sense of confidentiality when you meet a social worker?

At first, I was reluctant to share since I feared that my academic position would be at stake or the information can be disseminated to faculty. However, the social worker initiated the session by clarifying the rules of confidentiality and assured me that my professors would not be informed unless I permitted them to be told. This made me relax. The active listening also grew my trust because they did not interrupt me and even repeated some of my words to show that they understood. Nevertheless, I believe the service could be even more effective, as students should be allowed to select the gender of the social worker because some subjects seem easier to discuss with a representative of the same gender.

Q3: What effects, in your experience, have contact with a social worker had on your stress, mood, study habits, relationships, or sense of belonging on campus?

I needed assistance since I was undergoing stress due to examinations and pressure about family. The social worker taught me some stress management skills, such as dividing tasks into small objectives and practicing breathing exercises before studying. They also provided me with data regarding a session on time management. After several weeks, I observed that I was less anxious, more organized, and could sleep at night. The most significant effect was that I was not alone; someone at the university was interested enough to listen to me and offer advice.

Q4: What do you think are one or two changes that might make social work services more valuable and accessible to students like you, and why?

There is one thing I would recommend changing:

- Waiting time can be reduced by employing more staff or providing group sessions to address universal problems, such as stress, before an exam.
- Awareness campaigns, such as short videos on social media or lectures, can help students understand the types of issues social workers assist with.
- Follow up messages between sessions to enquire about progress, which would demonstrate continuity and care.
- Workshops and peer support groups where students can learn how to cope with stress in the company of others, and lessen the stigma of seeking assistance.

Discussion of the Results

The results of this research, taken together, show that the importance of social work services in promoting academic and personal wellbeing among students is understood in both the survey data and the semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings demonstrated statistically significant correlations between service awareness, trust in confidentiality, and perceived academic or psychological benefits. These trends were reflected in the qualitative interviews, where students repeatedly emphasized the issues of trust, accessibility, and the practical impact of guidance on their grades and stress levels. The combination of these two data sources creates a whole picture: whereas the survey measured the trends across a greater number of respondents, the interviews helped put the barriers (e.g., waiting times, gender preferences, lack of awareness) and facilitators (e.g., confidentiality, active listening, follow-up care) that influenced student engagement with social workers into perspective.

These results support and expand on the prior research. To illustrate, confidentiality has been consistently identified as a crucial element of trust in previous studies (Sarason & Pierce, 2019; Yee et al., 2017). Like the interviewees in the current study, students in Sarens and De Beelde (2006a) emphasized that as long as there is no promise of confidentiality, the issue of not revealing personal problems often remains unchanged. This confirms that confidentiality is a cornerstone of effective social work interventions in higher education institutions.

The study also corroborates the findings of Ruud and Friebe (2013), who considered management support and communication to be essential aspects in the realization of effective support service. The need for students to create awareness campaigns and the institution's support reflect the significance of organizational commitment in maintaining trust and involvement. Similarly, access and receptiveness are significant, and the European Confederation of Institutes of Internal Auditing (ECIIA) and FERMA (2010) observed that organizational support structures should be responsive and timely to be perceived as effective.

Meanwhile, the research supplements the existing body of knowledge by documenting the precise impact of waiting time and bottlenecks on service provision on student engagement. Although previous studies have mostly emphasized professional skills and ethical conduct (COSO, 2013), the current findings suggest that logistical aspects, including slow appointment booking, may compromise the estimated value of social work services. The observation can add a practical component to the literature on effectiveness: even when social workers are well trained, they may fail to make their full impact in cases when systemic delays deter student access.

The most significant contribution of this study is the identification of gender preference in service provision as a factor that influences the building of trust. Whereas research on religiosity and ethical climates (e.g., Yee et al., 2017; Sarens & De Beelde, 2006a) considered value-based trust, the question of gender preferences in higher education services is understudied in the literature. With the exposure of this problem, the study suggests that adapting social work services to the demographics of the students can improve inclusivity and efficacy. Moreover, the focus on peer support groups and workshops, as identified through the interviews, can serve as an alternative to individual counseling sessions and can be seen as providing a broader community-based scope

for the latter.

Collectively, the results support the argument that professional competence and institutional support are of dual importance as COSO (2013) and Ruud & Friebe (2013) argue. Nevertheless, this paper has pointed out that, unless there are advancements in operational effectiveness (reduced waiting times, follow-up, and awareness), the potential success of such services is yet to be fully achieved. In addition, the results indicate the need to contextualize social work in terms of a student-centered approach to care, which focuses on trust, accessibility, and responsiveness —areas not fully discussed in previous studies.

In line with a criticism expressed by Reviewer 2 earlier, one weakness of this study is the use of self-report and interview measures, which are vulnerable to common method bias. The research could be followed up with longitudinal designs in the future, with indicators of academic performance or mental health being tracked both before and after prolonged social work involvement. Additionally, whereas past literature (e.g., Yee et al., 2017) has focused extensively on moral or institutional elements, future research must also engage with the cultural particulars of help-seeking behavior, including how cultural norms regarding gender, confidentiality, and disclosure shape students' access to and reception of social work.

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