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Social Work and Facing Child Poverty in Iraq: A Comparative Study between Governmental Social Work Institutions and Non-Governmental Institutions

Abstract

Social work is a profession to help individuals, families, and communities to promote the well-being of the human and society, and this goal is achieved through social and economic justice while enhancing the quality of life of human and community. The study illustrates the importance of promoting integration with governmental and civil social work institutions to achieve the reduction of multidimensional child poverty. The descriptive and comparative approach as well as the social survey was used in this study. Collected data from 50 governmental and non-governmental institutions, where the study reached several conclusions, the most important of which is that social work institutions have an important and effective role in confronting the poverty of children in Iraq despite the existence of economic and social obstacles to their work. It also showed the contribution of non-governmental institutions to alleviating the burden on the government by providing assistance that enables poor families to cope with the poor standard of living and to enable them to get out of poverty.

Keywords: Social Work, Social Work Institutions, Poverty, Child Poverty, Social Service, Iraq.

Introduction

Social work aims to enhance cooperation between people and leaders so as to solve various problems quickly and to reduce harm as much as possible. Social work is more effective and efficient than individual work. It can address the problem of poverty through specifying its causes and finding solutions, thus prepare the poor for a better life. Poverty is a serious social problem that threatens the security and stability of societies. Regardless of their wealth and development, all societies suffer from the problem of poverty, and they are working hard to reduce its effects, whether at the family or community level (Noh H. and Kim K. S. (2015)).

To address the impact of poverty on individuals and in particular on children, the researcher refers to some scientific and research studies. Such studies found out that poverty is not limited to individuals lack money or food, but it is also the main cause of mental illness and a lot of organic diseases. Studies showed that there is a direct relationship between poverty and psychological and social illnesses, which need to be dealt with adequately and rapidly. Using systematic scientific methods, this study aims to examine the role of social work with a renewed vision to identify ways against poverty in Iraq. It emphasizes on the work of governmental and non-governmental social institutions in achieving their humanitarian objectives (Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017)).

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Child poverty refers to those children who come from poor families and orphans who depend on the limited, or non-existent, resources of a country. This term also describes children who are unable to achieve the minimum standard of living in their society, which is indeed very low in developing countries. Children who live in poverty suffer from deprivation of material, spiritual, and emotional resources necessary for development and prosperity. Such deprivation results in individuals unable to enjoy their rights, to realize their full potential, or to participate fully and equally as members of society (Alkire S. (2013)).

This cycle is not inevitable, but can be changed. There are strategies to deal with hard-to-reach groups and to expand opportunities for them. When policies, programs, and public spending priorities that target the most deprived children are set by the government, then transforming the lives of those children and their societies is possible. Yet, when governments fail to focus on meeting the needs of marginalized people, the lives and futures of millions of children would be at risk. Thus, there are two potential solutions for this problem. It is either to save children who are vulnerable to exclusion or to risk them in an unfair world. The current study focuses on the importance of social work institutions in addressing child poverty and the challenges facing poor families and their children (Chzhen Y., Gordon D. and Handa S. (2018)).

Child poverty is one of the major issues that need governmental and non-governmental efforts. Children in poor families not only suffer from scarcity of funds, food and poor housing, but also a lack of psychological and behavioral education, poor family control and a low level of awareness. Such sufferings expose them, especially when they are young, to many negative experiences and attitudes, and lead to future psychological and behavioral problems. Those children are fertile ground for all forms of deviance. In poor neighborhoods, children go out at a very young age to streets, hang out for long hours, and mix with different age groups and ethnicities. There is no parents' supervision or awareness, resulting in the child developing multiple behavioral issues such as smoking and theft (Abdu, M., & Delamonica, E. (2018)).

Many children also become victims to sexual harassment and sometimes unspoken sexual assaults. The academic achievement of children is adversely affected by poor parental care and follow-up. Some problems like skipping school, repeated failure and dropping out at an early educational stage increase in the poor strata of society. That is why when children spend much of their time away from family

control and school guidance, they start to embrace street culture that encourages deviant, aggressive and socially unacceptable behaviors. Also, it becomes a source of pride, proficiency and courage. The practice of theft, smoking and drug abuse spread among them (UNICEF. (2017)).

Childhood is a critical stage of development during which individuals' characters are formed negatively or positively. Therefore, it is necessary to care for these children and to secure all the requirements and conditions for proper psychological, mental, physical and cognitive development. The next generation will not live on the margin of a society where unemployment, behavioral deviations and ignorance are found (Obaid, M. Y. (2020)).

1. Child Poverty Reduction Strategy

The Iraqi government seeks to address the deprivations and weaknesses that children face, as it is critical to eradicate poverty, as well as to achieve human and economic development. The Iraqi government has renewed its commitment to the issue of child rights, and set out its vision in this regard in the Iraqi National Development Plan 2013-2017. Besides, the Higher Committee on Poverty Reduction Policies at the Ministry of Planning agreed to include the consequences of child poverty in the new strategy for poverty alleviation for the years 2017-2021. With support from UNICEF, The Iraqi government aims to tackle both monetary and non-monetary indicators of child poverty in the upcoming poverty alleviation strategy of 2017-2021. Child poverty and their deprivation must be included at the center of the social, educational and health protection pillars of the poverty alleviation strategy (UNICEF. (2017)).

The Iraqi economy needs integrated policies that conform to each other and ensure the achievement of sustainable economic growth. Also, it needs to overcome the problems that are exacerbated against unfavorable conditions for the economic growth and the prosperity of the private sector. Nevertheless, macro/microeconomic policies can strike a balance between the positive and negative impacts of shocks on vulnerable groups, namely the poor and those at the risk of poverty, and provide them with protection using the regular methods. Yet, if these methods are not conducive to poverty alleviation, these must not be harmful. In addition, the sharp disparity in poverty rates between governorates can be addressed through justice and equity in allocating resources. These differences resulted from the unbalanced pattern of development, wars and conflicts over the past decades. The

proper and successful implementation of decentralization can contribute to enhancing a sense of justice, and thus developing social cohesion (Yassin, Bushra Ramadan, (2019)). Reconstruction policy can also be employed as a direct policy towards poverty alleviation in liberated areas. The findings indicate a weak link between growth of poverty and its alleviation because oil is the only source of growth, so growth is not comprehensive (Al-Alaak M. et al (2014)).

2. Causes of Multidimensional Poverty

In order to develop programs and projects to face poverty in Iraq effectively, it is necessary to identify its causes and not focus only on describing the poor in society and estimating the rate of poverty in the regions, where it is necessary to understand clearly the reasons that led them to reach that situation, and the most important of them:

1. Wars and political instability: In addition to the emergence of the problem of displacement led to the situation of the population has deteriorated and the poverty rate has increased, especially in the central and southern regions. Recent years have greatly affected Iraqi society and the foundations on which the state and economy are built, with poverty and destitution becoming the main feature of Iraqi families (Obaid, M.Y., & Ali, M.K. (2020)).
2. Education: Literacy programs are needed for the poor. The reducing of poverty can only be done through works of education development assistance and financial contribution from wealthiest countries in education development. The fight against poverty and the promotion of an equal education must become a priority for all especially the governments. Development initiatives should be in the form of cooperation to transfer skills to targeted population. Quality education is most critical solution so that they can help themselves to come out from poverty circle. Priority must be given to children aged 6 and below so that the habit to learn and develop study technique can be instilled, and thus have a greater chance to perform and excel in the elementary, high school, and college years. What children learn before the age of six has a long-term impact on their minds and hearts. This will help to shape their characters and personalities the most (Banks, N., & Hulme, D. (2012)).

3. In addition to quality basic education, secondary and higher education, vocational training, and skill acquisition throughout life are indispensable tools to eradicate poverty. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Development Vision 2025, for example, has identified education as tool to transform a low productivity agricultural economy into a semi-industrialized. Agriculture needs to be modernized for increased productivity and profitability, innovation in agro-processing, technology innovation, and upgrading the use of technologies for value addition. Apparently, the promotion of education in science and technology in Tanzania has promoted growth and the reduction of poverty. Subsequently, with a critical mass of high-quality educated people at different levels, it can effectively respond to the sustainable development challenges of nations (Ng A. et al (2013)).
4. Among the factors of increasing poverty in Iraq are the negative effects of the economic and financial crisis. Such a crisis results from the decline of oil prices in the international market, the drop in the country's earnings, and the security deterioration due to the terrorist occupation of three governorates, namely Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Anbar in 2014. (Obaid, M.Y., & Ali, M.K. (2020)).
5. One of the major reasons of poverty in Iraq is the largest wave of displacement in 2014 which is a new challenge to the Iraqi situation. According to the data of the International Organization for Migration in Iraq, the total number of internally displaced persons reached about 3.3 million after January 2014. The simulation conducted by the experts of the World Bank showed that the poverty rate among the displaced people increased by about 15 degrees, from 23% to 38%, which is almost double the rate compared to the rest of the population. In other words, there are four poor people out of every ten displaced persons (Ministry of Planning (2018)).
6. Unemployment: In Iraq, unemployment is one of the major challenges to the Iraqi economy and it has led to perilous economic and social effects. Rapid developmental procedures must be taken to create jobs that absorb new entrants to the labour market. Unemployment has impacted economic security of both the individuals and society, and it causes them to lose the basic, and perhaps the only, income and exposes them to

poverty and deprivation. Rising unemployment led to an increase in poverty rate. Some of the reasons are the deterioration of the standard of living and the low level of economic well-being. For that, there is an inverse relationship between the level of welfare and unemployment rates (Saunders, P. (2002)).

3. Nature of Work of Social Work Institutions

The concepts, methods and pillars of social work have undergone many changes and developments in accordance with the changes of social needs. These changes that took place in the purposes and objectives of social work are of great interest to the current study. As the primary objective of social work was to provide service to society in all its segments, now the main objective is to change and improve the society. Such a goal can be achieved by the sincerity and seriousness of social work and the society's will to bring about development. (Trevithick, P. (2005)).

It is noteworthy that social work has become one of the main pillars of social progress and a standard for measuring how individuals fulfill it. There are several factors for the success of social work, the most important of which is human resource. The more human is enthusiastic about social issues and aware of the dimensions of social works, the more positive and real the social work will be. Social work constitutes an empty space for society members to exercise loyalty and belonging to their communities. It also represents an important area for refining individual skills and building their abilities (Yassin, A. (2002)). Social work aims to help individuals and families with their problems and needs through governmental or non-governmental institutions providing human services. These institutions include civil society organizations, religious organizations, tribal leaders and elders, and others who have power and influence over the society. They offer services to help individuals and families having productive lives in their communities. The social worker has an effective role not only to direct individuals toward ways to help but to provide them with hope and power. Social work has other goals among which is providing services to those who need help, especially young people, children, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, those who suffer from abuse, those who are subject to family violence and the unemployed. Social work helps them with their problems and obstacles, and it enhances their ability to adapt and reintegrate into their society (Yassin, A. (2002)). Social Protection Authority at the

Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is one form of social work in Iraq. It was established by the approval of the Council of Representatives and the President of the Republic based on the provisions of Article (61), Clause (3) of (73) of the Constitution. Thereby, an entity and a social protection system are created for the first time at the national level. In Iraq, the strategies of addressing poverty must not only provide monthly allowance, but comprehensive care for families. Under difficult circumstances and with modest means, the Social Protection Authority was able to implement the new Law on Social Protection Number 11 of 2014. (Abdu, M., & Delamonica, E. (2018)). The pilot program related to cash subsidies for health and education was implemented in Sadr Region/2, in cooperation with some ministries like ministry of health, education, and planning, and institutions like the World Bank and UNICEF. This program is part of Article 8/2 of the Social Protection Law Number 11 on social protection in 2014, and it was applied experimentally for two years. A recent electronic program includes a follow-up to the regularity of children of the families contracted in the study and a follow-up program for pregnant women and regular vaccinations. These two programs form an overall picture of the participants' cooperation in implementing the program, which originally aims to combat illiteracy and bring back children who drop out of school by the age of 9-14 years (Al-Sudani T. M. (1997)). Additional and conditional payments are included in the second batch of the social protection subsidy for 2018 to poor families within the pilot zone. The social protection program assigned for those families provides further subsidies so that their children would not drop out of school. According to the conditional subsidy program, each child attends school regularly is allocated 15,000 Iraqi dinars. In terms of adherence to vaccines and visit health centers, pregnant women receive 10,000 dinars. Such programs seek to ensure recovery, stability, and a continuing education for these families so as to break the cycle of inheriting poverty (Al-Namlah, A.I. (2014)).

Research Questions

The research aims to identify the reasons and motives of Child Poverty. It also investigates the social impacts that child poverty has on society through the following questions:

1. Can Social Work Institutions (governmental and non-governmental) cope with child poverty in Iraq?
2. Are the governmental institutions more influential or the non-governmental in poverty assistance?

3. What challenges do Social work Institutions face in addressing poverty in Iraq?

1. Data Collection

Several data-collection tools have been used to obtain data for the study. The researcher uses an interview as it provides detailed information on the work of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Also, observation is employed to identify the individual's actual behavior. Lastly, the researcher sets a number of questions in the form of a questionnaire to find out the participants attitudes and opinions about social work institutions to address child poverty.

Methodology

The researcher uses a descriptive analysis to study the social work of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the procedures to face child poverty in Iraq. The current study not only describes data, but also analyses it and generalizes the findings. The current study investigates the phenomenon of child poverty as it exists and it gives an adequate description of it. The data is presented quantitatively supported by a qualitative analysis. The researcher uses a descriptive method to describe the dimensions of the child poverty problem in Iraq. The study involves a number of institutions such as some governmental institutions, namely the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Social Welfare Department in Baghdad, and officials in private institutions like civil society organizations in Baghdad.

Result

Many questions were presented to 25 government institutions and 25 non-governmental institutions working in the field of social work. The 12 of these institutions are for-profit institutions, 20% of government institutions, and 28% of non-governmental institutions; Table 1 shows the nature of work of social work institutions.

Table 1.

Illustrates the nature of the work of social work institutions.

Nature of the social institutions work	governmental institution		Non-governmental institution		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
For-profit	5	20%	7	28%	12
Non-profit	20	80%	18	72%	38
Total	25	100%	25	100%	50

Table 2.

Illustrates the services provided by social work institutions.

Services provided by the institution	governmental institution		Non-governmental institution		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
To secure nutrition requirements	8	32%	10	40%	18
To provide sums of money for poor families	10	40%	6	24%	11
To provide housing	2	8%	3	12%	5
To foster care for orphan	5	20%	6	24%	16
Total	25	100%	25	100%	50

The results in Table 2 the services provided by institutions, where shows that 40% of government institutions provide cash to poor families, while 40% of non-governmental institutions provide food supplies.

Most government institutions give training courses in different fields to poor families to help them gain experience to enable them to escape poverty. The proportion of government institutions offering training programs was 72%, while 78% of non-governmental institutions did

not present any training programs; Table 3 explains this. While Table 4 shows the procedures taken by social work institutions to assistant children get out of poverty. Where found that 40% of government institutions and 48% of non-governmental institutions follow children's education and the elimination of school dropouts. Also, 28% of government institutions and 32% of non-governmental institutions provide health care for children.

Table 3.

Illustrates the training courses offered by social work institutions.

Are there training courses for poor families to face poverty?	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Yes	18	72%	6	24%	24
No	7	28%	19	76%	26
Total	25	100%	25	100%	50

Table 4.

Illustrates the procedures of social work institutions to face child poverty

procedures used to face child poverty	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Continuing education for children until adulthood	10	40%	12	48%	22
Health care for children	7	28%	8	32%	15
Health care for children with special needs	5	20%	3	12%	8
Providing entertainment and trips for children	3	12%	2	8%	5
Total	25	100%	25	100%	50

Table 5.

Illustrates challenges to social work institutions in facing poverty.

The challenges to social institutions	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution	
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank
Economic Obstacles	25	First	25	First
Security Obstacles	17	Third	18	Second
Social obstacles	21	second	9	third

Table 5 shows the most substantial challenges and difficulties facing social work institutions that hinder them in the performance of their work. It turns out that economic constraints come in first place for the difficulties facing the work of both governmental and non-governmental social work institutions. The most important strategies taken by social work

Institutions are the care of the orphans, where come in the first place. The elimination of school evasion comes second in the strategies carried out by government institutions, while the relief of displaced persons comes second to the strategies of non-governmental institutions. Table 6 shows the strategies taken by social workers to address child poverty.

Table 6.

Illustrates the strategies used by social work institutions to confront poverty

The strategy employed by the institutions	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution	
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank
promoting participation in volunteerism	15	Fifth	19	Third
Eliminating school drop-out	23	second	14	fourth
Supporting small enterprises	17	fourth	4	fifth
Engaging in relief operations for the displaced and those affected by natural disasters	19	third	22	second
Care for orphans	25	first	23	first

Table 7.

illustrates the contribution of social work institutions in empowering the poor

Contribution of social work institutions in empowering the poor	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution		total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Yes	8	32%	2	8%	10
No	17	68%	23	92%	40
Total	25	10%	25	100%	50

Table 8.

Illustrates meetings organized by social work institutions between the poor and officials

Do social work institutions organize meetings between officials and the poor?	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Yes	17	68%	9	36%	26
No	8	32%	16	64%	24
Total	25	100%	25	100%	50

Table 9.

Illustrates the future enterprises that social work institutions use to confront child poverty in Iraq

The future projects and services developed for poor families	Governmental institution		Non-governmental institution	
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank
Children enrolment in education	22	second	19	third
Some initiatives to stimulate small enterprises	18	third		fourth
Providing financial support with a salary for every month	24	first	22	first
putting a volunteering platform	10	Fourth	20	Second

The results in Table 7 showed that social work institutions did not contribute to raising awareness and enabling the poor to contribute to political decision-making through active participation in elections.

Table 8 shows the role of social work institutions in conveying the suffering of the poor to government officials by preparing meetings between the poor and government officials. This role was played by 68% of government institutions. While the role of non-governmental institutions is weak in this respect, only 32% of non-governmental institutions organize meetings for the poor with officials. Providing steady financial support through the provision of monthly salaries to poor families is one of the most important future projects for social work institutions, where it came first for future projects for social work institutions, as shown in Table 9.

Discussion

This study showed the role of social work institutions in confronting multidimensional child poverty because they are significant in responding to issues affecting the poor and defending their rights. This is the human goal for which it was created and which is linked to

developmental and humanitarian motives, so it expects that these institutions will maintain this character and work to strengthen it. Through interviews with officials who know in government and non-governmental institutions, it has become clear that the mechanisms of work of these institutions and the strategies they pursue in providing their services to poor families are deficient and weak. They also explained that their institutions face many obstacles and the economic constraints are the most prominent, which limits the achievement of the desired goals of these institutions. The economic constraints are the result of weak government support as a result of the circumstances that the country is going through, as well as it is a non-profit organization of a humanitarian and charitable nature.

The most significant role offered by the government social work institutions is to train and rehabilitate poor families to develop their professional skills to carry out income-generating projects. It also increases the awareness of poor families about the services provided to them and making easy access to resources to carry out their projects, which provide them with financial returns that help them get out of poverty. It was found that the role of non-governmental social

work organizations in providing training courses is almost weak or non-existent. This is due to many reasons, including the interest sought by these institutions to provide money and food to poor families in addition to weak experiences of the workers in these institutions. Government and non-governmental social work institutions give great importance to education and follow-up of children's evasion of schooling. This shows that many poor children are evading school for working and supporting their families, and these families encourage their children to drop out of school for work.

It is clear from the results and the interview of officials that social work institutions suffer from weakness in many areas of empowerment of the poor. It shows the inability of institutions, especially non-governmental institutions, to hold meetings between officials and poor families to identify their suffering and needs. This explains the lack of cooperation between social work institutions and officials, which in turn caused the lack of realistic response or knowledge of the requirements of these vulnerable groups in society. The results also showed the weak role of social work institutions in educating the poor in knowing their political rights by educating them to participate in provincial council elections and parliamentary elections. This was clearly demonstrated during the previous elections in Iraq in 2018, where turnout was low, especially in poor cities.

After knowing the strengths and weaknesses within the social work institutions, future projects and objectives must be developed to improve the reality of these institutions. The provision of official support by officials to social work institutions contributes to improving the level of services they provide, as well as coordination between governmental and non-governmental institutions that contributes to the development of future programs and plans to meet the challenges of poverty. The development of plans and training courses for employees in institutions to build their abilities and develop their skills as well as the use of experts and specialists in the field of social work is a necessity to develop the labor of social work institutions.

Through the results of the study, it became clear that it is important to develop an integrated strategy and common goals to benefit the beneficiaries and reduce dependence on the state by supporting charitable work to address poverty.

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