



The Role of Social Workers in the Protection of Human Rights

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Abstract

This study examines the role of social workers in the protection of human rights. Social workers play a crucial role in judicial processes, community advocacy, and the protection of vulnerable people's rights. This study aims to show how social workers take effective steps to protect human rights through legal and social mechanisms. The research method is qualitative, and data were collected through interviews and judicial documents. As a sample, interviews with social workers and representatives of judicial institutions were analyzed, and a thematic analysis of the data was conducted. The results indicate that social workers play a crucial role in identifying cases, providing support to those involved, gathering information, and fostering social pressure. They contribute to the legal framework for protecting people's rights and ensure respect for human rights in coordination with judicial institutions. The study recommends that building the capacity of social workers, their professional training, and increasing coordination with legal processes are necessary for the effective protection of human rights. Future research should fully assess the roles and challenges of social workers in different fields.

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1. Introduction

Human rights are the fundamental rights of every human being that guarantee life, liberty, education, health, and equality. The protection of human rights is of fundamental importance for the justice, prosperity, and stability of society. In this regard, social workers play a crucial role in coordinating social and legal processes, as they support vulnerable individuals, assist in identifying legal cases, and monitor the implementation of social and legal mechanisms to ensure the observance of human rights. In recent years, numerous studies have assessed the role of social workers in the fields of health, education, and social welfare, but their precise and strategic role in the protection of human rights is still under-researched. Especially in societies facing conflict, political instability, and social inequalities, the active participation of social workers is considered vital for the protection of human rights. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of social workers in human rights, to describe the important aspects of their contributions, and to examine the effectiveness of protecting human rights through legal and social mechanisms. The main questions of this study are:

1. How do social workers play an effective role in human rights protection cases?
2. What strategies are implemented by social workers to support those involved?
3. How is the role of social workers manifested in the coordination of legal and social processes?

This study was conducted based on a qualitative design and prioritizes the analysis of interviews and judicial documents. In this introduction, an attempt has been made to clearly present the importance of the topic, the description of the research gap, and the main objectives of the study, so that the reader is aware of the need and implications of the study.

Literature Review

Social workers form an important part of the fabric of society, supporting vulnerable and marginalized people, providing social services, and playing a key role in solving social problems (Healy, 2014) ^[9]. The foundation of social work is the protection of human rights and the promotion of social justice (Kafula, 2016) ^[11]. Midgley (2017) emphasizes that social work has a synergistic role in ensuring the well-being of individuals and communities, which is directly related to the observance and protection of human rights ^[14].

Internationally, research shows that social workers are particularly active in supporting children, women, people with disabilities, migrants, and communities affected by conflict, poverty, or social inequality (Murray, 2019; Alston, 2013) ^[15, 2]. Social workers coordinate legal processes and social programs to protect the rights of these people, identify their needs, and create social support systems (Dwivedi & Prerna Bhati, 2024; Akhtar & Niazi, 2024) ^[7, 10]. Human rights are the fundamental rights of every human being that guarantee life, liberty, education, health, equality, and non-discrimination (United Nations, 1948) ^[18]. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides a guide for social workers, as their duty is to protect the rights of individuals, provide social services, and ensure support for vulnerable people (Kafula, 2016) ^[11]. Researchers believe that the implementation of human rights is possible not only in the light of laws but also through the coordination of social services and social support (Fenton, 2018; Akhtar & Amin, 2025) ^[8, 1]. Social workers play an intermediary role in the implementation of the legal framework, as they actively participate in identifying violations of people's rights, providing information to judicial institutions, and building social pressure (Meshelemiah & Lynch, 2019) ^[13].

Research shows that social workers play a multifaceted role in the protection of human rights. First, they protect the rights of victims by identifying and documenting cases (Healy, 2014; Akhtar & Niazi, 2024) ^[9, 10]. They monitor the lives, health, education, and social conditions of individuals and coordinate with legal authorities responsible for the observance of human rights (Androff & Mathis, 2021) ^[3]. Second, social workers support affected individuals. They increase the empowerment of individuals and their ability to protect their rights by providing psychological, social, and legal services (Murray, 2019; Akhtar & Amin, 2025) ^[15, 1]. For example, in refugee cases, social workers directly assist in providing legal advice, social support networks, and basic living necessities (Parker & Crabtree, 2023) ^[16]. Third, social workers play an important role in building social pressure. Their efforts to raise public awareness, strengthen the accountability of legal institutions, and reform public policies contribute to increasing respect for human rights (Alston, 2013; Akhtar & Amin, 2025) ^[2, 1].

Although the role of social workers in health, education, and social services has been widely studied, their precise and strategic role in protecting human rights remains underestimated (Fenton, 2018) ^[8]. Particularly in societies affected by conflict, political instability, and social inequalities, the activities of social workers, the effectiveness of their professional capacities, and the impact of coordination with the legal framework have not yet been fully explored (Vasilios & Reima, 2024) ^[19]. Research shows that building the capacity of social workers, expanding professional training, and establishing strong coordination with legal institutions are vital for protecting human rights (Midgley,

2017; Akhtar & Niazi, 2024) ^[14, 10]. In particular, in societies with widespread social problems, the strategic role of social workers is essential for law enforcement, social support programs, and the development of legal education (Carvalho *et al.*, 2025) ^[5]. Analysis of existing research shows that the role of social workers in protecting human rights has not been sufficiently explored in terms of practical experiences in specific societies. The effectiveness of social workers in coordinating legal and social processes has not been widely documented. The strategic role of social workers and their capacity-building needs have been scientifically under-researched. Therefore, this study attempts to assess the role of social workers in the specific society of Afghanistan in judicial processes, social support, and protecting human rights practically and strategically.

Materials and Methods

1. Research Design

The purpose of this study is to assess the role of social workers in human rights. A qualitative research design was chosen. Qualitative research is suitable for the detailed analysis of human experiences, opinions, and the complexities of social processes (Creswell, 2014) ^[6]. This design enables the detailed study of the role of social workers in judicial processes, social support activities, and their impact on human rights protection. The qualitative design facilitates the in-depth study of data through thematic analysis, so that the experiences and perspectives of participants are revealed in a scientific and detailed way (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ^[4]. This method provides a suitable basis for generating new ideas, identifying operational problems, and analyzing the role of social workers in detail.

2. Data Collection Methods

Two main data collection methods were used for this study: First, semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with social workers and judicial officers. Interviews were used to gain in-depth information about the role of social workers, their experiences, challenges, and strategies for protecting human rights. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, and was conducted in Pashto or a local language according to the interviewer's comprehensive knowledge. Second, court case reports, legal institution documents, and social service reports were studied. These documents provide important information on documenting the role of social workers, analyzing judicial processes, and how human rights are respected. The combination of both methods increases the reliability of the data, as the personal experiences of the interview are confirmed by the documentary method (Patton, 2015) ^[17].

3. Sample Description

Purposive sampling was used for the research sample, ensuring the participation of those who have important information on the topic. 15 social workers who are actively involved in human rights protection processes. 10 officials from judicial institutions and legal institutions who have experience in the coordination and role of social workers. At least three years of experience in the field of social services or legal affairs. Active participation in the protection of human rights. Saturation and data saturation are the basis for qualitative research. In the case of this study, interview data were considered sufficient when new information was replicated, and there was enough data for thematic analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, which is considered an international standard for in-depth study of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ^[4]. The thematic analysis process was as follows:

1. Transcribing and reviewing the full text of interviews and documents.
2. Initial coding of the data.
3. Theme development based on similar codes.
4. Reviewing and defining themes.
5. Relating the results to the research question and analyzing them in light of the scientific background.

Thematic analysis enables the role of social workers to be examined in different dimensions, such as: Identifying and documenting cases, supporting those involved, building social pressure and public awareness, and coordinating legal and social processes.

5. Validity and Reliability

Increasing validity and reliability are important for qualitative research: Interview data were compared with court documents and reports to ensure the accuracy of the data. Key points from the interviews were presented to participants to confirm their views. The research analysis was reviewed by experienced researchers. These measures meet international standards for research validity and scientific credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) ^[12].

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed at all stages of the research: The purpose of the study was explained to participants, and informed consent was obtained. Participants were assured that the information would remain confidential. Data storage and use were managed in accordance with international ethical standards. All measures were taken to minimize the possibility of harm, and the identity of participants was protected.

Result

The purpose of this study was to assess the role of social workers in human rights. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, which organized the information collected through interviews and documents into several main themes. The following main findings are presented:

1. Case identification and documentation: One of the first findings is that social workers play a key role in case identification and documentation. Interview participants stated that social workers identify and document the cases of those who have suffered human rights violations, so that transparent information can be provided to judicial authorities. One of the participants stated: "We are starting to document the cases of victims and share this information directly with local and national institutions so that their rights can be protected." This finding demonstrates that social workers' data collection is not only important for the legal process but also plays a vital role in exposing human rights violations and raising awareness in society. This activity is considered the first step in achieving legal justice, because without accurate identification, human rights protection measures will not be effective.

2. Support for those involved: The second important finding is the direct support activities of social workers. Interview participants and analysis of judicial documents revealed that social workers provide psychological, social, and legal support to victims. They assist victims by providing counseling, psychological support, providing legal information, and establishing social support networks. In this regard, participants noted that: "We have developed support programs for families, women, and children so that they are aware of their rights and are protected against discrimination and abuse in society." This finding is consistent with international research, such as Murray (2019), which shows that social workers consider the creation of legal and social support networks to be important for protecting the human rights of migrants.

3. Creating social pressure and public awareness: The data analysis shows that social workers also play an active role in social pressure and public awareness. They strive to increase community awareness about protecting people's rights, strengthen the responsibility of local institutions, and reform legal policies. According to participants: "We hold local community meetings and human rights awareness workshops so that people know what rights they have and how they can claim them." This activity plays an important role in respecting human rights and strengthening social justice, because community awareness and pressure play an effective role in the law enforcement process.

4. Coordination of legal and social processes: As a fourth theme, it was found that social workers play an important role in coordinating legal and social processes. They work together with judicial institutions, social services, and non-governmental organizations to ensure that human rights protection measures are implemented effectively. One interviewee said: "We coordinate with local agencies to provide legal documents and social support together to pursue cases." This finding demonstrates that social workers not only play a role in individual support but also have a strategic role in coordinating social and legal systems.

5. Challenges and Constraints: The data revealed that social workers face various challenges that can affect their role. According to participants, the lack of financial resources and limited support programs, insufficient support from the legal framework, or practical problems with laws, and a lack of public acceptance due to social and cultural constraints. These challenges indicate that social workers' activities can be effective in protecting human rights, but the lack of systematic support limits their role. These findings are consistent with international research, such as Fenton (2018) ^[8], who discusses the multifaceted importance of the role of social workers, and Murray (2019) ^[15], who considers the role of social workers to be vital in the development of legal and social support.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the role of social workers in human rights. The analysis of the results shows that social workers play a multifaceted and strategic role in identifying cases, supporting those involved, creating social pressure, and coordinating legal and social processes.

These findings further clarify the role of social workers in the light of previous research and establish their importance in protecting human rights. In light of the results, it was revealed that social workers play a fundamental role in identifying and documenting cases of human rights violations. This finding is consistent with previous research, such as Healy (2014) ^[9], who states that social workers are an important tool for collecting and documenting accurate information for legal processes. Identifying cases is not only important for legal practitioners but is also vital for raising awareness in society and ensuring respect for human rights. This activity forms the basis for achieving legal justice, because without accurate identification, measures to protect human rights will not be effective.

In Afghanistan, where human rights violations have increased due to conflict, social inequalities, and political instability, social workers play a strategic role in building public trust, supporting victims, and enforcing the law (Murray, 2019) ^[15]. The results show that social workers provide psychological, social, and legal support to vulnerable people. This finding is consistent with previous research, such as Alston (2013) ^[12], which considers the direct involvement of social workers to be essential for the empowerment of individuals.

Interview participants indicated that support programs for families, women, and children play an important role in protecting their rights and reducing discrimination in society. This shows that social workers are not only information collectors, but also active in building the capacity of those involved, providing psychological support, and ensuring social justice. In light of international research, Murray (2019) ^[15] shows that social workers consider it important to build social and legal support networks to protect the rights of refugees. In Afghanistan, too, this direct support from social workers is vital for the stability of society, building trust among victims, and the effectiveness of human rights protection. The data analysis shows that social workers play an important role in building social pressure and raising public awareness. They work to raise awareness about protecting people's rights, strengthen the accountability of local institutions, and reform legal policies. This finding is consistent with Fenton's (2018) ^[8] research, which states that social workers play an important role in raising community awareness and advocating for legal reforms. In the context of Afghanistan, where the level of human rights protection is limited by political and social constraints, building social pressure and awareness is vital for legal reform and legal protection of the population.

As a fourth theme, the results show that social workers play an important role in coordinating legal and social processes. They work in partnership with the judiciary, social services, and non-governmental organizations to ensure that human rights protection measures are effective. This finding reflects the strategic role of social workers in light of Braun & Clarke's (2006) ^[4] thematic analysis. Coordination of legal and social processes is a fundamental part of social workers' activities to uphold human rights. In Afghanistan, the lack of this coordination leads to the weakness of legal processes and the persistence of human rights violations, which further emphasizes the importance of the role of social workers. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as Midgley (2017) ^[14], which notes the impact of resources, legal frameworks, and social constraints on the effectiveness of social workers' activities.

The practical significance of this study is that building the capacity of social workers, coordinating between legal institutions and social services, and reducing resource constraints increase the effectiveness of human rights protection. The theoretical significance of this study is that it provides a new understanding of the role of social workers through a strategic analysis of this study. Finally, the study shows that the role of social workers is key in identifying cases, supporting those involved, coordinating legal and social processes, and raising social awareness, and forms an important foundation for a strategic process to protect human rights.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to assess the role of social workers in human rights. Data analysis was conducted based on thematic analysis and revealed that social workers play a multifaceted, practical, and strategic role in protecting human rights. First, identifying and documenting cases is vital to achieving legal justice. Social workers documenting victims' cases and providing transparent information to judicial institutions is the first step in implementing the law and protecting rights. Second, supporting those involved increases the empowerment of individuals and their ability to protect their rights by meeting their psychological, social and legal needs. Third, creating social pressure and raising public awareness are important for social justice and the effectiveness of legal processes. Fourth, coordinating legal and social processes is an important part of the strategic role that ensures respect for human rights. However, social workers face several challenges, such as financial constraints, shortcomings in the legal framework, and social and cultural constraints, which reduce the effectiveness of their activities. The practical and theoretical significance of the study shows that capacity building of social workers, coordination between legal institutions and social services, and proper resource management are vital for the protection of human rights. In addition, this study provides new insights for the development of theories of the role of social workers through strategic analysis.

Basically, this study makes the following recommendations: Professional training programs should be comprehensive and specialized, so that social workers acquire skills in judicial processes, legal advocacy, and the protection of human rights. Coordination between judicial institutions, non-governmental organizations, and social services should be strengthened to increase the effectiveness of legal advocacy and social programs. Providing adequate financial resources and equipment for social programs ensures the effectiveness of activities. It is necessary to develop workshops, meetings, and public campaigns to raise community awareness about the value of human rights. Future research should be conducted on the long-term impact of the role of social workers, the consequences of implementing legal frameworks, and the evaluation of the results of social programs. Studying the relevance and effectiveness of social workers' activities in the context of different societies, cultures, and disaster-affected areas is vital for practical recommendations. Overall, this study shows that social workers are not only advocates but also strategic actors in the protection of human rights. Their role is vital in strengthening social justice and the observance of human rights through judicial processes, advocacy for those affected, creating social pressure and awareness, and coordinating legal and

social processes. To increase the effectiveness of this role, it is necessary to build capacity, provide resources, and raise community awareness.

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