



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

*International Master of Science in Social Work and Human Rights*

*Knowledge Use in Social Work: Exploring the Experiences of Graduates of the International Master Program in Social Work and Human Rights at Gothenburg University, Sweden*

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**Author/s:** Susan Kazooba & Ina Müller

**Supervisor:** Katarina Hollertz

**Examiner:** Anita Kihlström

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## Abstract

Applying the obtained knowledge when starting to perform social work can be a struggle for most social workers. Therefore, we studied knowledge use in social work practice to find out how Master social work graduates who just recently joined the field cope. We explored the experiences with social work Knowledge use of graduates of the International Master in Social Work and Human Rights (IMSWHR) at Gothenburg University where we answered five main research questions; what do the graduates of the IMSWHR regard as knowledge?, what do the graduates of the IMSWHR view as social work knowledge?, what kinds of knowledge do the graduates of the IMSWHR think they use?, how do the graduates of the IMSWHR describe their experiences with using social work knowledge? And lastly where do the graduates of the IMSWHR think they obtained the knowledge which they use? A cross-sectional qualitative design was used and sixteen interviews were conducted with graduates of the IMSWHR. We conducted ten in-depth interviews from both Skype (including a pilot study which was also analysed and included in the study) and face-to-face while six participants answered the interview guide on their own and emailed us their responses due to poor internet connection in their countries. The study was conducted from a social constructionist perspective. In addition we reviewed the different typologies of knowledge use by different scholars and came up with our own theoretical model of knowledge use in which we included Payne's concept of performing as a wise person which we used to understand and present the study findings. The data collected was analysed thematically. From the findings, some of our participants thought that knowledge is a very broad and philosophical concept which others stated having a problem with defining. Even with that however, we found that some concepts and key words were mostly used to explain what they thought knowledge is hence their mentions; experience, information and skills. They specifically regard social work knowledge to be the methods and the theories which they learned from their studies in addition to the experiences they gained from practice among other mentions. They also said they viewed social work knowledge as an instrument for practice, but also as knowing what one has to do in a practitioner-client situation. The findings showed that the graduates perceived to use different kinds of knowledge including theoretical knowledge, practice knowledge, system and situation/ context knowledge containing of legal knowledge, organizational knowledge as well as knowledge on the client and finally personalized knowledge to which practice wisdom, cultural knowledge, life experience, critical and analytical thinking belong. The kinds of knowledge named to be used by our participants are highly intertwined with where they perceive they obtained it; such sources are mentioned to include life experiences, their Bachelor and Master, the field and practice, internship and field placements as well as volunteering. They often referred back to both their undergraduate and graduate studies when talking about theoretical knowledge. We found that the graduates perceived themselves to cope with the demands in the field by using their knowledge to take upon adequate roles, being flexible and continuously coping with the social work's nature of uncertainty to correspond to the needs of the service user. Such is called performing as a wise person by Payne and gives a nice example of how relatively inexperienced practitioners can manage in social work practice after graduation.

**Key Terms:** Social Work, Knowledge, Knowledge Use, Practitioner, Graduates and the Wise Person/Social Worker

## Acronyms

AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers
CRC	Convention on the Right of the Child
ED	Executive Director
EBP	Evidence-Based Practice
EU	European Union
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers Work
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IMSWHR	International Master in Social Work and Human Rights
MSWHR	Master in Social Work and Human Rights
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NUR	National University of Rwanda
SGBV/P	Sexual and Gender Based Violence/Persecution
SPP	Systematic Planned Practice approach

## Declaration

We Kazooba Susan and Ina Müller do hereby declare that to the best of our knowledge affirmed by our faith in God, the work presented in this Thesis is original. The findings presented have never been submitted elsewhere for any award, proper references have been made.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Kazooba Susan**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Ina Müller**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**This Thesis has been written under my supervision and submitted with approval.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Katarina Hollertz**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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# **Dedications**

To

The International Master of Social Work and Human Rights at the University of  
Gothenburg

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we present a brief entrance and background to the study, problem statement, objectives, scope and significance of the study and finally, we define the key terms used.

### 1.1 Entrance

The International Master Program in Social Work and Human Rights (IMSWHR) at the University of Gothenburg is a two year Master program (University of Gothenburg, 2013:1), now in its sixth year. The two of us are students of this Master program. The program admits Swedish and international<sup>1</sup>-including exchange students whom one of us writers<sup>2</sup> of this Master thesis is privileged to be part of, it also exchanges teachers. It offers a wide curriculum with courses designed to meet the demands of a profession which is at the heart of the after-shocks created by this rapidly globalizing world. In addition to the practical experiences acquired through field placements, seminars and lecture room discussions that allow for the sharing of experiences brought to the program by different participants from different parts of the world. The program tutors its participants to six courses; Social Work and Welfare Systems, Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach; Research Theories and Methods; Social Work Practice and Professionalization; Social Work, Service Users Participation and Organization; Globalization, Poverty and International Social Work and finally, students must complete a Degree Report to fulfill the requirements for a two years Master program by (120 credits)<sup>3</sup>.

From our earlier days on to the program, we discussed and concluded that undertaking an International Master program was very exciting. Our main reasons were that it offered many opportunities including competing for international jobs, studying in an intercultural environment hence automatically widening ones network. However, as the discussion continued we asked ourselves what kind of jobs the graduates of our Master program could be doing? With this question, we asked one of our lecturers who said little was known about their where about except one former student who had sent her a happy New Year message once by email; she did not know about others.

Again this discussion became critical when we wondered about how best we would be prepared to take on social work jobs once we graduated and how we would actually manage in practice? What kind of knowledge we would use in practice and how we would actually manage to fulfill all expectations from others? With these questions, we became interested in finding out where the graduates of our Master program are? What they are doing? Why they are doing what they are doing? What kind of knowledge they are using? Where they possibly obtained the knowledge they apply to practice? And what they can say about the knowledge obtained from our Master program?

---

<sup>1</sup> Ina Müller from Germany

<sup>2</sup> Kazooba Susan; Makerere University Kampala Uganda

<sup>3</sup> ([http://www.utbildning.gu.se/program/program\\_detalj/?programid=S2SWH](http://www.utbildning.gu.se/program/program_detalj/?programid=S2SWH))

## 1.2 Background

Social work has been initially criticized for not having an independent body of knowledge (Payne, 2005:31) and some argue that social work has difficulties articulating and demarcating an exclusive knowledge base (Eraut, 1994:3; Taylor and White, 2006 cited in Trevithick, 2008:1213). In order to claim professional practice, an occupation needs to have theories and an exclusive body of knowledge which includes practice methods and skills (Watson et al, 2002:9).

However, social work has several characteristics due to which its knowledge base remains rather open and undefined (Trevithick, 2008:1213). One of those is the eclectic nature of the social work profession, which allows for the inclusion of theories from other humanities and sciences including the academic disciplines of sociology, psychology, social policy and philosophy. Secondly, it operates where management and treatment, professional work and politics as well as multidisciplinary theories and approaches meet and practitioners need therefore a diverse base of knowledge rather than a specified one (Payne, 2005:31).

It is argued that the knowledge needed in social work depends on the purpose the practitioner seeks to achieve with such. Further such varies with the local, national and international setting in which this practice takes place. Already Payne and Askeland (2008) acknowledge that social work knowledge consists of various types, such as knowledge obtained from life and experiences whether such is conscious or tacit, professional knowledge which is based on the traditions and the culture of social work and the experiences collected in the field and empirical knowledge. The discussion lays here very much upon how to combine the different types of knowledge with each other. Yet, a recent focus in knowledge use concerning the social work profession has been on evidence-based practice (EBP) following the positivist school of thought that the world is predictable. In contrast to such stands the social constructionist approach we take upon in this study arguing the opposite since humans may act irrelevant and uncertain due to their own interpretation of the world asking for a more diverse knowledge base to cope with such (Payne and Askeland, 2008:64-72).

With such, various forms of knowledge use by social workers can be observed. Several believe their knowledge derives from “learning by doing”, without any theoretical or factual aspects, while others acknowledge such, but have difficulties of allocating theory or empirical knowledge to practice (Fisher and Somerton, 2000), some base their knowledge fluently in theories and can apply those effortlessly to their contextual work (Secker, 1993). Within this discussion, some practitioners of social work get often accused of preferring “theory-less” practice, objecting theoretical and empirical frameworks of their profession while those in academics receive blame for re-producing knowledge which is too removed from reality (Watson et al., 2002:218) and not helping their students practically speaking (Payne and Askeland, 2008:13). From yet another angle, some scholars especially those from the global South argue that social work theories and thus accepted knowledge is developed from the West by Western scholars designed for the socio-cultural and economic contexts of the West with little or no relevance to the practical realities of the global South (Payne and Askeland, 2008:19). For those reasons, agents of other professions often downplay social workers’ knowledge (Payne and Askeland, 2008:14).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Applying the obtained knowledge when starting to work in the field can be a struggle for most social workers (Payne and Askeland, 2008:63). Watson et al (2002:10-11) agree with the two scholars though only point out theoretical knowledge and state that: “If already qualified and very experienced practitioners struggle to identify the ways they use theory in their everyday working life, what hope have inexperienced students?”, moreover, social work has evolved into a full-fledged profession with a distinctive value base, body of knowledge and methods of training” (Reamer, 1994:2 in Payne and Askeland, 2008:13). However, as it concerns the scholars cited above, the challenge is with how beginners and in this case graduates of the IMSWHR use the acquired knowledge. The IMSWHR hosts participants with varied education backgrounds whom after completing the program find themselves back in practice contexts as various as their origins. Hence it was in those varied contexts that our study sought to explore their experiences with using social work knowledge including theoretical, practical, empirical, personal and systems and situation/context knowledge.

We reviewed literature on knowledge use in social work and discovered that several studies that exist in this area are quite old and could therefore be out dated or may no longer represent the facts about knowledge use in social work especially by fresh graduates since the profession has undergone a huge change (DeMartini and Whitback, 1987). This is however, not to mean that there are no recent studies (see chapter two). Therefore, this means that the experiences of social work students; especially graduate students with knowledge use are not widely investigated or documented especially in recent times. Moreover, as stated by Rosen (1994:561), many in the profession believe that effective and accountable practice will be enhanced through focused efforts to develop scientifically valid and practice-relevant knowledge and through appropriate use of such knowledge in making practice decisions. Our study thus follows logically this assertion by Rosen to explore and document the experiences with knowledge use of the graduates of the IMSWHR at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

### 1.4 Research Questions

#### 1.4.1 Main Research Question

The main research question of the study was; “what are the experiences of the graduates of the IMSWHR at Gothenburg University with knowledge use in social work”?

#### 1.4.2 Research Questions

1. What do the graduates of the IMSWHR regard as knowledge?
2. What do the graduates of the IMSWHR view as social work knowledge?
3. What kinds of knowledge do the graduates of the IMSWHR think they use?
4. How do the graduates of the IMSWHR describe their experiences with using social work knowledge?
5. Where do the graduates of the IMSWHR think they obtained the knowledge which they use?

### 1.4.3 Scope of the Study

The study was international since graduates of the IMSWHR come from and after their studies, live and work in different countries. In terms of content, since the study investigated knowledge use in social work practice, attention was given to the perspectives of the graduates of IMSWHR at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The study was conducted over a period of four months from mid-January to mid-May.

### 1.4.4 Significance of the Study

There is so much literature on knowledge use in the social work profession. The challenge however is how this knowledge is used in social work practice by beginners of the profession. Therefore, the findings of this study may help such beginners to draw lessons and learn from how the graduates of the IMSWHR were found to use social work knowledge.

The findings of our study may also act to inform the department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg on the fields of employment in which the graduates of the IMSWHR find themselves after the program. They may also be informed on how relevant the graduates of the IMSWHR found the content of this program in practice, fresh graduates of the Master may also find this interesting as it can help them to understand their own possible fields of employment.

The findings of our study will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this particular area that can be reviewed by other social researchers conducting related studies. It will also act as a basis for further research by identifying gaps in the area since social research is cumulative in nature.

## 1.5 Operational Definition of Key Concepts

**Social Work:** Social work is a practice-based professional and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (New Global Definition of Social Work by the IASSW)<sup>4</sup>.

**Knowledge:** A socially constructed product of a certain context at a particular time, influenced by the involved actors and the social processes of knowledge use (Payne and Askeland, 2008). Rosen (1994:562) defines knowledge to consist of those statements, assertions, or principles that contribute to the profession's understanding of its subject matter. Within social work, we regard knowledge to be composed of different types, such as theoretical knowledge, practice knowledge, system and context/ situation knowledge, empirical and personalized knowledge to which also experiences count (see diagram 1).

**Knowledge Use:** The application and utilization of the knowledge the applicant recognizes as valid to a particular contextual situation to achieve a certain outcome/ effect (Payne and Askeland, 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.iasw-aiets.org/uploads/file/20140303\\_IASSW%20Website-SW%20DEFINITION%20approved%20IASSW%20Board%2021%20Jan%202014.pdf](http://www.iasw-aiets.org/uploads/file/20140303_IASSW%20Website-SW%20DEFINITION%20approved%20IASSW%20Board%2021%20Jan%202014.pdf)

**Graduate:** A person who successfully completed a Master degree education in this case the IMSWHR degree.

**Practitioner:** A professionally trained and practicing social worker.

**Practice:** The term practice as used in this study refers to social work practice.

**Note:**

Whereas the Master program is referred to as the international Master of Social Work and Human Rights and officially abbreviated as MSWHR, for the purpose of our study, we preferred to abbreviate it as IMSWHR to reduce on the repeated usage of the word international which we found to increase our words unnecessarily.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we present a review of literature from previous studies in the area of our research together with background information on fields of employment for the graduates of the IMSWHR. Literature was reviewed on what they regard as knowledge in general and as social work knowledge specifically, the kind of knowledge they think they apply to practice, the sources of such knowledge and their experiences with using social work knowledge.

#### 2.1 Jobs Performed by Master's Graduates/Fields of Employment

This literature was reviewed as study background information on social work graduates' current fields of employment.

“Most social work students, educators and practitioners do not cross national borders in their work, so can we say that they work internationally?” However, as Payne and Askeland categorize areas of international social work, social workers including fresh graduates if they find the opportunity may be; “Working in development agencies in the South – Examples of development agencies might be non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Save the Children, Caritas International, and Médecin Sans Frontières; Working for official international agencies – Examples of international agencies might include a range of United Nations agencies, the European Commission or aid departments of national governments; Working for agencies dealing with cross-national issues – Examples might be agencies dealing with international adoption or family matters such as abduction of a child from one legal jurisdiction in family disputes. Some service user organizations, for example for disabled and mentally ill people, have staff working on international links and finally working for international social work organizations – Examples might be the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) or people employed in countries on projects for or linking with such organizations to mention: participating in international conferences, educational or professional visits; exchanges and placements and research; working as a social worker in a country that is foreign to them and working with refugees and immigrants in their own country” (Payne and Askeland, 2008:3-4). It is therefore not a surprise that international exchanges between social workers have increased significantly. Today, social workers are more interested in developments in other countries, they travel more often to international meetings and conferences, and they are more frequently engaged in international collaboration (Hokenstad and Kendall, 1995 cited in Midgley, 2001: 22). Hence, in the South, social workers will often experience directly poverty, inequalities and social and personal problems that arise from the impact of globalization in their societies. Even though the average Western practitioner does not work internationally, daily practice may lead them to experience some of the local consequences of globalization: international migration, asylum seeking, and refugees. They may also experience concern about forced marriage, cultural conflicts and terrorism that are a product of the social trends of globalization (Payne and Askeland, 2008:4; Steger, 2009).

However, very little is known about the job positions of social work Master graduates. As we could find only one non-published “Own Evaluation” of the MSWHR which gave only limited information on the careers the graduates of this program take up after graduation, we extended our preview to the only other graduate Master study we could find and



supplemented such with the employments of newly-entered practitioners holding a Bachelor degree.

In an internal evaluation of the IMSWHR<sup>5</sup>, the report showed that; “globally MSWHR contributes to the development of knowledge, in that a number of students who have completed their Master's degree within the program have found employment at universities in their home countries. This contributes to the advancement of knowledge in both the academies and within their respective practice fields. In this context, particular mention Linneus / Palme project with Makarere University in Kampala, Uganda. Since its inception seven students completed their Master degree. Of these, three have been admitted to doctoral programs in Europe, the two are working on social work education at Makarere University one works specifically with human rights issues and another one engaged with setting up a professional organization for social workers”. Also in Rwanda, two students were working with the National University of Rwanda (NUR) (University of Gothenburg, 2013:22). The report however, also indicated that “unfortunately, no structured study was conducted with respect to the other students' continuing professional or research careers. Due to many reasons the conduction of such a study is urgent, not least to show that the degree objective is reached” (University of Gothenburg, 2013:23). Hereby the department calls for a follow-up study on where and what fields of employment the other students from Europe, America and Asia who have formerly graduated from the program are.

DeMartini and Whitbeck (1987:222-223) in their exploratory study ‘Source of Knowledge’ inquired from practitioners who graduated two and seven years ago regarding their Master programs at two Northwestern U.S. Universities about their job positions by questionnaires. Most of their informants were employed in clinical counseling/mental health sector, administration/supervision, and medical social work and in group home/residential treatment. Hawkins et al (2008:35-37) conducted a survey to analyze the labour market opportunities available to new social work Bachelor graduates in Victoria, Australia in 1995 which was repeated in 1996. At least one-third of those employed as social workers were in government positions. Other participants were employed in positions titled ‘counselor’ and ‘children’s protection worker’, where they stated that although their social work skills were very relevant, their social work qualification was not a prerequisite for the job. In 1995, most of the graduates found jobs in the interpersonal practice sector (Hawkins et al, 2008: 38), while in 1996, overall the number of social work positions increased, yet those in child protection, aged care, the education/ training sector and community development decreased rapidly, while positions in youth work and community residential work mounted up (Hawkins et al, 2008:40). However, over two decades away, the labour market has changed immensely and the above findings may not hold true for social work graduates today, especially in terms of percentage representation in the jobs mentioned above. Moreover, Hawkins et al give only an Australian picture of the labor market for social work, but it can at least say something about some areas where social work graduates in Australia could possibly be employed in.

Further, Sherer and Peleg-Oren (2005) conducted a ‘Job Analysis of Social Work Students in Israel’ and explored the field experiences of undergraduate social work students from the five major schools of social work in Israel. The findings showed that most of the social work students worked with older people, with children at risk and with disabled people (2005:70-72). According to the study, most students were engaged in casework, but less with families, groups and communities.

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<sup>5</sup> Universitetskanslersämbetets kvalitetsutvärderingar Självvärdering (Göteborg’s Universitetet, December 2013)

Apart from the self-evaluation of the MSWHR, all the studies outlined are taken in settings belonging to the global North so we feel that we can compare them in order to get a bigger picture of the job probabilities social work graduates of Bachelor and Master Programs possess. Also such has happened before as we found Sherer and Peleg-Oren describing their findings in Israel as consistent with other cross-country studies taken in the U.K., U.S. and Israel itself (2005:77). Concerning the Bachelor and Master graduates, job positions in family, group and community work as well as community development, child protection and education/ training sector remained relatively few or practitioners remained less interested in these jobs at that time, yet social work students from Israel seemed to be more interested in working with children at risk and attended to community work rather frequently during their field experiences. From the studies, however, not so much can be said about jobs in the fields of research, project work, advocacy and policy development. Still, we find those findings rather limited to their own national context. Also the self-evaluation of the MSWHR gives as a very sketchy picture just following the Ugandan and Rwandan students which came through scholarship programs often taking upon academic positions.

## **2.2 What Social Work Graduates Consider as Knowledge**

Very few studies actually have investigated what students in general regard as knowledge. We could only find studies concerning Bachelor students and hereby just two which were in the area of social science. Only one focuses purely on social work students in terms of how knowledge is constituted for them (Anderson-Meger, 2013).

In 'Students' Conceptions of Knowledge, Information, and Truth' Alexander et al (2012) investigated the everyday conceptions of knowledge, information and truth of undergraduate students in social sciences at an American Mid-Atlantic university by giving them three online tasks to accomplish. The findings showed that participants defined knowledge by using the following terms: information, experience, learn, fact/ factual, understand, true/ truth, idea and belief/ believe among others (2012:109). Alexander et al found moreover that the majority of the students were on the constant search for knowledge (2012:13).

In her Ph.D. dissertation conducted at the University of Capella in the U.S., 'The Epistemological Beliefs of Social Work Students' 2013, Anderson-Meger (2013) investigated the beliefs about knowledge undergraduate social work students held and how such influences their learning behavior (2013:128). This study consists of a pragmatic action research and cooperative inquiry with a data analysis based on the grounded theory method (2013:57). One of Anderson-Megers' objectives was to explore the perspectives of the social work students' on the nature of knowledge (Hofer, 2001 in Anderson-Meger, 2013:9) which is highly relevant to our study. She found that the participants' knowledge is entrenched in relationships with other people and experiences (2013:138). Their belief system concerning the constitution and the development of knowledge is rooted in the ability of caring for others and abandoning ones' own needs for the sake of pleasing others. Hence, the students found knowledge obtained through direct experiences, caring and relationships with others more important than such they gained through science or what seems to them to be scientific (2013:139). Yet, they are aware that knowledge is alterable and stems from different sources, but still their knowledge is rooted in subjectivist orientations (Clinchy, 2002 in Anderson-Merger, 2013:140). It is of constructive nature indeed as the findings show that knowledge is right as long as the person holding this knowledge thinks so (2013:140), hence the social constructionist view of knowledge. We found therefore this very approach to knowledge very helpful as it has been proven to apply to students in social work recently and integrated it in our theoretical framework.

Both Anderson-Meger (2013) and Alexander et al (2012) in their studies show that the (inter-) personal experiences of students in the social sciences have a great impact on how they regard knowledge and show with such that knowledge depends on human thoughts and ideas agreeing with Payne and Askelands' earlier argument (2008:15).

### **2.3 What Kinds of Knowledge do Social Work Graduates Use?**

Although a number of researches exist in terms of the kinds of knowledge social workers use, the focus has not been on social work Master graduates. However there are related studies.

Drury-Hudson (1999) conducted a research concerning the process of decision making in child protection, that is to remove a child from its family or not. Prior to this study, she developed 'a model of professional knowledge for social work practice' published in an article with the same title in 1997, which we reviewed for our theoretical model in chapter four. In 'Decision Making in Child Protection: The Use of Theoretical, Empirical and Procedural Knowledge in Child Protection by Novices and Experts and Implications for Fieldwork Placement' she compared those two groups with each other in terms of the kinds of knowledge used when making such decisions. The first group was of ten social work students at a South Australian University who were either currently taking their field placement with the Department for Family and Community Services or just returned from it. The experts were eight experienced social workers partitioning (1999:148-150). The findings show that experts understood the theoretical and empirical knowledge better and were more aware of the procedural knowledge and could as such apply it to practice more easily than the students. They were able to base their decisions in research findings, to identify the risks of the children and to focus on the child during the whole decision-making process making fewer mistakes. The study suggests that the students were often not sufficiently equipped to cope with the demands, left with too little information on the organizational context, legislation and theory depending on their supervisors and colleagues to provide such resulting in uncertainty and confusion. Drury-Hudson calls therefore for more adequate preparation and supervision of the students (1999:162).

In a more recent research, Blom et al (2007) focused on Swedish Bachelor Social Work students who just returned from field placements to their studies in their last educational year at the University of Umeå published as 'Social Work Student's Use of Knowledge in Direct Practice'. The students were asked to describe situations from practice that they experienced as problematic or critical in terms of which knowledge they used; the source of this knowledge; and its effect. According to this study, students use various forms of knowledge facts, understanding and skills (Blom et al, 2007:52).

Gordon and Cooper (2010) interviewed six female social workers in Scotland in their research 'Talking Knowledge — Practicing Knowledge: A Critical Best Practice Approach to How Social Workers Understand and Use Knowledge in Practice'. Their point of departure here is the strong governmental emphasis of implementing evidence-based or knowledge-informed practice in social work in Scotland and touch upon the discussion of what actually enables social workers and institutions best to work effectively. By using visual 'knowledge maps' the researchers found that all informants disposed of a compound and interacting range of practice experience, social work and other theory, knowledge of legislation, methods of intervention, research, local and national policy, procedures and resources. They were further aware that such is contextualized in their practice setting as well as their own experiences and beliefs (2010:245-250). This knowledge mixture can be placed within the knowledge model of

Drury-Hudson (1997) and others of social work and social care knowledge (Pawson et al., 2003; Trevithick, 2008).

Also Munro referred to the type of knowledge used by social workers in her study; 'Improving Social Workers' Knowledge Base in Child Protection Work' (1998). She analyzed forty-five British public inquiries made between 1973 and 1994 in the field of child abuse to identify errors in social workers' knowledge base which she found to be poor; consisting of common-sense understanding of the people next to some theoretical frameworks (1998:102). This finding is consistent with Howe's showing that several practitioners prefer to use practice wisdom, basing their knowledge on common-sense and pragmatism (Howe, 1987), deriving from observations and pragmatic practice analysis. Also according to Zeira and Rosen's argument, many scholars have claimed that social work practice relies on tacit knowledge. However, these two scholars have also argued that tacit knowledge or 'practice wisdom' cannot be critically examined in and of itself (Zeira and Rosen, 2000).

An exploratory investigation of knowledge use called 'Knowledge Use in Direct Practice' (1994) in Israel from the nineties by Rosen also focused on the kind of knowledge used by experienced practitioners. Data was obtained from seventy-three practitioners from six community family service agencies using the Systematic Planned Practice approach (SPP) after practicing such for a period of six months. The informants were trained in Israel with study content similar to a U.S. Master program and had been working for two to seven years averagely. The study findings indicated that; value based normative assertions were the most frequently used rationale for decision making, followed by theoretical/conceptual and policy rationales; instrumentalities; policies; client wishes and lastly practical experiences. It was pointed out in the article by Rosen that almost no use was made of research-based knowledge/empirical-evidence (1994:561).

Social workers' knowledge base has evolved from a very meager version of tacit knowledge added with some theories (Munro, 1988) in the late eighties, to one extended by more theoretical frameworks and concepts as well as instrumentalities; policies; client wishes; practical experiences, empirical evidence in addition to more understanding and use of value-based assertions in the nineties as explored by Rosen (1994). By 2010, practitioners had continued to hold such varied and interacting knowledge base (Gordon and Cooper, 2010) and even Bachelor social work students who just came to apply their knowledge in practice were already equipped with multiple sets of knowledge dominated by factual knowledge, personal knowledge and tacit knowledge (Blom et al, 2007).

Our quest for further knowledge in this area, however, is to explore what knowledge graduates of the IMSWHR think they use during social work practice.

## **2.4 How Social Work Graduates use the Acquired Knowledge**

From our review no study exists looking at how social work graduates inform their practice with knowledge. Only very little has up to date been researched about how practitioners do so. Gordon and Cooper found in their research 'Talking knowledge' (2010) that although the knowledge bases of their participants varied a lot from each other, they still used similar ways in how they applied their knowledge. The social workers referred to very active and critically reflective knowledge use involving working on various levels simultaneously (2010:249). The informants' knowledge use gets further influenced by the capabilities they gained from personal and professional experiences, beliefs and abilities (2010:250) and the organizational structures of their working place (2010:252).

However, in the research of Sherer and Peleg-Oren (2005) it seemed that graduating social work Bachelor students from Israel preferred a 'spontaneous' working style over a well-planned one (2005:79).

Rosen, presents three dimensions upon which the conception of knowledge use varies, hence; "the type of knowledge considered, what constitutes use and the purpose for which knowledge is used" (1994:564). He however, systematically points out what he holds as contributing to a difficulty in discourse that these "three elements are often not differentiated or explicitly distinguished". For our purpose however, he delineated hence use ranges from awareness of, ability to understand, attitudes towards use of certain knowledge, to actual use of given knowledge in making certain practice decisions. According to Payne and Askeland, social workers should also actively engage in critical reflection. According to them, the question, "what changes should follow from the new knowledge created through critical reflection?" is important. In addition, they "argue that critical reflection may benefit any kind of social work practice" (Payne and Askeland, 2008:31-32). Hence Payne calls for more research to fathom the ways how practitioners incorporate, articulate and apply knowledge (2007:95).

## **2.5 Sources of Knowledge for the Social Work Graduates**

We came across several studies exploring where the knowledge the practitioners use comes from. Most of those got already outlined in 2.3 as the kind of knowledge used goes easily in hand with where it was obtained from.

DeMartini and Whitbeck (1987:223-225) as the oldest study found as sources of knowledge on-the-job training graduate school, supervisors, workshops, colleagues, personal experience, books, journals, manuals and undergraduate. The study overall confirmed that knowledge is heterogeneous and deeply connected to its work context which connects to the findings of Anderson-Meger (2013) outlined under 2.2.

In the seventies until the nineties, Munro found in her analysis of the inquiries in the area of child protection very few sources of knowledge the informants referred to consisting of training courses and practical experiences, while few referred to theoretical frameworks (1998:102).

Sherer and Peleg-Oren (2005) explored the experiences of undergraduate social work students in their field practice, but from an Israeli context with a focus on their roles and tasks performed. Yet, this study found that a majority of third-year students valued their own experiences over the knowledge gained from colleagues as sources of knowledge. The researchers held the limited time the supervisors got for their student apprentices and the general overload of many practitioners in general accountable for this phenomenon (2005:79).

Also Blom et al (2007) targeted enrolled Swedish social work Bachelor students returning from their field placements. They found that the sources of knowledge used by the students in practice are as varied as their practice settings namely, their own similar experiences, social work education, supervisors, colleagues and files, documents etcetera as their sources, knowledge from own direct experiences with clients and clients themselves. Most informants also adapted to their described critical situations with which the sources as well as the effects of the knowledge verified largely (2007:53-58).

In Gordon and Coopers' study (2010) former professional practice experiences in social work and other disciplines; volunteering, nursing, social care work, colleagues and the team,

personal experiences and intuition were found to be valuable sources of social workers knowledge. According to the authors, the latter two sources were judged to be as equally important as the others by the participants, but not recognized as such in social work practice (2010:250-252).

The most recent study concerning the sources of knowledge of experienced practitioners was conducted by Forgey et al (2014). They explored the knowledge base used by Irish and American child protection social workers in the assessment of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) which they published under the same title in 2014. They found that the knowledge base of the Irish and American social workers was informed by their practice experiences, their statutory/ regulatory background, their Social Work Education, their socio-political context while scientific sources and their personal/ cultural background had a respectively smaller influence (2014:58-72).

In all reviewed studies, the social workers' knowledge was primarily informed by their practical experiences, followed by their educational background. Interpersonal contacts, such as the team, colleagues, supervisors and informants and personal experiences were also often referred to, yet practitioners only mentioned research and empirical findings to a rather small degree. In Western countries where all those studies were taken, evidence-based practice has been held as the most important and effective knowledge of social workers (Gambrill 2006; Gilgun 2005; Morago 2006; Roberts and Yeager 2006; Rosen 2003 in Blom et al, 2007:46) and thus, practitioners have been criticized for using other sources of knowledge, especially tacit knowledge as it is rather implicit and cannot be measured easily in scientific terms (Rosen, 2000:119).

Yet, the manifestation of scientifically-based knowledge has been criticized as it tries to bring rational prediction to a profession dealing with the uncertainty and irrationality of people, which does not fit the nature of social work (Payne, 2007:85). Various forms of knowledge have been acknowledged as useful to social work practice (Pawson et al, 2003; Walter et al, 2004 in Payne, 2007:85) and as such a variety of knowledge applied in multiple ways is relevant (Payne, 2007:85).

## **2.6 The Experiences of Graduates with Using Social Work Knowledge during Practice**

Already in former studies, we found that several practitioners find it difficult to express which practice actions and decisions they took clearly and to give reasons for such (Goldberg and Warburton 1978; Osmond and O'Connor 2006 in Gordon and Cooper, 2010: 246; Munro 1998:94) and they struggle to recognize theoretical and empirical knowledge in their practice (Sheldon and Chilvers 2000; Sinclair and Jacobs 1994 in Gordon and Cooper, 2010:246; Munro 1998:94;). Indeed, the use of knowledge in practice has been recognized as a very complex phenomenon, influenced by a variety of factors (Rosen, 1994:561) and yet, not only a challenge to the social work profession. Such lays largely in what Watson et al (2002:10) refer to as "the harsh reality of educating budding professional social workers about the importance of theory to their practice",..."for them the relationship between theory and their practice remains something of a mystery" (Howe, 1987:1).

Additionally, Munro found also in her study that her participants preferred personal and private working styles and found it therefore troublesome to integrate theoretical knowledge into their practice (Munro, 1998:100). Also Gordon and Cooper found the social workers initial difficulty in naming the used knowledge; yet as the interview proceeded the informants

became increasingly clear about it (2010:249). In the same study, attention was also given to how practitioners perceive what supports and hampers the development of their knowledge used in practice. The researchers found that by making use of personal capabilities, as being curious, reflective, evaluative, motivated, persistent, committed to one's own learning, confident and focusing on the needs of the service users and the carers, the practitioners applied their knowledge in the most effective way. Those findings are concurrent with former research (Walter, Nutley and Davis, 2003; Grambrill, 2006 in Gordon and Cooper, 2010:253). In those regards, Gordon and Cooper (2010) mention the concept of becoming a 'wise social worker' by Payne (2007). Also, the organizational environment has an impact on how social workers can inform their practice with knowledge. It supports the practitioners best also in terms of making use of their personal capabilities by improving practical arrangements, so the workers can interact, collaborate and meet on a frequent basis with each other to exchange knowledge and give mutual support in addition to offering regular supervision on practice (Gordon and Cooper, 2010:252).

Sherer and Peleg-Oren (2005) concluded that the Israeli students in their study are not equipped with the same base of experiences and education after graduation, even if they received the similar formal guidelines. Hence graduates enter the field with various skills and abilities especially in their initial years of work following graduation (2005:78). Such must also have an impact on how they experience their knowledge use in practice.

Conclusively, the review of the above previous studies has been quite somewhat interesting much more, because we have been able to acquire more knowledge of knowledge use in social work ourselves. It was shocking for example to find that what we held as views on knowledge which we thought could possibly be used by social workers is not even what they use or among the ones commonly used. The much emphasized theories during professional training are seldom mentioned and if so, it is placed in the language of "some theoretical framework" as mentioned for example by Munro (1988) when talking about common-sense understanding and Rosen (1994) identified it, but indicated that theoretical and empirical knowledge were not easily generalizable to different practice situations hence stressed the importance of using value-based normative assertions. The findings of most scholarly works reviewed herein did not even mention this as a form of knowledge that was being used. Yet little is known about the experiences with knowledge use of graduates who just currently joined the field.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an account of how the study was carried out. It describes the research design, study population, study sample, methods and procedures of data collection, data analysis and presentation, division of labour, validity, reliability and the generalization of the study findings. It also includes ethical considerations, the challenges encountered in undertaking the study and how they were overcome.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study was qualitative and cross-sectional in nature. It was qualitative, because data was gathered through interviews (Gilbert, 2008:35). The cross-sectional design was selected simply because we did not intend to follow up participants at different intervals and also in the interest of our study, because a cross-sectional study can be completed quickly (Gilbert, 2008:36). The study was exploratory in nature and aimed at exploring in detail the experiences with knowledge use of the targeted population.

For us qualitative interviews were the most appropriate design for gaining an in-depth insight into how graduates of the IMSWHR understand knowledge and hence how they think they use it. We chose for this method as we sought to understand the interviewees' points of view through unfolding their experiences, attitudes, opinions and feelings on the topic of study, rather than giving purely scientific explanations and conclusions of a situation (Kvale, 2009; Patton, 2002:4).

#### 3.2 Study Population

The participants were primarily graduates of the IMSWHR at the University of Gothenburg. The study was designed and drew participants from the first three years of the two year Master program that is 2008, 2009 and 2010. The total study population therefore comprised of fifty-nine graduates: a summation of all the graduates who were admitted to the Master that is twenty-three, thirteen and twenty-three for the three years respectively. We believe that group graduated earlier on; they were already into employment and had accumulated the experience that our study sought to explore unlike the last group of graduates admitted to the program in 2011 and graduated in June 2013. Also partly because one of us involved in this investigation was a member of this group, we sought to minimize the ethical dilemma of the insiders' bias though we were already conducting a study on our own Master program.

#### 3.3 Study Sample

In the beginning, participants were selected using non-probability purposive sampling. A total sample of sixteen participants was drawn from the thirty-one responses to the first step study. Sixteen participants were interviewed contrary to the thirteen who were earlier planned. This was, because some participants agreed to take part in the study, yet it took them a long time to get back to us. We tried to include graduates from the global South, the global North for the different perspectives of knowledge use and Sweden, because the Master was offered in the Swedish context. However, after a while we came across problems in obtaining enough suitable participants for such representation so we decided to treat the graduates as a whole leaving out the three categorical groupings. Later on we engaged in a lot of reminders also via new social media and included snowballing at last, which enabled us to interview some Swedish students since none had got back to us through our first step study. We therefore



considered only the categorization into global North and global South just for the first part of the where we found that certain facts which came out naturally had implications for social work, but rather not with the graduates' experiences with social work knowledge use.

Finally; we are glad to report that in the end we obtained a total of twelve well completed interviews in addition to other four filled in interviews that were not very well complete.

### **3.4. Procedure of Obtaining Participants**

The researchers first obtained the lists of the targeted participants for all the three years from the administrator of the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg. The lists contained the email addresses of the total study population. We later followed the two steps of the study as described in 3.5 below to collect data from the interviewees. We also obtained a letter certifying us as student researchers from the department just in case any of our participants would have reservations. It was titled, certificate of research for studies (appendix 2).

### **3.5. Data Collection Methods and Tools**

Our study was a two-steps study and both steps generated valuable data that we have presented in chapter five. The two steps are described below;

#### **3.5.1. First Step: Letter of Introduction**

In this step, we emailed the letter of introduction, introducing our study to the whole of the targeted study population requesting them to get back to us, view details in appendix 3.

#### **3.5.2 Second Step: Unstructured Interviews**

We asked open-ended questions and probed with the purpose of gaining in-depth interviews in which participants deeply shared their experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge (Kvale, 2009; Patton, 2002:4) about using social work knowledge in practice. In-depth interviews were also considered for their flexibility in eliciting detailed data that has been used to complete our qualitative analyses. We also preferred this method for our study to take into account Fielding and Thomas' explanation that "non-standardized interviews best fulfill the Loflands' (1995) case that the essence of the research interview is the 'guided conversation'". It is applauded as a simple design, corresponding to conversational procedures. We used an interview guide as the tool for data collection since it is the tool employed to gather data from unstructured interviews (Fielding and Thomas, 2008:247).

After the first step of the study, we conducted in-depth interviews: on Skype with non-residents and face-to-face interviews with residents of Gothenburg. A total of ten interviews were collected using this method; five for each of the mediums used. The fifth Skype interview was a pilot study from a graduate of the IMSWHR in order to test our interview schedule and improve it. This graduate was from a year of study that was outside of our targeted population hence from the fourth year of the Master. However, from the interview, we could tell that it was a high quality interview, rich with information some of-which we did not even obtain from our targeted population and hence included the participant in our study.

#### **A. Skype Interviews**

A Skype calling is similar to a phone call, but with the additional option of having a screen image of the participants through the web camera. However, the picture is limited as it shows only the upper part of the person using Skype and hence, in this case both the researchers and

the interviewees could not see the full body language of the other person(s). Skype offers the researchers the possibility to analyze audible and visible data. However, due to time reasons and for the purpose of this study, the researchers chose only to analyze the recorded data (audible). In order to ensure a good sound quality of the interviews taken, the researchers used a digital recorder placed next to the computer throughout the time of the interview (Cater, 2011).

Skype also offers a cost as well as time-effective and convenient way of conducting non-face-to-face interviews. It fits into busy agendas of working people who might also have other responsibilities. With exception of the Swedish students, we assumed the remaining international participants to be familiar with using Skype, since it is always a convenient way to keep in touch with friends and families back home. For some participants because of poor internet; we did not have successful Skype interviews so we re-schedule interviews. Also with these interviews we had to plan in-terms of time since in most cases especially those involving the global South the time zones had significant differences requiring one party to adjust. We hereby adjusted ourselves to the interviewees' timetable. We also conducted three interviews from our apartments except for the two others that were conducted in the day time. We requested all our participants to find quiet places for the interviews (Cater, 2011) though for one participant the sound of playing children affected the interview and for two others certain unfamiliar sounds from the computer affected the quality of the interviews and even posed a challenge during transcription; many words were lost which may have compromised the quality of these interviews.

## **B. Face-to-Face Interviews**

To conduct successful face-to-face interviews, we always booked a group room at the university where all the five interviews were conducted away from noise and distraction. In such an interview, we set the place, waited and welcomed the interviewee, introducing ourselves and allowed them some moment to settle down. We re-collected, if they had read the Informed Consent form earlier emailed to them and handed them a printed copy thereof (Ref: appendix 3), explained the confidentiality of the study again and asked, if we could record the interview. We then took turns by leaving the first half of the questions to one researcher, while the other took upon the second half. At the end of each session the other interviewer could probe on what they found requiring clarity.

## **C. Filled in Interview Schedule**

Participants who could not be accessed for either Skype or face-to-face interviews asked to have the interview schedule emailed to them. This was mainly for reasons of poor internet in the case with five participants and in one case a busy work schedule making a total of six. It should be noted that whereas we sent out our tool to some participants by email and had the answers emailed back; it was not part of our initial plan and hence not our most favorable method of collecting data, but we had only found it very useful in the beginning when we had few responses from the study population willing to take part in our study.

## **3.6 Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation**

After all interviews were done, we continued to the post interview stages of working with the interviews: transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting/presenting the knowledge in the interview conversations.

### **3.6.1 Data Processing and Analysis**

#### **A. Transcribing**

For transcription; the inquiry was made by two researchers and so was the transcription in order to get a full picture of the data to be able to analyze it. Transcribing was done verbatim since we had no interest in making any detailed linguistic and narrative analyses (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:177). Transcription was done for nine interviews both the Skype and face-to-face interviews. One of the interviews which would have required transcription was lost through the recording process, which we resolved by writing down the responses we remembered from the interview and got such checked and finally approved by the participant.

#### **B. Open Coding**

Open coding refers to “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” as they also put it, “coding is a key aspect of content analysis”. We chose open coding, because we wanted our findings to be data-driven and therefore, we did not have the codes developed in advance (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:202) and read the transcription thoroughly as many times as possible to familiarize ourselves with the collected data. We used different colors and highlighted major themes throughout all the data, each color represented a coding category hence the major themes; red (field of employment), yellow (education background), light blue (motivation for joining the Master), grey (what they regard as knowledge), light green (what they view as social work knowledge), pink (the kind of knowledge used), orange (experiences with using social work knowledge), purple (when they didn’t know which knowledge to apply), dark green (sources of knowledge), maroon (knowledge from the Master), turquoise (other benefits of the Master), dark blue (recommendations to the Master) and bright green (performing as a wise person). In addition to these major themes other subthemes were identified under each. On another round, we also assigned applicable theories to those where they fit and where they oppose our theoretical framework. Finally all the data was properly edited and critically analyzed for presentation. Through data driven coding, we found out that performing as a wise person became a common theme throughout the interviews, as it became a common probe. The rest of the codes eventually related with the questions that were asked from the interview guide.

### **3.6.2 Presentation of Findings**

The research findings are presented using thematic content analysis. The themes presented are those that emerged during the post interview stages of transcribing and data coding (Kvale, 2009). The overall process of analysis was guided by the main research objective.

### **3.6.3 Organization of the Report**

The report is organized into chapters that is; six chapters in total each presenting a separate item hence from the first to the last chapter, we presented the introduction, literature review, methodology, theoretical framework, analysis and lastly conclusions and recommendations chapter respectively. Within the separate chapters numbering is done cumulatively, but they skip to the next level, if a particular main item has more than one specific issue to be

explained. Number skipping was done only up to the third level, alphabetical letters and numerical were used for the fourth and fifth levels respectively.

### **3.7 Division of Labour**

The researchers shared all tasks equally from the first chapter to the last. They conducted the interviews jointly, shared the transcription of the data and analyzed the findings together. This gave both researchers the opportunity to be involved at all levels of the study and to be part and partial of the whole research process. Though we cannot disregard the fact that in certain parts each one of us wrote proportionately more than another especially, but even in the same areas, it could be difficult to specify contributions since sometimes we found ourselves alternatingly typing in the same document at the same time.

### **3.8 Practical Challenges and how they were overcome**

*“It was not a bed of roses”!*

First of all, we met immense challenges which sometimes we thought could not even enable us to complete this academic piece of work together. They ranged from difficulties with working together based in different countries in the earlier stages, deficiency of and difference in applying research knowledge to challenges with communication, being overly ambitious, complexities in private personal life and sometimes what could be interpreted as being non-considerate of the other. We tried to overcome such by establishing a good communication and a continuous exchange of information with each other that could enable the completion of this Master thesis.

Second were the failed email addresses of the graduates in the first place when we emailed the total study population. Five emails bounced back since they could not be delivered. The solution to this problem was to contact all of them whom we knew through other means like new social media in order to maintain our sampling frame work. As we managed to gain responses from more than half of the study population and they gave us rich information, we do not think the non-responding graduates affected our study negatively.

Thirdly, it was sometimes difficult to transcribe some Skype recorded interviews as some contained background noises or technical defaults. With this problem, during the transcription we had to listen several times and sometimes leave gaps in the interview transcription and send it back to the participant to fill them in.

The fourth issue was the difficulty with having any feedback from Swedish students whose perspectives we cherished, because whereas our Master is offered from a global perspective, it is actually based on the Swedish context. We decided to remove the Swedish and hence all to do with global North and South as had been planned. This problem was solved after our first face-to-face interview with a participant who promised to contact some of his former class mates and through him we got one Swedish participant, whom because of her busy schedule offered to fill in the guide. Again through another participant, we obtained two other interviews with Swedish graduates. Yet, we found no significant difference when looking at the interviews from Swedish participants and those coming from the global North, so we agreed to categorize such with the other graduates stemming from the North.

Fifth, on one occasion, after completion of the whole interview having had the recorder on and checked from time to our utter horror, the file was empty in the end. It was sad news for all of us including the participant whose interview was the first from a Swedish participant after a thorough quest through reminders in vain. This problem was solved by trying to memorize the whole interview in turns, question to question. The write up was sent to the

participant to confirm what was memorized, edit and fill in what was missed. Thank God, this interview was recovered.

The sixth regards the poor internet connection in some countries where participants resided, as a solution some of them, however, offered to fill in our interview schedule instead of Skype interviews. The challenge with these was that, not all of them were as elaborate as if we interviewed them in face-to-face Skype interviews. We lost the opportunity to probe from such participants.

Seventh and last, it was a challenge to find previous studies which investigated fields of employment of social work Master graduates. As we could only find one of such nature which is rather old (DeMaritini and Whitbeck, 1987) we therefore extended our preview to studies on the employment of newly-entered practitioners holding a Bachelor degree.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

The researchers informed the participants by emailing a copy of the Informed Consent form (Ref: appendix 3) before conducting the interviews about the ethical considerations in order to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees. In this form, the participants were assured that the study was purely of academic nature. Further, the interviewees were informed about the importance of their participation, its voluntariness and the possibility to terminate the interview at any time according to their discretion. They were neither pressured nor persuaded to take part in the study. Upon proper explanation of the purpose of the study, they chose whether or not to participate depending on their full understanding of the intention of the research. In addition, their personal information such as names were replaced that is (R01), (country withheld), (nationality withheld) and (NGO withheld) as used in chapter five of findings. Such ensures the anonymity and the protection of personal data of the participants (Kvale, 2009). Only in very general cases, reference to Sweden was made when talking about the Master.

The intrusion into private and sensitive spheres of a persons' life by taking an interview is an ethical concern in social research (Gilbert, 2008). Most critical to this study however, was the fact that the interviewers and the interviewees have attended the same Master program and in some cases nationalities. Our concern here regards our role being from the same Master program. We were aware that the information given from our participants were influenced by such. By being insiders ourselves we could relate easier to certain contents of the program which was on the one hand a big advantage in accessing information, but on the other hand we might have focused too much on certain aspects than others. Certainly an outsider would have had another position, yet we still found our roles within the research as being advantageous for the purpose of our study.

However, by following the ethical considerations and handling the interview situation to research standards, a comfortable atmosphere was ensured throughout the data collection process and if any biases existed, it were none that we noticed. The participants openly shared their experiences on the study subject.

The researchers were also aware of the power aspect in the interviewees, as there is always a specific hierarchy existing between the researcher and the subject resulting into an imbalanced power relation (Kvale, 2009:3-4). Even with unstructured interviews, the researchers guided the interviews. First, they chose the topic; they designed the whole study and posed the questions, thus, leading the conversation by and large. However, by attending to the ethical considerations outlined above and by sharing the same educational background

with the interviewees, power dynamics were more equally distributed also, because the interviewers wanted to engage in in-depth interviews to enable them obtain rich responses. Such could only be obtained if the interviewees felt that they were fully respected and that the interviewers were not being bossy through the interview process especially through questioning and probing. On the contrary, however, the participants have been in professional practice for some years now, they have acquired experience. This could have made them to feel more powerful than the researchers who are still under-going training through the Master program. The participants yet, thought it was a pleasure to be selected purposively to take part in our study and responded to all questions and openly informed us where they thought the questions were rather difficult, so we could give them additional explanation to do so finally.

### **3.10 Validity, Reliability and Generalization of Study Findings**

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:251) “when ascertaining validity that is whether an inquiry investigates what it seeks to investigate, the content and purpose of the study precede questions of method”. In this study therefore, whereas the study sample can be said to have been a ‘scatter’ across the global; the study findings are held valid, because they suitably served the context and purpose of the study.

To a large extent we can also say that the findings of our study are reliable, because first of all we collected data from a large sample of sixteen participants from a total study population of fifty-nine. Secondly, from the face-to-face interviews conducted, we had the opportunity to probe our participants further by asking them on the spot (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:203) where we had not understood or thought we needed more clarity. The data was supplemented with responses from six other graduates responding to the interview guide and emailed us back. Thirdly, we recorded all the interviews and transcribed them by ourselves while ensuring that the job was well done.

However, generalization may be difficult, because the study findings are based on only sixteen interviews out of a study population of fifty-nine which is not even half. This may not be representative enough of the whole study population. However, whereas the findings prove difficult to generalize, they point to a multiplicity of realities existing which can be used to understand how graduates of the Masters’ programme perceive creation and use social work knowledge in practice. Hence readers of these researcher findings may transfer the content to their situations in the best ways they are able to relate with it. This is what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:263) termed as ‘reader-based analytical generalization from interview studies’.

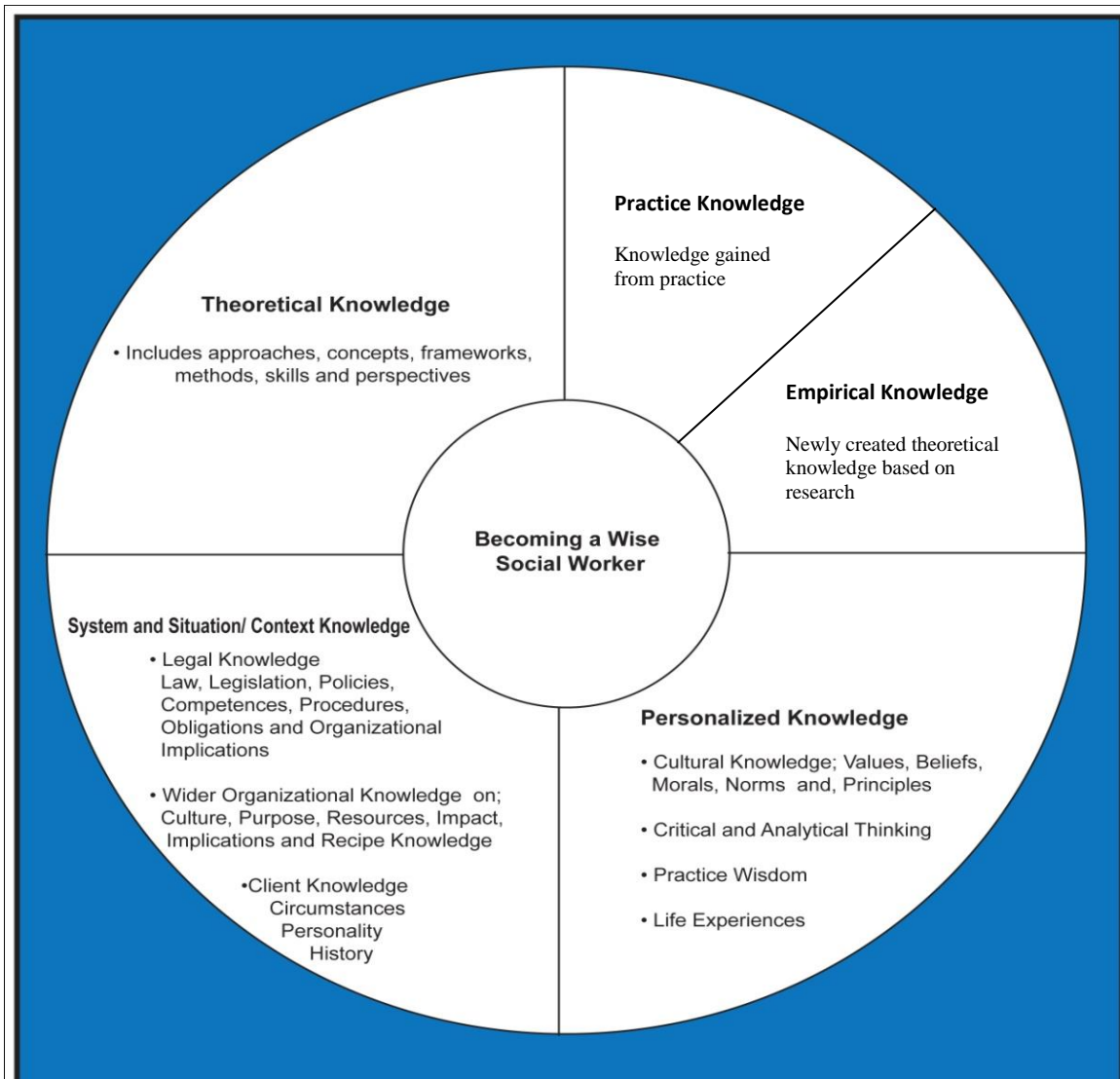
## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

#### 4.0 Introduction

The theoretical framework used in the study is in three folds; first we extensively reviewed literature on the different typologies that social work scholars use to understand knowledge creation and use for the profession hence; the theories by Drury-Hudson (1997); Pawson et al (2003); Osmond (2005), and Trevithick, (2008) together with the impact of the working environment upon knowledge use (Osmond and O’Connor, 2006). Upon proper understanding of such, we looked at Payne’s (2007) theoretical framework of performing as a wise person and came up with one model of our own (Ref: diagram 1) which best suited our study purpose. Finally, we based the research on a social constructivist perspective (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) which is depicted through questioning and analyzing the study findings.

**Diagram 1: A Model of “Using Different Social Work Knowledge and Becoming a Wise Social Worker”**



**Source:** Kazooba and Müller, 2014

## 4.1 Understanding Knowledge Use in Social Work

In our model we included five types of knowledge, that is, theoretical knowledge, practice knowledge, empirical knowledge, system and situation/ context knowledge and finally personalized knowledge. However, we believe that when one finally masters the proper usage of the different types of knowledge depending on the proportions one applies to different practice settings including the wealth of experience they gain over time, their personal ability to manipulate such knowledge to reach their practice goals, is what we sum up to make the wise social workers (Payne, 2007).

Theoretical knowledge includes approaches, concepts, frameworks, methods, perspectives and skills to enable the practitioner to explain, describe, predict or control his/her job context (Drury-Hudson, 1997:38), while practice knowledge encompasses all the knowledge gained through experiences in the field which may also include theoretical knowledge (Trevithick, 2008:1226). We then regard empirical knowledge as newly created theoretical knowledge based on research (Trevithick, 2008:1222).

We further came up with a new category, which is system and situation/ context knowledge in which we subcategorized three main knowledge types; legal, wider organizational and client knowledge which are to help the practitioner to move around and take action within the working environment. We believe that every person holds a social stock of knowledge in everyday life including knowledge on their situation that is in which context this knowledge can be applied and to which extent. This stock is much more specific and well-assorted in areas frequently dealt with like one's own profession; giving the tools to master the main routines in daily life, whereas unfamiliar and remote areas remain more imprecise and general. Unless the knowledge cannot serve to deal with an arising problem, it will be held as valid and taken for granted (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:39-41). Legal knowledge may be on laws, legislations and policies as well as on competences, procedures and duties similar to Osmond, (2005:896), so the practitioners need to know to which extent she/he should apply such knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:39). This also includes knowledge on organizational implications, thus, how much the legal system can encourage, enable, promote or on the contrary hamper or limit social workers in delivering their best practice (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006:16). Such may be structured according to how relevant something is to know in daily life and for others one interacts with, which may differ from time and place (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:42-43). Further, we included wider organizational knowledge which consists of organizational culture, purpose, impact, implications and resources. It is the role of the practitioner to interplay with such knowledge to attain effective practice (Osmond, 2005:896). To this we added recipe knowledge, hence, the knowledge where to turn to when one's own knowledge is exceeded; the practitioner knows which knowledge to expect from whom (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:40, 43). Also here belongs knowledge on organizational implications (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006:16). And lastly, we agreed with Osmond (2005:895) that knowing about the client's context especially circumstances, personality and history is indeed essential to provide a good service to them in social work.

Last but not least is personalized knowledge containing of five subtypes. To such belongs cultural knowledge (Drury-Hudson, 1997:40-41), which again can be complex and confusing for people who don't hold knowledge on specific aspects (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:43). To cultural knowledge Osmond categorizes values, beliefs, morals, principles and ethics (2005:890). We extended personal knowledge to include critical thinking and analytical reflection (Payne and Askeland, 2008:31), life experiences (Trevithick, 2008:1226) and practice wisdom as a tacit form of practice knowledge, which can be described as intuition,



common-sense and an inner feeling of knowing what to do in a specific situation based on former experiences (Scott, 1990:565; Zeira and Rosen, 2000:104).

The different knowledge types definitely overlap for example, context knowledge can also be found in cultural knowledge, practice wisdom which is easily understood as practice knowledge is also under personal knowledge and organizational implications cutting across as discussed above. According to Gordon and Cooper (2010:251), practitioners try to balance their different types of knowledge in order to inform their practice in the best way possible. By highlighting the importance of specific personal capabilities to ensure good practice, they drew to Payne's concept of the 'wise social worker' which we found well applicable to our study. Moreover, we think in order to hold professional social work knowledge what Drury-Hudson calls the accumulation of information and understanding of all the different types of knowledge to serve as a guide in practice (1997:38), requires one to become a 'wise social worker' hence we see such as the ultimate goal in practice. The model on performing as a 'wise social worker' is presented (diagram 1).

## 4.2 Performing as a 'Wise Social Worker'

Payne argues that there is need for the social work profession to switch its research and theory-development efforts to accept and understand improvisation in flexible situations, not to try to produce and promote unrealistic certainty and order (Payne, 2007:85, Fisher, 1991:xii) and agrees with other scholars who acknowledge the relevance of other kinds of knowledge to social work practice (Pawson et al., 2003:17; Drury-Hudson, 1997:35-37; Osmond, 2005:882 and Trevithick, 2008:1212). He argues that while social work knowledge and theory is integral to all social work practice, to provide a good service to the service user certain abilities need to be embodied in the worker, in an improvised interpersonal performance with users in the agency context. Payne certainly builds up with his concept on the embodiment of critical practice in social work by which the unit of understanding, knowledge and skills in practice in one person and it's personality is meant (Adams et al, 2002:1-2). He therefore draws to three aspects which are crucial for a practitioner to become such a professional, what he terms as 'performing as a wise person in social work practice'.

First is the social work role, where he uses Goffmans' dramaturgical role theory (1968, 1972a, 1972b, 1972c in Payne 2007:92) suggesting that we react to interpersonal situations by acting out roles in accordance to the appropriateness of the situation and other involved actors. Therefore, also the social worker acts out roles which are relevant to the contextual situation, presenting herself/ himself as a person and in her/ his role of a social worker while interacting with other people who also take upon various roles, such as the disturbed or the sick. Social workers, service users and their carers take upon various roles from life experiences which are in relevance to the situations at hand. Performance consists therefore always of a set of roles, rather than only one particular role.

Secondly, he refers to the importance of improvising. Payne acknowledges that social work offers a wide range of techniques which are quite general and complicated in books making it difficult to apply such knowledge in a certain human situation, creating a challenge for every practitioner being able to use it all the time. By grasping the idea of the knowledge 'tool kit' and being creative while considering how to react to a certain situation, social workers are able to inform their practice. Thus, social workers build up a selected collection of response to the themes they can identify with in commonly working situations. How this knowledge gets applied depends partly on their training and understanding and the reaction of other people. To become a 'wise person' one has to learn how to improvise in social work practice by

embodying one's set of knowledge, fully grasping it, thus, being flexible to performance. The instruments used in this improvisation in practice are knowledge, skills, understanding and the social work values, of high importance here is establishing communication, the courtesies of entering helping relationships with the different actors as well as wider institutions and helping services resulting in experiences from which the practitioner profits.

Third and last, he points to the need for certainty and flexibility. Social work practice is always improvised as no intervention can be fully conceived before it takes place, thus, improvisation of actions and roles is required at all times. It is a continuous process of trying and retrying with what works best. The challenge here lays in offering certainty of accepted practice and at the same time offering the flexibility of being provisional. Such seems to be an inconsistency with which practitioners especially beginners suffer, but it resembles the very nature of social work as this profession deals with humans who are inconsistent and unpredictable. Social workers therefore always use their flexibility to promote certainty.

Finally, for one to become 'the Wise Social Worker', a practitioner's wisdom first depends on his/her knowledge base and on how this knowledge gets embodied within his/her personality. Such means, that the social worker first has to discover how he/she reacts in a certain situation and get comfortable with his/her role. This wise person is able to attend adequately to the needs of the situation and the involved people by improvising his/her performance alongside his/her colleagues, service users and their carers, restructuring and incorporating knowledge and evidence. She/he is able to name the source of the knowledge and to use theoretical parts to structure the applied knowledge. It is crucial to fathom the practice, thus, theory as well as evidence-based knowledge are only helpful to a certain degree. However, by grasping more theoretical frameworks the understanding of social work practice will be continuously improved (2007:91-95).

### **4.3 A Social Constructionist Approach to Knowledge Use in Social Work**

Since the emergence of postmodernism as a new mirror through which knowledge construction is being viewed, the positivist worldview of objective reality has been challenged (Lit and Shek, 2002:105). Social constructionism as a sociological theory of knowledge takes a critical stance to conventional understandings of the world and rather considers how those are socially constructed as social phenomena and objects in particular contexts. As such, it scrutinizes generally accepted knowledge stating that all observations of the world are biased as they are created by human beings that is 'subjects'. Further, how the world is perceived is bound to certain historical and cultural contexts and therefore shaped by the concurrence of social structures and economical arrangements. Opposing essentialism with this school of thought, social constructionism sees the world as fabricated by social processes allowing various truths to coexist at the same time. Since knowledge is a product of time and culture, it can neither be taken as universally valid, nor social theories and psychological explanations (Burr, 2003:2-3; Hacking, 1966:19-25).

Within this study, we take upon a social constructionist approach to knowledge use in social work. From a constructionist epistemological point of view, knowledge is a result of the interactions of a person with others and hence depends upon the time, social and cultural contexts (Ben-David, 1998:103 in Houston, 2002:151). Also Berger and Luckmann consider knowledge as developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations. From here we can see that social interactions play an important role in what becomes knowledge for the individual hence what underpins the principle upon which the social constructions paradigm that knowledge is socially constructed. In line with such, reality – what is thought to be

known as true – is a social construct itself. Moreover, the authors describe “*knowledge in everyday life as socially distributed, that is, as possessed differently by different individuals and types of individuals*”. That is, what one person holds to be true and real or regard as knowledge might not be so for somebody thus depends on the subject and context (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:43). Also Hacking (1999:1) views knowledge as being socially constructed.

Already, Anderson-Meger (2013) found in her dissertation that undergraduate social work students view knowledge as being a subjective concept and regards knowledge hence as being constructed. Thus, we take a critical stance to knowledge use in our study and can just say what the graduates of the IMSWHR think knowledge and specifically social work knowledge is what knowledge they believe they use, how they think they use it and where they believe they obtained it from. In general, we explored how they perceive their experiences with knowledge use in social work practice. However, we cannot say which knowledge they actually hold how they use such and where they obtained it; this would be based on our preconceived views about knowledge gained from other sources hence contrary to the social constructivist perspective which sees knowledge as a result of the interactions of a person with others meaning that the knowledge perception of the graduates is deeply embedded in certain historical and cultural contexts they have been experiencing. Therefore, what the graduates considers as knowledge depends on each of them and might not be considered as knowledge by the others. Hence, we took upon this approach agreeing that multiple truths and multiple realities are created and co-created by each of us, individually and collectively and with such assumed that various experiences with knowledge use by the graduates exist.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **STUDY FINDINGS, ANALYSES, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings and analyses of the study on our topic “*Knowledge Use in Social Work: Experiences of Graduates from the International Master in Social Work and Human Rights, Gothenburg University*”. The study was done at two stages as detailed in 3.5 of the methodology chapter. Findings from the first step study are presented with all responses from the thirty-one graduates who got back to us. Details of these findings are presented in table 3 (appendix 5). The second step was the main focus for the entire study and is therefore explored in details presenting the findings from a total of sixteen participants who were interviewed. We first present background information in the first section aimed at aiding the reader to understand the main findings on knowledge use by the graduates which is presented in the second section where we also applied the model of knowledge use (diagram 1) as detailed in chapter four. Note that the categorization of participants into two groups of global South and North was only made in the first section to better visualize the kind of social work that the graduates engage with in the two global spheres, but does not have much bearing on succeeding discussions. We also used such categorization when drawing implications of our findings for social work.

#### **5.1 Section One: Background Information**

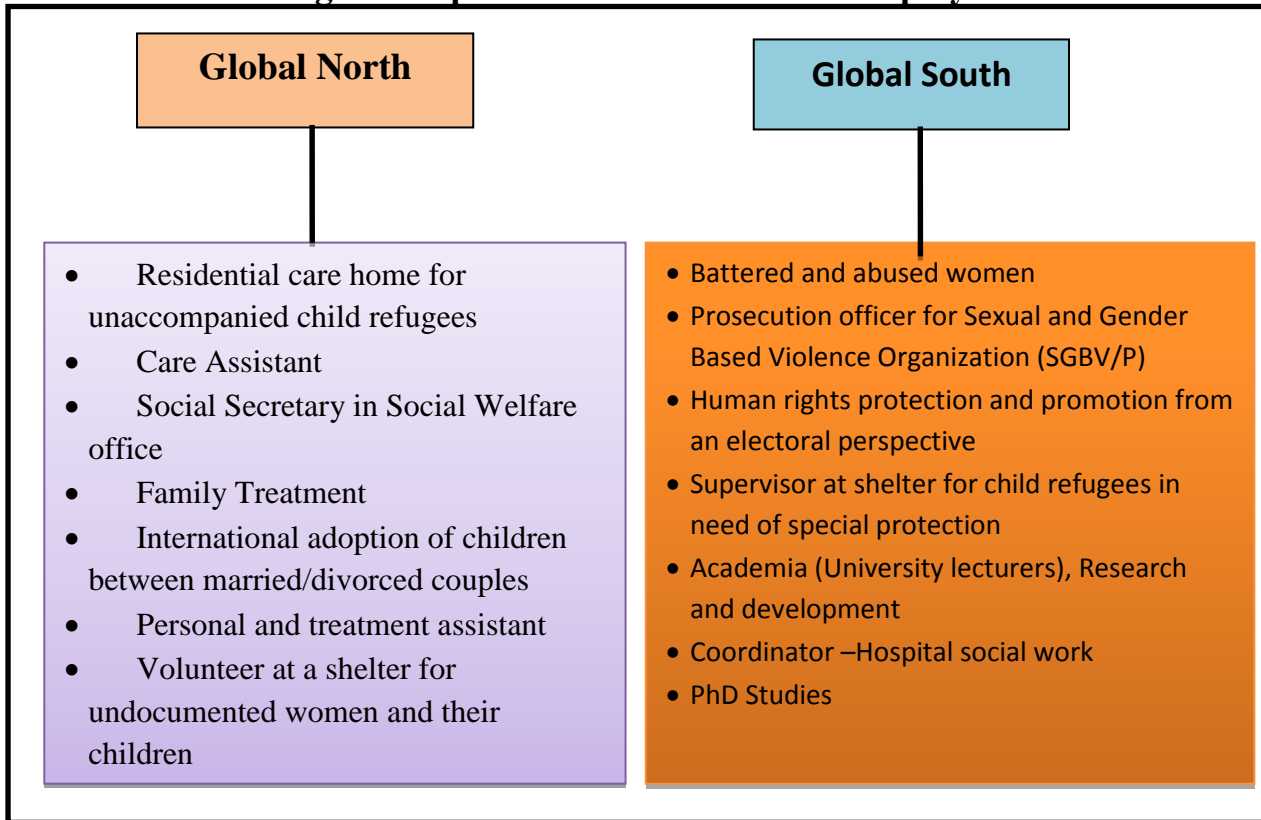
This section presents all the background information that was considered in the study to help the reader best to understand our findings on knowledge use by the graduates of the IMSWHR. It includes; participants’ current fields of employment; activities of social workers in the global North and activities of a social worker in the global South, graduates’ educational background before undertaking the IMSWHR, motivation for joining the IMSWHR and knowledge from the Master and other benefits of the program.

##### **5.1.1 Participants’ Current Fields of Employment**

The table below presents all the current fields of employment in which the graduates who participated in the study were found to be. The analysis that followed also briefly took in the tasks they were engaged in. From the total study population the thirty-one graduates who got back to us, twenty-one said they were in social work, while the remaining ten were engaged in other activities, such as running their own businesses, non-social work jobs, further education and parenting.

Concerning the sixteen participants we collected data from we found them largely engaged in social work as compared to non-social work activities. The graduates were also found to work in all kinds of organizations where social workers could be found being at local; national; regional and international levels. In the global South they largely worked with NGOs, INGOs; Private Sector Partners and to a lesser extent also with the state, especially by lecturing in the public university and one with the electoral commission. In the global North, however, the state was the leading employer with a few exceptions who were employed by NGOs. Also in the global South, the activities engaged in targeted holistic socio-economic development contrary to those of the global North which were case-work centered.

**Table 1: Showing Participant’s Current Fields of Employment**



**Source: Empirical Data from Interviews**

In the global North one participant said that she was working with a residential care home for unaccompanied child refugees another with a shelter for undocumented women and their children. Related to these was a participant from the global South who said she worked as a supervisor at a shelter for child refugees in need of special protection. According to Payne and Askeland (2008:4), such social work graduates are not working internationally, but their daily practice is related to some of the local consequences of globalization: international migration, asylum seeking, and refugees. One worked with international adoption of children between married/divorced couples which they categorized as working with agencies for cross-national issues. All the above participants worked for national NGOs located in their home countries. Care, personal and treatment assistants worked for the private sector in the North while two social secretaries, a coordinator for administration and a participant working with family treatment were employed by the state. In the global South, participants said they were working for national NGOs except for one working in the private hospital as a social work and those engaged in academics with a public university. Also in the global South the finding agree with Payne and Askeland (2008), hence participants work linked directly with poverty, inequality, social and personal problems.

Finally, we only found three participants who had crossed international borders to perform social work hence we believe because this number is very small, it could succumb to any other explanation not necessarily having undertaken the IMSWHR and as already described; two were employed by the state and one by the private sector hence do not work with international NGOs.

### 5.1.2 Graduates' Educational Background before Undertaking the IMSWHR

Up to ten participants had direct social work education backgrounds. One of the participants had done social work with a special focus on pedagogics. The remaining participants had done Bachelors in either one of the following subjects or had a combination of two or three as majors and minors; social sciences, social administration, psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, education-pedagogy, Asian-American studies and International Migration with Gender and African studies.

Some participants also possessed other trainings including other Masters, internships, long term volunteering experiences and placements, workshops and conferences and on-the job trainings where some acquired knowledge certificates and more knowledge which they apply to their practice.

For example R09 had attained a long term experience in volunteering with different groups including the youth and the elderly. She explained that; *“before I started doing my Bachelor, I was volunteering for around 8 years. I started being a volunteer when I was 12 years old”*. Also R16 had had trainings for her volunteering work; *“I have been in many social workshops for which I got certifications in (...) and here also through this education in (NGO withheld). It was about how to deal with people. It is about drugs and addiction training and another one is about how to give counseling to people who are dealing with guilt. They feel guilty in their life, so that was another workshop I have been through. I have been through one education before you become a volunteer, because you know this organization is volunteer-based.”* Several participants had had similar or related experiences.

### 5.1.3 Motivation for Joining the IMSWHR

The IMSWHR draws participants from across the globe. However, no matter where the participants come from; they have a motivation. Whereas some of the motivations for joining the Master were common across participants; others were unique to the individual persons. No literature was reviewed on this theme, but it was included in our analysis for the purpose of establishing the relationship between motivations for joining the Master and the benefits gained such as obtaining practical experience and acquiring social work and human rights knowledge hence directly related to the core of our study. Our study encountered and explored the motivations discussed herein below;

The desire to escape from a stressful work environment; and the interest in working as a researcher coupled with an interest in the international part to see social problems as global; were the motivation factors for R02 to join the International Master program. Others also felt a need to change the environment or the love for adventure which was in R15's case combined with an invitation of his brother, who already stayed in Sweden at this time to seek for the program; *“I always liked to discover something new and see myself how I react in foreign countries, different environments and (...) it was between adventure and different feelings”* (R15). So we can say that for this participant they were combined factors that motivated him.

Yet the motivation of a few friends who were already doing Masters in their home country and kept on telling R05 to start thinking about doing a Master finally got her to the program. This participant explained that she was strongly attached to her job, which involved working directly with children, who had been victims of abuse, physical, sexual and neglect hence she felt unprepared. Closely related to this was in the case of R05 the opportunity given to attend the same Master program at the University of Gothenburg as her Executive Director (ED) and

two more colleagues who had completed in earlier years motivated her; “(...) *our Executive Direct said that this time it is your chance, he thought that it is time for me to attend the same program and then at the same time for me, I felt that I was ready, emotionally, psychologically and everything, so I grabbed the opportunity.*” Because R05 was given a chance by the ED of her employing organization who has actually earlier attended the Master program, this speaks well for the relevance of the Master program to practice as it is recommended by those who attended it over ten years earlier and are now in practice. Another factor was the lacking tuition fees also mentioned by other participants.

The nature of the earlier kind of social work engaged in by the graduates also motivate someone to join the Master program. R06 thought that her kind of job was not what she wanted to do for a long time, so she wanted to do a Master to be able to get into some kind of different work tasks, but within the same field. She was thinking of working more internationally in bigger organizations or abroad on a more organizational level. The participant who had also enrolled for a Master in her home country which she abandoned; “*I did start a Master in (country withheld) before which I quit, because I didn’t like it or because it was just mainly the same as I did in the Bachelor. And when I discovered the program in Gothenburg I thought immediately that that is the right thing, because it would - or from the description what I found was that it tried to develop a different kind of social work based on human rights instead of the national social care system. And that was what I was interested in.*” The quest for difference motivated this participant to join the Master program.

Many graduates were driven to join the Master by the human rights perspective of the program; to this motivational factor R07 explained; “*All my life I wanted to do something for others. I cannot stand injustice ever since I was a little girl and I can’t stand injustice; I need to do something about it. And when we found this Master program that connected social work with human rights that was ideal. (...) it seemed like the perfect match after anthropology that teaches you a lot about social injustice on a world level, but doesn’t do much about it. It is very theoretical and I wanted to do something practical, hands-on that not only combines social work, but also the human rights perspective in it. That was very fundamental for me*”, in the same way R09 said; *the most important thing for me I saw from the beginning was that the Master in Sweden in human rights would give me a lot of experience in Human Rights which is lacking in (country withheld)*” and one other among many was what R12 said; “*another thing is the title itself the ‘International Master of Social Work and Human Rights’, you cannot miss out on that!*” Further the curriculum got pointed out as motivating; “*I just liked information about the Master, so didn’t take long time to say yes, because it was interesting, also the curriculum looked interesting*”(R15).

Among other factors, participants who had Bachelors in Social Work were motivated to continue in the same line with the desire to build a career in social work. This passion can be seen in the explanation of R11; “*I had a background in social work and I had the urge to further the same line of academic business. I simply loved this people-centered profession where each day presents with an opportunity to intervene in other people’s lives and possibly make a difference in their lives, in the lives of those who matter to them as well as a difference in their relations.*” Also other participants were attracted by the international nature of the Master. For R08, she had already been an international student before, yet she hadn’t met African students; “*(...) before doing the program I came to the school and I met with (...) the program coordinator back then. I don’t know whether she is still there. She told me that most of the students in this program will be coming directly from Africa and I thought well that’s good, because I didn’t have any friends who were from African countries and I thought that’s the point of an experience or knowledge which I am lacking.*” So the desire to meet African friends brought this participant to the Master. Also for R15, it was the desire to meet people

from other continents and to obtain comparative aspect to enrich his experiences with different perspectives. So he explained; *“I also wanted to become a bit familiar with the system here, in Sweden. Like more or less, in all European Union, we have common laws and practices, but sometimes there are huge differences. And this has to do with their mentality.”*

Other factors which were equally important for the participants to join the Master included the practical experience that the Master offered through field placements. For most graduates, this experience is simply invaluable also the desire to master in Social Work yet such was not available in any university in the country of origin or it was not offered by any competent university. R13 said; *“we don’t have a competent university in my country that offers an opportunity to study a Master degree in social work so this was a great opportunity because my interest has always been Mastering in social work.”* Yet for R12, besides the title of the Master, she also, always wanted to attain a higher education as she explained; *“I always wanted to get higher education for my knowledge. Just to achieve more knowledge onto how I can practice what I have learnt, but I always wanted to do that after I had worked some years and I know what I am doing and going into Masters I would be like equipped with enough knowledge, but I actually took upon this right after my Bachelors and I loved it. So was really motivated just to do it.”*

Finally, R16 unlike all other participants was driven out of her home country by the political situation. She explained that her country had problems with elections they started killing many young people. It really affected her as she couldn’t do anything for social work since human rights activists and women were being killed or imprisoned in addition to many young people. The situation frightened her first as a woman, young person and as a professional, also the desire to practice democracy in her country as she had always read in Western social work books, which would only remain a dream in her country for the moment. Luckily, there was a window of opportunity; her mother’s support; *“my mother supported me both economically and emotionally. We searched together to find one good place. And I was ready for everywhere just to move out of (country withheld) and I was ready for Malaysia, but at the end she supported me to come to Sweden. And my professors they suggested to me UK and Sweden and one of them really affected me and always they said that especially in social work we are very weak, we don’t have many people who are educated abroad and they come back. I mean in this way that they can support (country withheld)’s situation in social work professionally and in the field.”* For this participant, practicing social work in her country constituted a risk of her life or imprisonment hence a motivation to find another place.

As the picture is painted above, the motivations for joining the International Master program ranged from personal to exploring socio-cultural differences, political structural, adventure and finally to the name and curriculum of the IMSWHR itself.

#### **5.1.4 Knowledge from the Master and Other Benefits of the Program**

Like the motivations for joining the Master and what the graduates regarded as social work knowledge, we did not review knowledge on this theme either, but included it because of its importance in linking the knowledge gained by the graduates from the Master to the overall study as presented below;

Well in relation to the motivations for joining the Master, to what extent can we say that the Master met the expectations of the graduates especially in terms of knowledge they are using in practice? This question guided us in understanding the knowledge gained and other benefits of the Master for the graduates.



Some participants obtained social work knowledge especially in terms of perspectives that were different from those in their home countries. What came out of the interviews mostly referred to what they did not gain or the inapplicability of the content to their home context. For example R06 explained that; *“well, when I read the description I thought it would be more, or closer to the social work reality that I experienced in (country withheld) and help me develop something from there, but in the end it was not. It was interesting, but I think it had nothing to do with the kind of social work that is practiced in (country withheld) or not a lot.”* Those who had accumulated many years of experience prior to the IMSWHR mainly benefited informally. They already had social work knowledge gained from their Bachelors and work experience. As one participant stated; *“if I think of the actual content of the course I think there is not a lot that was new or I learned new or related to qualifying me further for any kind of jobs.”* (R06) This participant, however, explained that during her work with young people that come from cultures different from her own, the experiences she gained from interacting with classmates with similar backgrounds is what often helps her to understand her clients a little bit more. This way the knowledge from the Master whether the participant had targeted or not is helpful.

For some participants, what they benefited from the Master in terms of knowledge is not remembered in their short term memory, but they believed that it is somewhere intertwined in the general knowledge that they possess. R07 had this to say; *“I guess that those things do add up to your knowledge without knowing. But then it becomes part of the knowledge that you think is normal knowledge. (...) of course I know all about the - for me it is normal. But not everybody - if I wouldn't have studied what I have studied, I wouldn't have known.”*

Yet others who did not remember the details of the courses they had taken during the Master also thought it was not helpful in the practice areas they were engaged in. R06 expressed this; *“to be honest I can hardly remember the content of the courses, I really can't. What I actually think I use is the knowledge that I got from communicating with my classmates and discussing with people from different countries and exchanging points of view, morals and values.”* Learning is personal whatever one learned and therefore is able to remember is up to the different individuals (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:43), yet the inability to remember what one learnt may not mean that they are not practicing such. Many thing people learn get embroiled into their earlier knowledge hence they may not recognize when and where they obtained such knowledge. This is a possibility with those participants who said they did not remember.

The human rights knowledge was variously referred to. As it was a motivation for many of the graduates to come to the Master, many equally benefited from it. R03 expressed what she gained from the Master as such; *“I gained quite a lot from the Human Rights aspect of the course. I now see every situation at work from a human rights perspective, by doing so, I am able to make fair, informed decisions and relating to clients and stakeholders in an ethical and professional way.”* Another interesting response was from R12 who said; *“I think I took the best out of it and that was the human rights and that was my goal.”* Many more participants had different expressions about the human rights aspect of the Master which either regarded as new knowledge or knowledge obtained from either the Bachelors, practice experiences or other trainings.

Participants said they gained a deeper understanding and various perspectives of the world by engaging with classmates and discussing matters pertaining to different countries and exchanging viewpoints on various topics; socio-economic, cultural and political. In relation to this, some participants pointed out that they learned how religion and religious values influence social work in other countries and the position of women and gender roles in

different perspectives. For others international networks resulted that some participants are using during their professional work.

The graduates also said that they benefited from the field placements. It was a motivation factor for some participants to join the Master and they had hoped to acquire practical experiences. R15 expressed that; *“so yes I had the chance to get the knowledge of the local context where social work takes place, Sweden, ok, specifically and it helped me a lot. I would like to have something more. Some more practical experience, but we cannot be perfect.”* According to many participants, this did not meet their expectations as the time period was brief, they went to the field only two days of the week during the placement period of two months. However, for others they did not only gain knowledge about the NGOs they worked with, but also about the particular social issues that they targeted, for example migration and asylum seeking processes.

Graduates became more critical and analytical from the Master and later in their work. They gained insight into examining different aspects of a case and questioning themselves what certain things mean when they encounter them at work and in their daily lives. R10 responded to this by saying; *“the knowledge from the Master program has enabled me to think critically and also view things from a human rights perspective. My current job requires me to meet people with all kinds of sexual orientation, without the exposure and human rights perspective that the Masters provided me with, I would still handle them with a biased attitude that I had before.”*

Other participants were confident that having a Masters definitely qualifies one for better jobs within their country; graduates also confirmed faith in the possibility of obtaining international jobs with the IMSWHR. With regard to this, one participant had this explanation; *“I was not planning to come back to (country withheld,) but because of this Master, I am grateful that I am here and now I am working here, it has changed so many things”* (R12).

## **5.2 Section Two: Social Work Graduates’ Knowledge Use**

This section presents findings on the participants’ experiences with knowledge use. It includes; what social work graduates of the IMSWHR regard as knowledge in general and as social work knowledge specifically, the kinds of knowledge used by the graduates of the IMSWHR, the wise social worker and the sources of social work knowledge.

### **5.2.1 What Social Work Graduates of the IMSWHR Regard as Knowledge in General and as Social Work Knowledge Specifically?**

Some of our participants thought that knowledge is a very broad and philosophical concept which others stated having a problem with defining. Even with that, however, we found that some concepts and key words were mostly used to explain what they thought knowledge is hence their mentions; experience, information and skills, the least used were; facts, insights, ideas, inputs, awareness, learning and finally to perceive or not to.

In addition, many other thoughts were found to be held about knowledge and among them included that; knowledge is diverse hence it can always change, because you always learn and it is very open and that it is also what is newly acquired. It can be both subjective and objective depending on context and perspective. They also thought that knowledge can be obtained in both formal and informal ways, it can be about something or anything and finally that it can be both professional and unprofessional.

Knowledge acquisition was regarded as a continuous process of acquiring all or some information, experience, facts among others hence R12 saw knowledge as a process; *“just to acquire more things. I am always curious to finding out, learning more, understanding more and yeah, I love learning and I am thinking of studying a PhD.”* This is an ambition which can lead to acquiring more knowledge. However, knowledge has also been looked at differently hence a sum of all that has already been gathered thus; *“knowledge is maybe the sum of all the experiences and inputs that I gathered over the years (...) whatever I have insight on builds up my knowledge”* (R06). This also relates to what others thought that knowledge is a state of being aware and/or informed. The findings here are in line with Alexander et al (2012), who also found knowledge to be much regarded as an ongoing process to which we can add the dimension of knowledge being what is newly acquired as one participant sought to define knowledge. However, while we agree that it is exciting to acquire new knowledge we also agree with the finding that knowledge acquisition is continuous meaning not only new knowledge is regarded as knowledge.

Knowledge was also regarded by participants to be essential in personal, household, community and professional life. According to R12, knowledge helps one to speak with reference and confidence as she explained; *“at least by having what I have through this education, at least I can speak of things sometimes and confirm them to people or to myself and say at least I know (...) yeah, at least now I can always support myself at work and say, yeah, this is your situation but you have rights.”* Viewing knowledge in this way places it over and above as a powerful tool for practice when intervening in client situations and points out that knowledge will be taken as valid as long as it works. According to R12s’ explanation, her professional knowledge is vital because it backs her up at work and as long as it does, in Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) terms, there is no need to change it. Knowledge of all kinds be it of the client situation, organizational resources and of other organizations which form the community referral network is essential to a social work practitioner as its absence could lead to failure or ineffective practice.

Comparatively participant R12 knows exactly the kind of knowledge to refer hence finds it vital, but it was portrayed to be rather difficult and defeating when the practitioner doesn’t possess certain knowledge which is regarded to be essential in accomplishing social work certain tasks. That came out clearly in the case of a participant whose counseling had changed an abused female clients mind about claiming her rights through the courts, but the IMSWHR graduate practitioner was let down by her insufficient knowledge of how the system of that country work hence her explanation; *“I couldn’t, I knew how (country withheld) worked, but not in a very detailed logical structural; what are the concepts, but in front of the client, I should have played that I can do everything, because I was working as a represent of (institution withheld)”*. The participant found the complex knowledge on the new country she worked in confusing as she didn’t know enough about it (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:43).

And finally, though for many participants classroom learning/education and practice experience were major sources of knowledge, others thought that they gained more knowledge from social interactions. This finding is in agreement with Anderson-Merger, (2013:138) that knowledge is entrenched in relationships with other people and experiences. Also, Alexander et al (2012:109) found knowledge mostly to be defined by undergraduate social work students as information and experience which is consistent with what we found to be the case for the graduates. But also with the overemphasis on knowledge be a product of interpersonal interactions most our participants, we can confirm the definitions of knowledge

given by Berger and Luckmann (1966:3) stressing the importance of experiences, culture and context in forming such and confirms knowledge as an open and subjective concept.

Having seen what the graduates regarded as knowledge in general, below is what they thought pertained specifically to social work knowledge;

The graduates regard social work knowledge to be the methods and the theories which they learned from their studies in addition to the experiences they gained from practice. They also said they viewed social work knowledge as an instrument for practice, but also as knowing what one has to do in a practitioner-client situation.

One participant stated that; *“Social Work knowledge can be seen as the intellectual understanding of social work, both as a field of study and practice. In that, one should be in position to put the social work knowledge learned into practice”* (R03). Just like some participants said about knowledge in general, others also thought the same about social work knowledge hence; *“social work knowledge is like other kinds of knowledge in the social field thus highly dependent on perspective and quite subjective”*(R02). Hence how this knowledge is applied to practice may vary from practitioner to practitioner as long as the holder remains adherent to the principles of the social work profession. For example, the theoretical knowledge acquired through education may for one practitioner be modified by practical experiences, while for another adherence to the company policy may cause them to apply the same knowledge differently. For yet another participant; *“the different social work theories should be transferred into practice and then it becomes social work”*(R05). Other participants also held the same view as the one quoted. The graduates regard social work knowledge as the methods and the theories which they learned from their studies. They also stated that theories were a kind of knowledge they were using in their daily practice. However, whereas we agree that social work knowledge should be *“transferred into practice”*, we disagree with the participant adding that; *“and then it becomes social work knowledge”*. Stating such would disregard all that valuable knowledge which makes up the professional body of knowledge, but is not transferrable into practice. For example such knowledge on the distinctive value base, the professional culture and methods of training (Reamer, 1994:2 in Askeland and Payne, 2001:13).

*“It is very rich (...) social work practice is a highly skilled activity mainly when we are supervised. The other side of the coin relating to Social Work study areas like Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Social Welfare Policy, Research in Social Work and Human Rights; it’s all amazing. It’s abroad and diverse field that enriches students with great skills and experience to work with human populations”* (R04). Here, social work practice is regarded as a highly skilled activity, especially when the practitioners are supervised. This implies that effective practice requires the practitioners to possess specific knowledge and skills that are relevant to the specific area of intervention; for example knowledge of the social welfare policies and that of human rights which the participants stated having acquired from different sources.

*“Anything I have learned within the formal education programs the Bachelor and the Master and my practical experiences even before my Bachelor studies maybe when I was doing volunteering in a social work field so anything related to the job and the field”* (R06). Participants variously referred to their practice experiences as social work knowledge which they gained from practicing in the field and indicated that such knowledge they could not have acquired from anywhere else. For some participants, valuable practice experiences were obtained even before their Bachelor studies. One participant stated having started

volunteering in social work when she was only twelve years and has since been in social work. Together with other participants who had long and different practice experiences, they also portrayed gaining social work practice knowledge as a cumulative process. This has implications for volunteers and interns who undertake training within social work organizations and others state departments that employ social workers. Interest should be paid to the supervision of such processes for they are vital in the process of creating knowledge for the profession.

*“If the knowledge I obtained doesn’t enable me to work effectively with people then it is not social work knowledge”* (R08). According to this participant, social work knowledge should enable the practitioners to perform work which directly relates to people’s holistically situations. It should therefore contain theories, methods and skills which enable the practitioner to approach clients in a humane manner diagnose and design interventions for their problems in the best ways possible to arrive at the best solutions. In this way social work knowledge was portrayed by the graduates to be different from other kinds of knowledge which do not center their practice on the person. Take for example the medical and social models of disability; a social worker in this regard embraces the social model as emphasized by social work literature.

Social work knowledge for one of the graduates refers to *“knowing what you are going to do, to be equipped, and to be armed with what you need so you can later use it when you need it (...) I work with people who are ready to give up their lives, women who are battered but just me having that education, it helps me to speak professionally”* (R12). This finding is in line with what was earlier on regarded as knowledge hence its importance to every practitioner also pointed out. Possession of the necessary knowledge in form of methods and skills required in a particular client-worker situation gives one great confidence in doing their work. It also assures the client that their problem will be solved and that they consulted the right practitioner or social work organization. This in the end we are sure promotes trust in the social work profession.

The graduates also held other views about social work knowledge hence in one participant’s view; *“social work knowledge is one instrument to help you to reach your professional goals”* (R12) another participant added that; *“you need to know some norms, some stereotypes also. The more somebody knows the better for the output and the results”* (R15). Viewing knowledge as an instrument of practice held by some participants in terms of possession of theoretical knowledge including methods, skills and all the experiences gathered directly from practice. An example was given by a participant to compare how different countries focus on different aspects of social work using the illustration that Sweden focuses on domestic violence which may not be the same case in other countries. While gender equality in Sweden maybe a key aspect in practice; in other countries it could be easily neglected. Hence, paying attention to such local context of practice is necessary, especially for practitioners who go to work abroad as some of the graduates were found to do. It was emphasized that without such the practitioner would not be able to reach his professional goals of assisting clients to work out solutions to their problems. According to one of the participants; *“there is a lot of knowledge regarding social work and how it is done in different settings but social work knowledge especially focusing on an African perspective is there but is not well documented and therefore it is not accessible to many across the globe like it is with social work knowledge based on a Western perspective”* (R13). The assertion by this participant is in line with the arguments that much social work books are written by Western scholars from a Western perspective. This therefore renders such text on social work

knowledge less relevant to practice contexts of the South though the practitioners continue to use such texts (Midgley, 2001).

Finally, the participants pointed out that social work knowledge can be obtained from various sources. It is not only what is written in the books, what the supervisors hand down to you, no, it is also obtained from interacting with the clients and its usage includes a creative mix of all kinds of knowledge. We could never understand individuals fully, hence every encounter with every client teaches a practitioner something new about the client and the new knowledge acquired helps you in planning intervention. This is discussed more under the sources of knowledge.

## 5.2.2 The Kinds of Knowledge Used by the Graduates of the IMSWHR

Our findings showed that the graduates perceived to use different kinds of knowledge including theoretical, practical, empirical, systems and situation/ context knowledge containing of legal knowledge, organizational knowledge as well as knowledge on the client and finally personalized knowledge to which practice wisdom, cultural knowledge, life experience, critical and analytical thinking belong as described in the model of using different social work knowledge and becoming a wise social worker (diagram 1). This part follows exactly the description of the model and leads over to the analysis on the wise social worker. It also integrated our findings on the experiences of the graduates with using knowledge in practice.

### A. Theoretical Knowledge

Most participants thought they apply theories in their daily practice, that is, approaches, concepts, frameworks, methods, perspectives and empirical knowledge. R14 stated to be aware of how to professionally approach a client; *“I mean we read a lot about approaches during our undergraduate, so was the approach like your professional, private, personal and how you become a social worker with the three p, we call it.”* She was further quick to name psychological concepts she said she works with; *“Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectic Behavioral Therapy (DBT) and the parental course is called KOMET as outlined by the Stockholm sociologists.”* Although R07 first said; *“theoretical knowledge, seldom, no”*, she was quick to add: *“but it is entangled in the way I think, because I think I became a very analytical person through the studies I have done.”* As such, she refers to *“an analytical framework”* and later on to *“using the human rights framework”*. We find that such deepens one’s *“social awareness”* and causes one to understand how the social structures affect human rights. They easily mentioned methods; *“I have worked a long time with substance abusers and then I worked with a method called motivational interviewing. I still use the technique even if I changed jobs”* (R02). One stated to hold a philosophical perspective, while another one claimed to have one on human rights and a third one stated to know; *“theory about traumatization, people in difficult situations and this kind of thing”* (R06).

Some stated that theoretical knowledge remains in their subconscious, but come up when needed; *“Yeah I mean of course all this time I guess not really consciously, but you use or I use knowledge that I acquired during the Master through theory about traumatization, people in difficult situations and this kind of thing”*(R06). As an implication, she had the following to say; *“I think as a team or as me and my colleagues as persons we realize very often that for example we are not using enough knowledge on traumatization for example. (...) but sometimes it is pushed to the back that we are dealing with severely traumatized children that have experienced the worst in life. (...) we might need more training in that special field. There is rarely time during every-day work.”* Here R06 thinks that she needs to improve her specific knowledge on traumatization as it is not sufficiently serving the daily working

situations (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:41). Also, her organizational context hampers her in obtaining such giving too little time for further education (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006:16).

Similar to Gordon and Cooper who identified difficulties in naming the used knowledge in the beginning of the interview which became better as it proceeded (2010:249), such was also often the case with the graduates. In concurrency with earlier research (Sheldon and Chilvers 2000; Sinclair and Jacobs 1994 in Gordon and Cooper, 2010:246; Munro 1998:94) the graduates sometimes struggled to recognize theoretical and empirical knowledge in their practice, although they came to mention theoretical knowledge eventually. We think they managed to answer the call of Rosen (1994) to incorporate more theories in social work practice after he found such lacking (1994:561), as confirmed by Howe (1987) and Munro (1998:102), but were found lacking in terms of using empirical knowledge. Given that the participants recently entered the field, they seemed highly informed by theoretical knowledge of various kinds and said they were using such in practice, even if that was the case for just a few in terms of empirical knowledge. Even though they felt they might not know enough or are hampered to obtain more, they were able to draw a number of illustrations on the usage of theoretical knowledge. However, we think that awareness of holding and using such could overall be improved since it was weakly represented by some of the practitioners.

## **B. Practice Knowledge**

As the second knowledge type in our model, we referred to practice knowledge which we found that our participants drew a lot to. Quite a number said that they obtained this particular type of knowledge from former practice experiences, like R01 does; *“Communication skills: how to listen, how to communicate, how to ask questions. I have learnt this from interacting with people in different situations especially at work”*. It becomes as such also a source of this knowledge, which is described more in detail in 5.2.5. Some said they use previous experiences; *“Yes, yes let’s say that the client that I have in my mind has some similarities with others. So, I got some experience and with the latest, like the client I have in mind we tried to focus on building up again the social network, to meet new people, to socialize, to get some contact from the other family members, so just a bit”* (R15). Moreover, we found it interesting that several participants valued colleagues very much, who mainly obtained their knowledge through practice. *“Yes, he has so much knowledge even though he never went to the university, so I mean that practical knowledge is very good”* (R14) Another graduate acknowledged that practice experience certainly helps in the field, but cannot be the only knowledge used to derive at a certain decision. *“When working at my last job with homeless women, I’ve learned that for instance, a messy home or unpaid rents can be a sign of mental illness or substance abuse. But I can’t make a judgment based on only that. Usually there are many things combined that I base my idea about the situation on”* (R02).

Already Blom et al (2007:52) found that familiarity is often used by Swedish Bachelor students, which we would see as practice knowledge and in Gordon and Cooper (2010:249) practitioners drew also to practice experiences. However, while our participants found practice experiences to be a valuable kind of knowledge as R14 illustrates; *“(…) but at the same time I can see myself using my practical knowledge so much more which I learned by all the practical studies I have done”* Rosen (1994) saw such as the least used type of knowledge in his study. The graduates gave us the impression with what they told us that they use practice experiences appropriately and also take in other types of knowledge too to arrive at decisions. We think that this type of knowledge has a high relevance for social work practice and for many graduates entering the field full of book knowledge is interesting, but the pressure soon settings in for the graduates to be able to break down all this theoretical knowledge into frameworks that can be applicable to practice situations sooner or later. It

becomes important for them to be able to learn day by day from their colleagues, supervisors, clients and the environment as a whole. This was also emphasized by majority of the participants.

### **C. Empirical Knowledge**

Very few participants referred to empirical knowledge, only one participant thought that she could transfer empirical knowledge to the field hence; “(...) *and the knowledge you get from research so I think that you can be reading something and associating that oh, in that situation, this is exactly what is happening*” (R09).

We can say that graduates thought that their practice was not very much informed by research. In contrast, Blom et al (2007:52) found that the enrolled students used facts mostly in which we would categorize empirical knowledge and also Drury-Hudson (1990:162) as well as Gordon and Cooper (2010:249) found such held by the practitioners they interviewed. However, our study confirms the findings of Rosen (1994:561), Munro (1998:102) and Howe (1987), whereby Rosen calls for a better integration of theoretical and empirical knowledge in the knowledge base of social workers to ensure better practice (1994:562). Whereas empirical knowledge was found not to be used by most graduates, there is need for the profession to increase its focus on new studies to create new knowledge for this profession which globalization affects adversely.

### **D. System and Situation/ Context Knowledge**

We found that the graduates think they hold knowledge on the specific contexts/situations they work in as well as the overall system.

#### **(i). Legal Knowledge**

Firstly, most of our participants named legal knowledge and many of them acknowledged that their work is based on the law like R01 explained; “*I refer to the laws which are set up in (country withheld) and by which people with certain psychological disorders are entitled to receive a certain kind of help and treatment.*” Next to knowledge on social policies, they illustrated how important it is to understand the law and legal procedures to deliver good social work as R07 does; “*You have to play with the law a lot, because people without documents don’t fit within the law. So to be able to communicate with lawyers you need to have some knowledge about the legal system in (country withheld) and the laws on refugees and migration, the laws on social assistance and social benefits and how we can play with these laws (...) and migration policies, asylum policies that is what you need to know.*” Like other participants, she indicated to possess knowledge on her country legal system as well as the wider organizational knowledge hence can move around easily and get her job done, described by Berger and Luckmann (1966:39). This implies that practitioners are able to use their knowledge to navigate through the systems and achieve their practice goals in the end.

Closely related to the above, many participants claimed to hold a specific understanding of human rights and how such affect their work and that it helps them to promote human rights and create awareness for human rights in the community. “(...) *many women they say “I want to know my situation. I want to know that.” So last week with another organization I organized a first workshop on basic rights with the lady from the national organization. And a lot of people came and we decided that we are going to do this more often, because this was the first meeting just to see if people are interested in this and a lot of men came as well that are connected to other organizations and some of them had been undocumented for over 20 years. People asked a lot of questions, so there was apparently a good need for this*”. R07’s knowledge seems to be structured in how relevant it is for her daily life and for her clients



(Berger and Luckmann, 1966:42-43) including external cooperation, which we refer to more specifically in wider organizational knowledge. R14 had a similar story to tell where she fostered her client's human rights by seeking help within her organization. Both graduates knew where to get help (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:40) and how to use their system for the best benefit of their clients (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006:16).

## **(ii). Wider Organizational Knowledge/Context**

We also found that the graduates held rich and detailed information regarding their organizational context. One participant said she knew about her organizational culture, that is, how it works; *“but I took this risk, I learned a lot and became very independent at this organization. Some days, no one came, not even my boss, no one came and I was just alone. I organized everything alone”* (R16). With such, she also thought to know how to move within the institution (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:39). R05 explained the purpose of her organization; *“(…) we don't want to just keep the children under our custody or in our organization giving them everything from head to toe without involving the parents, because we believe that it is also the responsibility of the parents themselves especially the mother who in this case is the alleged abuser to give care as well. So ideally, it should be that the mother should also receive some help”*. Some participants said that their experiences with knowledge use involves collaborating among themselves, other stakeholders such as local institutions, community leaders, and parents/guardians which shows the organizational impact and the wider organizational knowledge; *“(…) we cooperate with all the institutions there and keep in touch with schools, doctors, therapists, lawyers, legal guardians, voluntary guardians, youth agencies and the social care managers”* (R06). These experiences involve relying on the social work knowledge of others as stated by R02; *“furthermore, I am dependent on other people's judgment as well. I could think that someone should have the right to get a second hand contract from the municipality but my remittance could still get a rejection from the municipality real estate office, then I have to base my decision on their judgment.”* The collaborative intervention utilizes the social work knowledge and experiences of others to accomplish social work tasks as explained by the participants. Some of the benefits of such collaboration are to help the non-social work members of the professional team to understand the context of the problem they are confronted with as explained, *“so that everyone would get an understanding or the bigger picture of the problem. That is where as a team we can arrive at a unified intervention or solution not only for the children but also for the mother or for the parents of these children”* (R05). Others stated that they know whom to ask for help; *“(…) I always have my nearest boss, so even if it is after our working hours we always have a boss who you can call, which is also a way of I mean sometimes you can get in the situation that you react instead of actually taking a step back and overview the situation.”* (R14) Besides using this recipe knowledge, she seems to be aware which knowledge to expect from her boss (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:40-43). In line with R15 who states that; *“Because sometimes, we are really affected by it, the resources that we have. Maybe we have the best ideas, the best methods, but this thing is affected by the context, those are the factors of our overall help”*. In such circumstances, collaborating with other stakeholders covers resource deficits and seems to help social workers to reach many more clients as was explained by one participant.

Possession of wider organisational knowledge and understanding of the context in which one works goes beyond just interacting with colleagues, but extends to reach networking with other organizations, members of other professions like lawyers and doctors for the purpose of creation, maintenance and sustenance of a solid practice necessities like a referral network, resource mobilization, development of partnerships including those cutting across private and public sectors as well as consultation with senior practicing members of our profession among

other purposes. All these together contribute to what Osmond and O'Connor termed as delivering best practice (2006:16).

### **(iii). Client Knowledge**

Finally, some graduates were aware of their clients' personalities and they pointed out certain characteristics; *"So I was thinking of notifying the police, but then he came home and he looked very different to me, because normally he is, he doesn't look at you, he looks like a beaten dog well I can say that he looks down on the floor and he always stands against the walls, so you can always see that he is very stressed and in this moment he was looking me into the eyes and was smiling and he came into my room, the office where I was also sleeping and sat down and said he had a headache, if I could give him a pain killer. And I was thinking that this is really odd, because that was really out of his way and also he had never asked for a pill before"* (R06). As this graduate seemed so well-informed about her client's personality, she thought she knew which behavior to expect (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:43), but he acted quite contrarily. So the participant expressed wariness immediately and she became very cautious in handling him. Moreover, she paints the picture even bigger by providing us with the client's history; *"Maybe I should describe a little bit about the boy too. So it's a boy from Afghanistan and he is 15 or 16 years old now and he is very troubled and traumatized. His family is mostly dead, they were adopted (...) (country withheld) with his half-brother on a very long journey through different countries and we know very little about him, but we suspect that he had to prostitute himself in Afghanistan. Starting from a little child that he is hurting himself a lot and he started taking drugs we don't know when"*. Knowledge on the clients' circumstances was said by the graduates to assist in practice as in the following; *"I had one case with a client, where the client had been a victim of honor related violence. It was a terrible situation where the person had escaped from the family and came to the office with basically nothing. The client told a terrible story and feared for their life. We felt that the situation was really serious so we helped to hide this person"* (R02). Other graduates also were able to relate with this kind of knowledge in different client situations. Their explanations indicated that this kind of knowledge is very vital for making informed decisions, especially those which effectively help to alleviate the client situations. This kind of knowledge is not only important for the benefit of the client, it is also vital for the practitioners to be aware of the situations they find themselves in which sometimes. Depending on client history and sometimes personality, it could be dangerous say like in cases of mental illness and aggressive behavior taking the case of the situation R06 described above.

Regarding system and situation/ context knowledge holistically, we found the graduates very knowledgeable given that they mostly only recently joined the field. Whereas Drury-Hudson (1999:162) and Gordon and Cooper (2010:249) found that only very experienced professionals had a good understanding of legal knowledge, procedural knowledge concerning the system as well as organizational knowledge which may include knowledge on the clients, the graduates of the IMSWHR provided a rich picture of such. They also contradict Rosen's (1994) findings of policies being used last by established social workers in decision-making. The experience with the impact of the organizational environment on practice was already discussed in Gordon and Cooper (2010:252), the graduates related with this very positively and criticized what some of them termed as restricting which limited their decisions while they praised what they termed as an enabling environment. The impact of such organizational context being either restrictive or enabling was emphasized by the graduates to enable them be able to deliver best practice or not. As a new legal knowledge we could add human rights as they said they knew about conventions and how to evoke them, which is especially important in the context of the graduates here for the fact that the Master

includes the human rights perspective. They expressed confidence that they have understood the system in which they work and know how to move around within it. In case of limitations be legal or organizational, they claimed knowledge of either where to seek help or how to deal with the situations in the best ways possible to benefit the client. When a new obstacles came up they said they improvise and look actively for the best solutions they can find. Therefore they claimed to establish good communication with their colleagues, their wider network and the clients, but to react adequately to the presented situations. Hence making efforts to master the environmental context in which every practitioner finds themselves should be a continuous positive force in practice. Yet, the majority of the graduates find it difficult in their early years of joining the field.

## **E. Personalized Knowledge**

This kind of knowledge can be said to be that which is embedded within the personality hence who the practitioner is. Some sources of this may be from within other learn/taught like theoretical knowledge on the principles of social work, it's practically and applicability is more reliant of the personality of the practitioner.

### **(i). Cultural Knowledge; Values, Beliefs, Morals, Norms and, Principles**

As the last kind of knowledge we found the graduates the graduates also perceived to hold and to apply personalized knowledge to practice. Such might be on culture; *“Because I felt as a Non-European person, as I walked, I felt like a blind person I should really say. I didn't know the system, what am I doing really?”* (R16). Thus, cultural knowledge can be rather multifaceted and confusing for people who don't hold it (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:43) and plays an immense role in understanding the context and the system. For some of the participants, this kind of knowledge accrues to them by just being born where they were born that is their home countries where we found them practicing from. This may sound like a big challenge to international social work where social workers leave their countries of birth and go to work in other countries, but it in situations where knowledge of the cultural and local context is needed, it may be very beneficial. For example, in a situation of intervening in a local community for developmental purposes, to design projects that are relevant to mobilize local resources, a practitioner who speaks the language of the people and understands their cultural including religious beliefs may become more successful that one who comes from the outside to do the same.

Also principles, values, morals, beliefs and ethics were mentioned by several participants in guiding them to arrive at a decision. Several participants pointed out the importance of principles, like impartiality, confidentiality, empowerment and being respectful; *“yes and I do counseling with them and so often people prefer confidentiality of course and also like to validity their experiences and not being judgmental for them, for their choices”* (R08). R07 emphasized the presence of *“own moral values”* in decision-making and R14 stressed the societal values and the morals of social work, which she called *“silent knowledge”* influencing her practice. Some informants told us they experienced ethical dilemmas in their practice, where they had to make decisions based on their values and beliefs. R16 said she risked once to lose her job in order to stand up for her own principles and beliefs. She further affirmed her position; *“(…) I got a lot of pressure from (organization withheld) to go back and give this service. And I felt oh my God now this is a moral question. This woman, I know how much she is in a difficult situation, this was a dilemma that I really experienced, but I am a woman and I am in a difficult situation, but I am in another (level) and they are in another level”*. Similarly, R02 decided with her colleagues to break the law for ethical reasons; *“I had information that could help the person to realize that the family was lying, but giving out this information would mean that I would be breaking the law of confidentiality. Well, I talked to*

*my colleagues and we decided that the situation made it eligible to break this law because it would save someone's life".* Even though she said she felt limited by the organizational context here and the law (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006:16), she stated that she came to disregard it, but that was because she knew whom to turn to (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:40) for consultation in order to deliver best practice to the client whom she felt was in danger.

### **(ii). Practice Wisdom**

Practice wisdom as a tacit form of practice knowledge, which can be described as intuition, common-sense and an inner feeling of knowing what to do in a specific situation based on former experiences (Scott, 1990:565; Zeira and Rosen, 2000:104) also belonging to our last category.

Some participants pointed out practice wisdom as a form of knowledge that they use in practice which they often described as personal intuition as R14 did; *"I have been there for eight years. I met a lot of girls. In all kinds of shapes and balances whereby I would say in one way when I use intuition is when there comes a new girl. Oh my God, she is just like let's say Jenny"*. Here it becomes apparent that practice wisdom is very much grounded in previous experiences, which the graduates experienced as helpful in judging similar situations. Yet it seemed to remain more tacit; *"I know it is somewhere there subconsciously (...) But I take actions because I feel they are right to take (...)"* (R01). Another graduate described practice wisdom in his own words; *"and this means we need to have some social intelligence, not like IQ, ok, no like mental part, but like the social intelligence, the ability to understand the other people (...)"*(R15). In several other voices of the graduates, you could hear, what is here termed as practice wisdom especially with regard to their own judgment of the situation. In our own opinion, however, we think that this kind of knowledge is very subjective and relying on it to making practice decisions will always require the practitioner to be extremely critical.

### **(iii). Critical and Analytical Thinking**

Most participants stated that they engage in critical and analytical thinking. This draws to how the graduates think they use their knowledge as explained in 2.4 of the literature review chapter. *"What I think we do is that as social workers we do a critical reflection of ourselves. I feel that, for myself, every day I think about what I did wrong and what I did right but apart for that as an individual, we do have meetings every week with our team, (...) we try to analyze the whole situation during that period either a week or during every 15 days"*. This explanation by R09 on critical reflection and the discussion of further steps with her team is in line with what Payne and Askeland (2008:31) wrote. Also being analytical whilst reflective got outlined by R07; *"I think I became a very analytical person through the studies I have done. I have learned how to analyze things so my head is always analyzing from the moment I approach people."* R02 expressed her critique in decisions taken by higher instances; *"There are many times that the municipality says no and I find their decision wrong. In some cases I have sent them new remittances with more information."* With such she states to use critical thinking and although she feels limited by the municipality (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006:16) she says she seeks for enforcing best practice. A more global critique was provided by R13; *"(...) social work knowledge especially focusing on an African perspective is there, but is not well documented and therefore it is not accessible to many across the globe like it is with social work knowledge based on a Western perspective."* This educational imposture has been discussed in several literatures from Askeland and Payne (2001:19).

#### **(IV). Life Experiences**

Finally, we had several graduates pointing out to life experience that is not derived from working in the field, but assists them in decision-making; *“I used to work, for example, as a barman and I came in contact with different groups of society and this gave me a great view of the problems in the society (...)”* (R15). For R12, her family and society are important too; *“Yeah, I acquired knowledge from my education, from my upbringing from the society and basically from the people around me.”* Life experiences become as such also a source of social work knowledge. You will find more discussions on this under sources of social work knowledge.

We could not find any previous research regarding cultural knowledge. However, whereas Rosen (1994) had criticized the overuse of value-based normative assertions of social workers in his study, Gordon and Cooper (2010:250) found that practitioners were aware that their beliefs influence their practices. Munro (1998) also thought so in terms of the use of common-sense understanding in line with Howe (1987), which she criticized. Finally, Gordon and Cooper (2010:249) found long-time practitioners very reflective and critical when practicing social work as well as being aware of using life experiences. In our study such was not referred to a lot, but we found that the graduates stated to hold all subtypes of personalized knowledge. They seemed to be very strong when looking at their awareness of knowledge use, their ability to understand knowledge, their use of certain knowledge to derive at decisions and their attitudes towards certain knowledge. Also, most graduates expressed specific attitudes towards knowledge they used. Further, they said they draw to several types of knowledge, not overusing a specific type in regards to personalized knowledge and checked back with colleagues being guided by the needs of their clients. By demonstrating their critical and analytical thinking, they further showed that they knew how to base their decisions in several knowledge types to ensure good social work also important for good social work practice is what some participants stated in 5.1.4 as having gained the international experience and exposure.

#### **5.2.3 Summary of the Kinds of Knowledge Used by the Graduates of the IMSWHR**

On a whole, most participants acknowledged applying a mixture of the different knowledge types we found above. We found such well-assorted and specific, so they could deal with their profession to master the main routines in their daily practice life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:41). Many found social work knowledge as holistic in nature, *“Attitude in a holistic way, because all the other professions, they look at it’s very isolated parts of the human being.”* (R06). Not so with social work knowledge, they think a person has several dimensions i.e. mental, physical, gender roles etcetera; *“I think it is always about understanding a person as a professional team. So understanding a person in his system, internal and external systems and I think that is what social workers do”* (R06). Such points very much to the eclectic nature of the social work profession (Payne, 2005:31) which attributes to its knowledge base remaining rather open and undefined (Trevithick, 2008:1213). Yet when asked if there is genuine social knowledge, R06 narrated a scenario that proves that in her experience there is a genuine source of knowledge which she gained through education. She said, *“There is such a thing as genuine social work knowledge that only social workers have and I think my supervisor actually didn’t belief that first, but does belief it now, because she used to employ cheaper staff before us, so she had some social workers and then she also had some extra people working in the same field and then it went awfully wrong. And she realized that she actually needs social workers to do the work appropriately. So this is one thing that points out that*

*there must be genuine social work knowledge that (technical default) I can only get through education”.*

Sometimes participants also described the nature of social work knowledge in their experiences as being abstract; *“You cannot categorize this knowledge, I don’t think you can because it requires all kind of knowledge like for example me being a person, I still have to put in emotions and feelings, you cannot be like this is how I learnt this, this is how I was taught no, you have to incorporate in all the different kinds of knowledge so that they all work together to benefit you and the client so I cannot separate the knowledge”* (R12). Yet in one way or another they referred to it before the end of the interviews subconsciously. Personal intuition, practice experience and theoretical knowledge were common to such categories which were in some cases not referred to out rightly. For example, when one said they do counseling and they learnt it from school, but denied using theoretical knowledge. R15, however, said that he combines the various knowledge types to assist him in practice; *“First of all, because everything happens in a specific context, in a specific continent, country, society – it can be a village or a city. We need to exactly know what the context is like we need to know the institutions, the laws of course, the legislation, because sometimes, we are really affected by it, the resources that we have. Maybe we have the best ideas, the best methods, but this thing is affected by the context, those are the factors of our overall help. So we need to have good knowledge of like the laws, the institution and the method that like an organization follows or has to follow even if you don’t agree sometimes. We have to be flexible also. And to know the mentality of the locals, the culture – everything plays a role. We are all a system, we need to know a little bit about this systemic approach, systemic theory. Yes.”* R09 said, *“What I do is that I try to combine everything and put it into practice.”*

Both R12 and R15 yet point with their statements what we find crucial, namely that next to trying to take in as much different knowledge as possible, being flexible with such and to improvise continuously to be able to judge the situation at hand adequately and to react in the best appropriate way in terms of the client’s needs. Some participants portrayed that such calls for good cooperation with service users and all other stakeholders to overcome certain obstacles to good and successful practice, but more as most participants asserted, pertains to the personality of the social worker. We hereby find that the graduates think they can master their daily practice by using all the knowledge they possess when needed and deliver good service to the clients. Such is called ‘performing as a wise person’ by Payne (2007) as illustrated more in-depth below.

## **5.2.4 The Wise Social Worker**

In the following we applied ‘performing as a wise person’ by Payne (2007) which we integrated into our model of knowledge use (diagram 1). It follows exactly the theoretical description given in 4.2.

As seen above in some of the kinds of knowledge participants said they use above, among them some explained that they take their social work knowledge a step further in order to apply it adequately to practice. In line with this, Payne describes three essential variables; in the first one, he shows that the social worker takes upon various roles in order to perform appropriately in a given situation (2007:92). Such was illustrated by several participants and R14 relates it to what her boss did according to her description; *“He has got the characteristics that I am looking for, because he is very good at being professional when it comes to the meetings with the social services, when it comes to the treatment of clients he discusses it on a very professional level. In the meantime when he is around the girls he is very personal with them and he could put stuff down on their level (...)”*. Here R14’s boss was

said to change his character to fit the different roles that he has to perform as a professional. In her explanation, R14, he was said to manage to appear professional advocating for the girls with the social services who might play a supervisory role to him. Whereas with the clients, he was described to appear rather empathic and collegial with staff members of the team, members whom she rather described as playing more distressed roles. Some of the participants said that within their broad practice settings; in some cases they feel like they such roles as; advocate, mother, nanny and listener. These help them to respond adequately to the situations at hand. From this we can say that the graduates perceive themselves and other practitioners to take upon a set of roles to respond to the diverse situations they face in practice.

The next two variables given by Payne called improvising and the need for certainty and flexibility are described by looking at a case given by R06 outlining how she handled a situation in which the client came home late to the institution and asked for a painkiller.

**Table 2: Illustrating a Case**

<p><i>“And I knew I have to be very careful with drugs that I hand out to him, because I never know what he has taken before so I asked him first why he needs the pill, what he has consumed during the day and try to figure out what else I could do so I guess this is some other kind of knowledge which I always have tried, to find different alternatives to instead of just shutting down the way the boy is trying to go. And then we discussed and in the end we agreed to take half of a pill, of a light headache pill which I thought was ok.”</i></p>	<p>Here R06 said she established good communication with the client, while trying to find the best solution together. She perceived herself as very cautious with the medicine she handed out due to her knowledge on drugs gained from earlier experience by working in a similar setting.</p>
<p><i>“And when he was taking it I saw that he had a couple like at least ten of other pills in his hand. So I tried to get the pills from him and he didn’t want to give them to me and got agitated and aggressive and again I remembered a couple of courses and situations I had with aggressive people where I remember to keep calm, to stay physically away from them as much as possible, not to corner them, not to ‘threaten’ them in any way, so I gave him two alternatives and told him that he could either take the pills, which would mean I would call an ambulance or he could hand them to me.”</i></p>	<p>R06 said she acted flexible to this new turn in the situation and improvised. She thought that she built up an adequate response on her knowledge tackling aggressive people while stating she hold up good communication with the client.</p>
<p><i>“He chose not to give them to me and chose to lock himself into the bathroom, then I had another choice to make, which was, do I think this situation is dangerous or do I think it is not dangerous? And I decided that this is not up to me to decide, so I called a medical emergency service where you can call to get medical advice, but also to talk with a doctor if necessary.”</i></p>	<p>Again the situation as R06 describes it seems to turn and she stated to improvise again considering the fore seen danger. Her reaction seemed first to depend on how she understood the situation, namely dangerous, and secondly on all of the reactions given by her client and how she perceived them.</p>

<p><i>“So I described them the situation, told them about the pills and they actually - this also I knew from practical experience, because where I worked before this was the way to go when you needed help at a certain hour and I decided not to call the ambulance, because I knew they would come immediately and just take him away without me being able to influence them on where they would take him and that might not help him. (...) On the phone they agreed with me that it was a dangerous situation especially if he had taken something else before, so they advised me to supervise him every ten minutes, to check his breathing and they would send a doctor to see him within the next hour.”</i></p>	<p>The participant then said she used her knowledge on the wider organizational network. She explained that she established a good communication with another stakeholder whom she thought would best take care of the provided situation according to how she perceived the needs of her client. The decision to ask for further help was based on her former training according to R06.</p>
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**Source: Empirical Data from Interviews**

All the reactions named by R06, point to the second variable improvising, that is, to be able to pick knowledge from one’s base according to the given situation while being creative with it to eventually inform her practice (Payne, 2007:93). Also the third variable “the need for certainty and flexibility” can be seen from what the participant explained. According to her, she kept continuously trying to apply her knowledge by improvising taking upon various actions and roles according to the changes of the situation. Also Payne says that no intervention can be drafted before it takes place due to the unpredictability of the clients’ behavior (Payne, 2007:94-95). Other participants also demonstrated the importance of improvising and flexibility in their practice and regarded such as core competence in social work. Moreover, several participants thought that their personality matters in the service they deliver as R12 explained; *“(…) it requires all kind of knowledge like for example me being a person, I still have to put in emotions and feelings, you cannot be like this is how I learnt this, this is how I was taught no, you have to incorporate in all the different kinds of knowledge so that they all work together to benefit you and the client so I cannot separate the knowledge.”* Payne calls it the embodiment of knowledge within a person, hence, to discover how one reacts in a certain situation and get comfortable with one’s roles (2007:91-92).

Additionally, R01 explained; *“to have a passion for working with people,”* while R09 stressed; *“I think to be a good social worker is to have a good heart mostly”* when asked about the characteristics of a good social worker. R05 and R14 even stated that they *“love their work”*. R06 concludes it best; *“Well I guess your knowledge is always there so I am always hoping that some of it guides me during these situations and I guess the rest is intuition which of course comes from this knowledge, so. But sometimes it is personality and that is sometimes bad and sometimes good. And I guess that’s ok.”* Hence, when all of these variables come together, the graduates find themselves able to perform wisely which we perceive is built upon their personality to complement their knowledge base.

Only Gordon and Cooper (2010) addressed ‘performing as a wise social worker’ in the analysis of their study (2010:251) when highlighting the balancing act of the practitioners’ knowledge. The graduates mostly expressed that they found a way to bridge the insecurity which they first felt when entering the field; *“I had, the first couple of months I had it really difficult and I felt like I could not use that knowledge at all, and as time was coming and I was growing there and getting helped by the other volunteers, but also by women that trusted me anyway”* (R07). Notably, the graduates find the working environment crucial in feeling enabled to perform wisely as the system seems to really affect the extent to which



practitioners are able to perform as was discussed regarding system and situation/context knowledge. Still, we find that the participants gave great and motivating answers on how social work graduates in general could manage to overcome the difficulties in the beginning as described by R07. Further, we acknowledge that it takes some time for beginners in social work to come to perform as wise persons, yet there is a lot of hope given the graduates only recently joined the field and find themselves coping so well. They thought they can express their decisions and the reasons for such rather clearly which stands in contrast to earlier studies (Osmond and O'Connor, 2006; Gordon and Cooper, 2010: 246; Munro 1998:94), but which confirms the picture of the wise social worker once more. We hereby confirm Payne's call to shift some focus from incorporating more evidence-based practice to rather regard social work practice holistically asking to take into account its eclectic nature and dealing with people's uncertainties. Rather, we think that social workers find themselves continuously coping with such by being flexible and artistic about which knowledge to apply than to stick with methods which have been proven to work best in much more defined settings. Next to restructuring and incorporating knowledge adequately alongside with colleagues, service users and their carers, Payne also mentions that 'wise' practitioners can name the source of the knowledge they apply (2007:95). Hence, we finally looked at how the graduates dealt with this question.

### 5.2.5 Sources of Social Work Knowledge

The kinds of knowledge named by our participants are highly intertwined with where they perceive they obtained it from which is why we need to consider those together. Some named knowledge types as the source itself, as R03 does when looking at the law. Others stated, however, that; *"I apply the knowledge that I got especially during my Bachelor about the law and I have to apply that every day and use my knowledge to coordinate through the system"* (R06). Whereas R08 said to use readings to obtain legal knowledge, R07 and R14 stated to acquire such by working in the field.

The field also became a source of practice knowledge, if not to say practice itself was seen as the important source of practice knowledge,; *"Let's say one situation that I was very glad that I had this knowledge was a couple of weeks ago when a boy tried to kill himself on my watch when I was there during the night, alone and I had this situation before so I could even though it was a completely different field and a completely different situation I could go back and say, ok what have I done before and what makes sense now so that was actually very helpful. (...) so here I applied my knowledge which I used from experience before when I was working with drug addicts. (...) again from other practical experiences I gained with mentally ill people, I knew that these were really strong opiates like pain killers that you use for cancer treatment and that they can be deadly if you are taking an overdose. (...) And again I remembered a couple of courses and situations I had with aggressive people where I remember to keep calm, to stay physically away from them as much as possible, not to corner them, not to threaten them in any way so I gave him two alternatives and told him that he could either take the pills which would mean I would call an ambulance or he could hand them to me"* (R06).

Internships as well as volunteering were also seen as a source of practice knowledge. As in the example of R16 who said to receive on-the-job training by the institution she volunteered for; *"I said that I have been through one education before you become a volunteer, because you know this organization is volunteer-based. All of the volunteers should go through their education about violence and women. So I have been through them."* On-the-job training was also mentioned as a source by others mainly referring to theoretical knowledge specifically

related to the institutions' services. Many appreciated interpersonal interactions as a knowledge source as R16 draws it; *"I think that my colleagues they really (taught) me both language (...) and they really tried to learn (teach) me documentation, how to write academically."* So colleagues were perceived to inform about cultural knowledge and theoretical knowledge next to practice knowledge as in the case of R15; *"It can be colleagues of course, that's why we have many meetings, we have the ability to exchange knowledge and I get another view from my colleagues, opinions on their clients, so it is like getting an extra experience, maybe that I haven't experienced, but I see through their eyes"*. They may also be in contact with professionals from other disciplines, such as psychologists, teachers, legal guardians and lawyers among others from whom they also said to obtain various types of knowledge. R06 thinks that also informal sources are useful; *"(...) in some situations friends, I just call friends they work in the same fields or that I just think might think to be able to know something, the internet, I google a lot."* R15 refers to a mixture of knowledge he thinks he draws to; *"It's something I have already learned at the university, in my school, in my family even. In the society I am coming from or from experience that came from the past, but preceded my studies, It's not all about studies and what you study in the books. It is also about experience. I used to work, for example, as a barman and I came in contact with different groups of society and this gave me a great view of the problems in the society (...)"*. Life experiences which R15 mostly refers to as a knowledge type are said to stem from life, his upbringing and non-social work working experiences.

Further, we found that they often referred back to both their undergraduate and graduate studies when talking about theoretical knowledge, as demonstrated by R14; *"It is more like a girl's group. We are two women and the six girls. And together we talk about like sex, alcohol, drugs everything that goes around in a teenager's life. That is a part where I really use my undergraduate studies since I was specialized on drugs and alcohol abuse. So there I can really see that I still use my undergraduate studies."* The IMSWHR was very much mentioned when talking about human rights belonging to legal knowledge; *"But how to read the UN conventions is something that I learned in Gothenburg. Because reading the UN convention I have to know the basic understanding of human rights and that's something like in the psychology major I never read the UN convention, any of them"* (R08). Yet R16 added; *"I think that my Bachelor I can dare to say that my Bachelor is four times stronger than this Master."* Research as a source was mostly mentioned by our participants in academia to gain empirical knowledge and in terms of research by participants' own Master thesis as in the case of R06; *"Then I apply my system knowledge I guess I got mainly from my Master thesis when I was doing the interviews in the exact same area and city that I am working in right now, so I learned a lot from that."* The graduates stated that they continuously tried to educate themselves further in terms of theoretical knowledge; *"I just got some information when I started my job, but I went to a one day's workshop which helped me a lot. Since then I have tried to take several workshops which concern my interests, like migrants and violation of women's rights and the abuse of women. So I always try to educate myself further. I always tried to link my work to my areas of specialization even though it does not have something to do with such in the first place"* (R01). R06 said she got provided with trainings from her organization; *"(...) There are regular trainings that concern for example immigration law or dealing with traumatized children stuff like that we can take part in;"* to pick up more legal and theoretical knowledge. R08 said that she regularly attends conferences; *"Well, yeah actually I visit normally conferences or I attend the conferences maybe let's see five to ten times a year."* R11 mentioned in addition a mentorship program. Also some participants differentiated what they regard as knowledge from what they hold as its sources. A case in point is the illustration by R04; *"in my opinion it refers to facts, information, and skills which we acquire through education from the class environment (theory from class) or through experience or what we call field experience/ practice; depending on the various requirements"*

*of the discipline or subject under scrutiny. For example in Social Work we go to field agencies for internship; but we also get theory from class from the teachers or reading on our own (guided reading- using course outlines).*” Others said they don’t remember vividly what knowledge exactly they applied to practice like R07, but still they told us the sources of that knowledge, which paints the complexity of such. Yet, most of the graduates could name us the exact source of their knowledge, which Payne describes such as an ability of the ‘wise social worker’ (2007:95). This finding additionally shows us how well the graduates of the IMSWHR perceive to manage to inform their practice adequately. Hereby, very few graduates said they make use of research, but referred mostly to their Bachelor and Master education, followed by interpersonal contacts and additionally practice experiences. The latter was found as the foremost source in our literature review, yet also former research pointed out the lack of empirical data as a source. Interpersonal contacts, workshops, trainings and there like got fairly mentioned in previous and our research (DeMartini and Whitbeck, 1987; Munro, 1998; Sherer and Peleg-Oren, 2005; Blom et al, 2007; Gordon and Cooper, 2010; Forgey et al, 2014). Our study added the internet, conferences and the mentorship program as newly perceived sources of knowledge in social work. Although empirical data as a source was clearly lacking, they drew to multiple other sources and tried continuously to gather more knowledge. Thus, we think it is more important how the graduates think they can actually make use of their sources and to take a step further to perform wisely than being richly informed by empirical findings.

## CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

### 6.0 Introduction

In this chapter we have presented conclusions and implications for Social Work and Human Rights, recommendations and the gap for further research.

### 6.1 Conclusions

Our point of departure for this thesis was the struggle with applying knowledge in practice towards the demands found among many graduates of the social work profession who just joined the field. We therefore looked at how the graduates of the IMSWHR experience knowledge use in social work practice from a social constructionist perspective. We specifically focused on what they regard as knowledge and as social work knowledge, the kinds of knowledge they think they use; where they think they obtained the knowledge from they use how they describe their experiences with using social work knowledge. From the findings, some of our participants thought that knowledge is a very broad and philosophical concept which others stated having a problem with defining, yet they often used the terms experience, information and skills to describe it. They specifically regard social work knowledge to be the methods and the theories which they learned from their formal education in addition to the experiences they gained from practice among other mentions. They also said they viewed social work knowledge as an instrument for practice, but also as knowing what one has to do in a practitioner-client situation. The findings showed that the graduates perceived to use different kinds of knowledge including theoretical knowledge, practice knowledge, system and situation/ context knowledge containing of legal knowledge, organizational knowledge as well as knowledge on the client and finally personalized knowledge to which practice wisdom, cultural knowledge, life experience, critical and analytical thinking belong. The kinds of knowledge named to be used by our participants are highly intertwined with where they perceive they obtained such knowledge; such sources are mentioned to include life experiences, their Bachelor and Master, the field and practice including interpersonal contacts here, internship as well as volunteering. They often referred back to both their undergraduate and graduate studies when talking about theoretical knowledge. Looking at the experiences with knowledge use, we found that the graduates perceived themselves to cope with the demands in the field by embodying their knowledge into their personalities. That means that by having grasped various types of social work knowledge they find themselves able to apply such by using their personalities to improvise and become artistic with such along with colleagues according to the needs of the situation and others involved. They find themselves as taking upon suitable roles to the situation at hand; being flexible with the knowledge they apply and continuously try to cope with the uncertainty of social work practice. Such is called performing as a wise person by Payne and gives a good example of how relatively inexperienced practitioners can manage in social work practice after graduation. The graduates of the IMSWHR demonstrated that they find themselves very capable to apply their knowledge in practice to fulfill the demands social work practice world.

## 6.2 Implications for Social Work and Human Rights

The experiences with knowledge use by the graduates of the IMSWHR at the University of Gothenburg in social work practice have been found to have some implications on knowledge use in social work;

Graduates of the IMSWHR highly regard practical experiences as a valuable source of knowledge for practicing in the field. They also appreciated the vigor and rigor with which the field placement during the IMSWHR is handled. However, some of their expressions indicated that they wished the department would extend the placement period so that they could broaden such experiences. Some also wished that emphasis would be placed on the students trying out real cases as opposed to going to the organizations to meet the contact persons, interviewing them on what they later write in their reports to the university without actually engaging with the case.

We think that this type of knowledge has a high relevance for social work practice and for many graduates entering the field full of book knowledge is interesting, but the pressure soon settings in for the graduates to be able to break down all this theoretical knowledge into frameworks that can be applicable to practice situations sooner or later. It becomes important for them to be able to learn day by day from their colleagues, supervisors, clients and the environment as a whole. This was also emphasized by majority of the participants.

Further, those findings contradict the importance laid upon evidence-based knowledge in social work recently. In fact the graduated did not think that empirical knowledge assists them much in informing their practice. We agree with some scholars that evidence-based practice tends to focus on a social issue or problem in a too narrowed way just taking upon a scientifically-founded approach. In order to be able to correspond to the complexities and the unpredictability of social work practice we find that both inexperienced and experienced practitioners need to hold various knowledge types which they can apply according to the need of the given situation. It takes more to be a good social worker than just simply to know what works according to recent research. Next to having a diverse knowledge base, we argue that in order to be able to deliver good social work practice, the practitioner needs to incorporate one's personality into her/ his practice. The knowledge a social worker holds does not help much in the field if it stays abstract, but rather has to be embodied to be adequately applied. That does not mean that the social work education becomes indifferent. It certainly lays the basis of knowledge for every social worker, but the personal aspect needs to be more recognized in social work literature. Therefore, we call for more awareness and importance of what Payne calls `performing wisely` in the discussion concerning knowledge use in social work.

In fact, the graduates of the IMSWHR possess a diverse base of social work knowledge which they have gained throughout their educational training, practice experiences from field placements; some obtained it both from the Master and the Bachelors and others from volunteering and finally the interpersonal interactions. It was also remarkably expressed by the graduates of the IMSWHR that the knowledge from the Master especially Human Rights knowledge is simply invaluable and could not have been obtained anywhere else. We find that the graduates of the IMSWHR attached a lot value to the knowledge and experiences they gained from studying in an intercultural environment which in our view the luxurious ambiance of the University of Gothenburg afforded them.

Some of our unintended findings could have major implications for social work as a profession and for human rights as a whole;

The findings showed that social work graduates in the global South largely worked with NGOs, INGOs and the private sector and to a lesser extent also with the state could have implications that the state in the global South does not have enough resources to invest in social services management. Importantly, this could also paint a picture about the nature, quality and quantity of the kinds of social services that are provided for the masses in the global South, contrary to the state in the global North which was found to be the leading employer of the IMSWHR graduates. The concern for our profession in this case would be on how the masses in the global South could be coping in the absence of the state amidst the challenges of poverty, illiteracy and disease hence affecting the attainment of their human rights which is the central premise of the social work profession.

Also in the global South, the activities engaged in targeted holistic socio-economic development contrary to those of the global North which were case-work centered. For the profession, this may be pointing to the kind of knowledge that social work trainers in the different global settings may have to emphasize to the students undertaking social work education. For human rights, it may however indicate that in the South whereas holistic socio-economic development is not yet attained and hence worth focusing on, the pursuit of this maybe at a human cost of those vulnerable people who need care.

The kind of social work services required and therefore provided by organizations in the global South differ from those in the global North. The global North social work involves providing services for undocumented migrants and unaccompanied minors. These operational concepts are not quite often common in the global South where actually these people get displaced concern for our profession is on how to cope with the growing global migration challenges that are resulting. On the other hand, social work in the global South involves gender based violence, refugee resettlement due to civil wars and civil strife. However, they could also be attributed to other factors. The duty is therefore incumbent upon social workers to engage in human rights advocacy for the different client groups whose rights might be violated in the different areas highlighted herein.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

The topic of this study struck anyone from continuing students of the IMSWHR, to lecturers and the graduates of the program whom our study targeted. For the lecturers of the program; it would be nice to make a follow-up and see where the graduates are currently for the continuing students of the Master; they wished to know where the graduates end up especially in the fields of employment and for the our study population, it was simply wonderful to be contacted by someone from the Master. To the department therefore, it is now six years into the program, it would be rewarding to do an evaluation of the IMSWHR and document the achievements of the program which we think will produce more information about the Master.

Generally, the question of knowledge was not an easy one for the graduates as there were different levels of awareness. Some graduates said they were not using knowledge, but later they referred to the types of knowledge which indicated that they used social work knowledge, yet they were not aware. It may therefore be useful for social work educators to start/increase awareness on how social work graduates use knowledge for example by including a model like ours on the curricula.

Finally we agree with many graduates who expressed their wish for a more in-depth and hands-on human rights course within the program. Thus, we call for a better practical preparation to actually be able to use human rights as a tool in social work practice.

## **6.4 Knowledge Gap**

Knowledge use in social work is a well-researched area, but a gap was identified with social work graduates' knowledge use that our study sought to bridge. However, our study was limited to only the graduates of the IMSWHR meaning that the findings cannot be generalized to social work graduates everywhere. There is therefore need to conduct related studies from other universities and explore the experiences of other social work graduates with knowledge use.

This study was qualitative in nature hence a quantitative research can also be conducted to generate some statistical data in this area.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix1

#### **Interview Schedule Designed for the Primary Participants of the Study: Graduates of the IMSWHR**

1. In which field of social work are you currently employed? (briefly describe your job tasks)
2. What was your educational background before undertaking the International Master of Social Work and Human Rights?
3. Briefly share with us your motivation for joining the International Master Program in Social Work and Human Rights.
4. What do you regard as knowledge?
5. What is your view of social work knowledge?
6. Using your practical experience, what kind of knowledge do you think you apply to practice? (theoretical, empirical and practice wisdom)
7. Can you think of any situation(s) you didn't know what to do/which knowledge to apply?
8. Where did you obtain this knowledge that you apply to practice? (colleagues, on-job training, supervisor, undergraduate studies, internships etcetera)
9. Can you talk about the knowledge from the Master program? What have you gained from it?
10. Drawing from your practical experiences with using the knowledge obtained from the International Master Program in Social Work and Human Rights, what specific preparation on knowledge would you wish to have been given during the program?
11. Generally, how would you describe your experiences with knowledge use in social work?

## Appendix 2

### Certificate of Research for Studies




UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

#### Certificate of research for studies

This is to certify that Susan Kazooba, 841125-P781 and Ina Müller, 870512-T203 are students at the Master's Programme in Social Work and Human Rights, University of Gothenburg. As part of their Degree Report (Master thesis) they are doing research and will conduct a number of interviews which will involve former students at the University of Gothenburg.

Gothenburg, 25 February 2014

Ex Officio,

  
Viktoria Jendmyr  
Study Administrator  
Ph. +46 31 786 1572  
[viktoria.jendmyr@socwork.gu.se](mailto:viktoria.jendmyr@socwork.gu.se)



**UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG**  
Department of Social Work  
P.O. Box 720  
SE 405 30 GOTHENBURG  
Sweden

## Appendix 3

### Letter of Introduction

We are Susan Kazooba (a second year student) and Ina Müller (from the last year's graduation), students of the International Master Program in Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg/ Sweden.

As a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of this Degree, like any other student of this Master, we are obliged to undertake a research study. Hence, we are conducting a study titled, *'Knowledge Use in Social Work: Exploring the Experiences of Former Graduates of the International Master Program in Social Work and Human Rights at Gothenburg University, Sweden'*.

Our interest in the above topic emerged during casual discussions over lunch at café Haga. We wondered about how best we would be prepared to take on social work jobs once we graduated and again if actually we would be able to find these jobs, what kind of knowledge we would use in practice and how we would actually manage to fulfill the expectations laid upon us? With these questions, we immediately thought about you, former graduates of our Master program. We want to know; where you are right now? What you are doing? Why you are doing what you are doing? What kind of knowledge you are using? Where you obtain this knowledge from? And what you can say about the knowledge obtained from our Master program?

Our study is a two-step study, in the first step; we have contacted you to invite you to participate in our study, as your experience in social work practice is extreme important to us. It gives us and the University of Gothenburg's Department of Social Work a valuable insight of how social work students of our program proceed once they finish their studies and how they experience their knowledge use.

We shall conduct in-depth interviews with a purpose of sharing your experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge about using social work and human rights knowledge in practice. The interviews will be conducted on Skype lasting one to one and a half hours. In case you have not been working in any field of social work, we already thank you for taking your time, but would still like to know which career path you have taken. You have the right to decline answering this email. However, you are also welcome to contact us or our supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

#### Students' names & e-mails

Kazooba Susan  
[Kazoobasusan@yahoo.com](mailto:Kazoobasusan@yahoo.com)

Ina Müller  
[Ina.lucas@web.de](mailto:Ina.lucas@web.de)

#### Supervisor's name & e-mail

Katarina Hollertz  
[Katarina.Hollertz@socwork.gu.se](mailto:Katarina.Hollertz@socwork.gu.se)

#### Coordinator of the MSWHR:

[Ing-Marie.Johansson@socwork.gu.se](mailto:Ing-Marie.Johansson@socwork.gu.se)  
 Tel+ 46 31 786 1889/Fax+46 31 786 1888

## Appendix 4

### Informed Consent Form

The following is a presentation of how we will use the data collected from the interviews.

The research project is a part of our education in the International Master program in Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. In order to insure that our project meets the ethical requirements for good research we promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
- Interviewees have the right to decide whether he or she will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for us to document what is said during the interview and also helps us in the continuing work with the project. In our analyse some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project the data will be destroyed. The data we collect will only be used in this project.

You have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

You are welcome to contact us or our supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

#### **Student names & e-mails**

Susan Kazooba  
[kazoobasusan@yahoo.com](mailto:kazoobasusan@yahoo.com)

Ina Müller  
[ina.lucas@web.de](mailto:ina.lucas@web.de)

#### **Supervisor's name & e-mail**

Katarina Hollertz  
[katarina.hollertz@socwork.gu.se](mailto:katarina.hollertz@socwork.gu.se)

Interviewee's name  
 (email)



## Appendix Five

**Table 3: Showing Responses from the First Step Study.**

No.	Graduates' Current Fields of employment or Activities since graduating from the Master Program
01	"I work working currently as a care assistant (something between social worker and social pedagog) with people with psychological orders.
02	UN Refugee Agency
03	Had a job as a treatment assistant but contract ended and is awaiting a renewal. Now distributes newspapers.
04	Volunteer in an Informal Women's Shelter
05	"I worked within the field of Human Rights and Social Work- Sociology and right now I am performing a different task because of her ethical beliefs and principles".
06	"I haven't had a social work related or other job since I finished the course; I am a stay at home mum at the moment. This is what I have wanted since I was little, so I am happy we have the luxury to make that possible".
07	International Social Work at an organization in home country involving international adoption, assistance for refugees/asylum seekers, counseling for international family disputes, etc.
08	"Working with Electoral Commission, it is not a typical social work practice work-place but I deal a-lot with promoting and protecting civil rights of citizens".
09	"Working on other job which is totally different from my study background"
10	PhD student
11	Working as a Faculty Member at a University
12	"As of now i am distributing Newspapers ... with hopes that I will have a social work job offer one day".
13	"Not formally working in my field of study. I am actually doing IT support now. But I am still actively volunteering in social work and human rights. I am a volunteer at Amnesty International, and also an active member of a child help organization...

	I am planning to start a PHD in social development”.
14	“Now i am running my own business. And beside this i am a professional social worker and trying to help needy people, and i am trying to join an INGO”
15	Personal and Treatment Assistant
16	“Working for children in need of special protection. I am the programs supervisor but have worked directly with children prior to this post”
17	“I am engaged in a family business, not in the field of social work”
18	Works as a coordinator at a medical center
19	“I had worked in 2 different organizations since I have graduated and in the same time I really tried to learn Swedish. I'm going to a job interview tomorrow” (Participant got back to us later that she was offered a job as a social secretary)
20	“I work within social welfare services, but no longer as a care assistant, I recently got a promotion and now I am working in the office as a coordinator with administration and planning (it is more like an assistant to two of our bosses)”
21	“I had an employment at housing for homeless women. But the working hours (evenings, weekend) didn't fit my situation as a single mom, so, because of that I got a new job at a social welfare office (social secretary) working with housing issues. So this job is NOT based on my Master education at all”
22	“I am employed as a "social pedagog" working with people with different forms of disabilities like autism and learning disabilities in an assisted home. My job involves mostly care in the clients' day to day needs, but i am also responsible for all administration, documentation and the pedagogics in the work with the clients. I feel that i am overqualified for this as it does not differ much from employments that i have had prior to university. Getting jobs in line with our degree is however hard going, but i will keep looking”.
23	“I'm working at the national board of institutional care and I'm right now specializing in family treatment”.
24	“I am employed in an academic Position/Assistant Lecturer in a Public University... So I lecturer/ teach students of Social Work, Social Sciences and Humanities”.
25	“I work with the Refugee Law Project as Sexual and Gender Based

	Violence/Persecution Officer (SGBV/P)”
26	Assistant Lecturer and PhD student
27	Project Manager; works with LGTB rights
28	Works in a meat factory
29	“I am employed as a lecturer at a University in the social work department. The tasks and responsibilities include teaching, examining students and researching. I am teaching developmental social work, foundations of social development and introduction to social work”
30	Assistant Lecturer and PhD student, but in medical treatment at the moment
31	Centre for EU-Migrants

**Source: Empirical Data from Interviews**