The Cross-Cultural Context of Social Work with Migrant Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

This research study is a phenomenological interpretative analysis of the cross-cultural experiences of social workers with migrant women survivors of domestic violence. Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 experienced social workers working in government and non-government domestic violence services. Findings indicate that social workers prioritise social work values and trust-building with their clients, but struggle with their client's experiences of racism and find it hard to bring this up in discussion with their clients. They are often frustrated by professionals who show bias and prejudice towards migrant women, as well as with migrant women's traditional views on gender roles and domestic violence. Respondents feel that there is a lack of training and education on cultural responsiveness, trauma and migration, and cross-cultural communication, as well as a lack of coordination between DVS and CPS. These gaps should be mitigated by facilitating culturally responsive trauma-informed practice and education, preparing students and practitioners for a the increasingly culturally diverse population in Malta.

Keywords: cultural responsiveness, cultural competency, cross-cultural social work, social work with migrant women survivors

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ADEPT	Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform
CPS	Child Protection Services
DV	Domestic Violence
DVS	Domestic Violence Services
FSM	Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MWS	Migrant Women Survivors
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SWS	Social Work Services
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose and relevance

This research study explores social workers' cross-cultural experiences when working with MWS of IPV, focusing on social workers' cultural responsiveness to patterns and contexts of IPV affecting MWS in Malta. The purpose of this study is to generate local interest and knowledge on cultural responsiveness in social work, and to advocate for increased support to social workers in this area. The subject of IPV is extremely relevant to migrant women coming from traditional societies, as the study shows, because they often face additional barriers to accessing DVS, such as language, information and financial barriers. The study greatly esteems the role of social workers in empowering MWS, who are often one of the most marginalised people in host countries in Europe and the Mediterranean region (Freedman & Jamal, 2008).

Definitions and Provisions

Domestic violence, and especially intimate partner violence, is the most common form of violence against women in the world (WHO, 2013). In fact, 34% of all women and girls intentionally killed around the world are murdered by intimate partners (UNODC, 2018). The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) defines 'domestic violence' as:

> "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (Council of Europe, 2020).

Within the context of DV, IPV specifically refers to "any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (WHO, 2012). The Istanbul Convention was ratified by Malta in 2014, and the

first national strategy was launched in 2017, under the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality, and monitored by the Commission on Gender Based violence and Domestic Violence in Malta (GREVIO, 2019). DV survivors in Malta can be supported through a number of services provided by the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), including the DVS provided by the DVU, an emergency shelter (Għabex), and a 22-week programme for men who are abusive in intimate relationships (FSWS, 2019). There are also NGOs, such as Fondazzjoni Sebħ and the Good Shepherd Sisters, which provide shelter to DV survivors, and the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), which supports MWS and social workers in the cross-cultural context of IPV.

The Istanbul Convention clearly identifies the historically unequal power relations between men and women as the root cause of violence against women, persisting in structural inequalities in all countries today (Council of Europe, 2020). The 2018 Global Gender Gap Index ranks Malta as the 90th country in the list, the lowest in the Western European Region, except for Cyprus (World Economic Forum, 2020). The literature review in this study finds that gender inequalities and racial inequalities in host countries often increase the chances of IPV for MWS. The Istanbul Convention also identifies migrant, undocumented, and asylum-seeking women to be at increased risk of violence and makes specific provisions to ensure their protection under Chapter 7 of the Convention (Council of Europe, 2020). Research conducted in Malta shows that cultures in the countries of origin may expect women to accept some forms of violence, while language, information and support barriers may additionally restrict their access to support services, and leave women dependant on the perpetrators (Naudi, Clarke & Saliba, 2018). This increased vulnerability of migrant and minority women to DV justifies the need for research studies on the subject, for improving cross-cultural social work and for advancing the rights of minority and migrant women in Malta.

The Social Work Code of Ethics in Malta refers to social work as being "based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, irrespective of individual and cultural diversity", within a framework of cultural awareness where social workers should recognise "the impact their own views and biases may have in their practices", and be careful not to "engage in discriminatory behaviour or practices" (MSWPB & MASW, n.d.). However, there are no specific national standards of cultural competence for helping professionals in Malta, although training is often provided on subjects such as cultural competence, SGBV and human trafficking (Government of Malta, 2020). The Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Malta provides two related study modules, one on anti-oppressive policy and practice (SWP3370) and another on human rights practice (SWP3140) (University of Malta, 2020), however this research finds that further social work training needs to be considered in the area of cultural competence, anti-racism and migrant advocacy, as expressed by respondents themselves.

Positionality

Qualitative research, especially in phenomenological and ethnographic studies, requires reflexivity of researchers about their bodies and emotions, as well as their multidimensional identities, in an approach of "bringing your whole self to research" (Hordge-Freeman, 2018). Similarly, in critical feminist approaches (Mehrotra,2014, as cited in Hudson & Richardson, 2016) and anti-oppressive approaches (Sakamoto, 2005). there is a need for critical consciousness, self-reflection and an examination of one's social identities and positions in relation to oppression and privilege. Using these approaches, I reflect on the interaction between my various identities and the research subject.

The choice of research subject is based on my own values rooted in human rights, global citizenship and social justice, and my work in the field of migration in the last 20 years. My work started within migrant churches, and later as a volunteer with ICRC, and

other NGOs, identifying and monitoring vulnerable persons in detention centres in Malta. Since 2012 I have worked with the FSM, developing transnational and local integration and capacity building projects, working closely with local and international migrant-led organizations. I often assumed the role of cultural mediator, accompanying migrant women to offices and hospitals, and I used these experiences to advocate for the rights of migrant women, collaborating with organizations such as the IOM, UNHCR, the Riga City Council, and ADEPT.

My interest and work have mostly focused on minority groups that face social exclusion and hidden oppression. As a young girl I grew up in a working-class neighbourhood in the South of Malta where I remember frequent incidents of bullying and fighting on the streets, signs of domestic violence, and the feeling of frustration and desperation around me. My father, who came from a very poor family, had a strong influence on my development of a social justice perspective. He was confident about who he was and where he came from, but he was also a survivor, traumatised by the prejudice and discrimination he had suffered because of his working-class background. My father's experience helped me recognise the impact of hidden trauma and resilience in the lives of migrants, and to reflect on professionals' lack of trauma-informed awareness.

My marriage to a Mamprusi from the North of Ghana has also had a significant impact on my choice of subject and my perspective on gender-based violence. The Mamprusis are a minority Muslim tribe with strong traditional, patriarchal attitudes, and frequent conflicts with neighbouring tribes. In my position of cultural insider (Couture, Zaidi & Maticka-Tyndale, 2012), I learned about the real challenges of women in rural societies in Africa, who are locked in conflict situations, lacking access to basic necessities, and facing persisting oppressive cultural practices such as polygamy, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

This chapter started with discussing the research question and purpose, including definitions and of DV and IPV, my own positionality, and a brief overview of the local response to DV and cross-cultural social work in Malta. The next chapter will provide a literature review on the subject, focusing on the global context of DV, the relationship between IPV and migration, and the challenges of cross-cultural social work practice with MWS. The following chapter then describes how the research methodology was developed, and the chapter after presents the research findings. The last chapter concludes by describing the implications of the research analysis for social work, including proposed recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review was conducted using the University of Malta's online library data bases, as well as textbooks and online websites to access reports and statistical data. Therefore, the global context of DV is first explored, including the impact of historical trauma and racial violence on MWS' trust in DVS and the justice system of host countries. The literature review will then focus on the relationship between migration and IPV, including the impact of patriarchal systems, partner dependence and restrictive immigration policies on migrant women's decisions to migrate and to report the abuse. Finally, the review will explore the challenges of social workers in their work with MWS, focusing on major debates on appropriate frameworks and theories that can be used to improve cross-cultural social work research, education and practice.

The Global Context of Gender-Based and Intimate Partner Violence

Global and Regional Statistics on Gender-Based Violence

SGBV is experienced by women all over the world. Global statistics indicate that 35% of women in the world experience either physical and/or sexual IPV, or sexual violence by a non-partner (excluding sexual harassment) at some point in their lives, but some national studies show that 70% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, with increased risks of depression, HIV infection and abortion-related complications (WHO, 2013). In 2017 it was estimated that 87,000 women in the world were intentionally killed, 58% of these by intimate partners or family members (UNODC, 2018). In certain regions, the harmful traditional practice of child marriage, where 12 million girls are married every year before the age of 18, further predisposes girls to early pregnancy, interrupted schooling, social isolation, DV and IPV (UNICEF, 2019). The highest rates of women killed by intimate partners in 2017 were found in Asia (20,000) and Africa

(19,000), while the lowest rates were found in Europe (3000), although statistical reports indicate that levels of IPV in Europe are still high (UNODC, 2018).

Surveys conducted between 2005 to 2016 in 87 countries found that there are considerable regional differences in the prevalence of DV between Europe and developing regions of the world, where the proportion of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 experiencing IPV in the previous 12 months, was found to be lowest in Europe (6%) and highest in Oceania (30%, excluding Australia and New Zealand), Sub-Saharan Africa (22%) and Central and Southern Asia (17%) (United Nations, 2020). Tavares & Wood (2018) also report that one in four countries still do not have specific DV laws, that more than one in three countries does not include sexual violence in DV law, and that half the countries of the world exclude economic violence as a form of DV. Two out of three countries also exclude unmarried intimate partners from protection under DV laws. These figures demonstrate that there has been almost no progress in the protection of women against sexual and economic abuse under DV laws, leaving 1 billion women unprotected against sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member, 1.4 billion women lacking legal protection against domestic economic violence, and 2 billion women unprotected when it comes to legal protection of unmarried intimate partners (Tavares & Wood, 2018).

Historical Trauma, Racial Pathology and Disclosure of IPV in Minority Women

Statistical data can be useful in helping organizations and states prioritise their efforts and resources. However, the gathering and interpreting of statistical data which is disaggregated by region, race and other categories can create the effect of pathologizing regions and communities based on their racial, ethnic or regional identity (Ferraro, 2008) According to Ferraro (2008) these statistics ignore the impact of structural and historical injustices committed by empires on these ‘less developed’ regions, such as the pillaging of lands, the committing of genocide and the gaining of wealth from the enslavement of human

beings (Ferraro, 2008). For example, many Native American and Alaska Native communities believe that the traumatic events they experienced at the hands of European migrant settlers who forcefully removed children from their families to rescue them from their 'savage' ethnic identity, and used the rape and battering of Native American women as a tool of colonization and domination, is the cause of Indian-on-Indian DV today (Bussey & Whipple, 2010).

Minority women survivors and MWS can respond to these racial prejudices by strongly identifying with their community as their main source of support, feeling responsible to save their partner from discriminatory treatment, presenting a positive image of their community when in contact with dominant others, and fearing retribution from their family and community for reporting (Bent-Goodley, Chase, Circo & Anta, 2010). For example, in aboriginal tribes in Australia, Willis (2011) found that women's experiences of cultural insensitivity by police officers during reporting, and their experience of culturally related violent retribution from their communities after reporting, led to an increased fear of disclosing DV. The mistrust of mainstream services and justice systems is a part of aboriginal post-colonial response to atrocities committed during the colonisation period, especially the removal of children as the 'Stolen Generation', where indigenous women still have a collective fear of having their children removed when disclosing about IPV to authorities (Willis, 2011).

This section has explored some of the global, historical and political contexts of DV, and the impact of oppressive global, regional and historic events on minority women survivors of DV. The next section will focus on migrant women coming from strong traditional communities, who share similar challenges as minority native women, as well as additional difficulties when they are regarded as unwelcome outsiders , portrayed negatively

in the media, and exploited by family members and criminal networks who use migration processes to exploit them (UNFPA, 2018).

The Transnational Context of Migration and Domestic Violence

Patriarchy and the Oppression of Migrant Women in the Family

Women's experiences of migration and IPV are influenced by patriarchal values and practices, as can be seen from examples of spousal migration, where extended family members can be perpetrators or condoners of the abuse, and where immigration sponsorship can be used as a mechanism of control (Bhuyan, Shim & Velagapudi, 2010). In their study among battered immigrant women from 35 different countries of origin in the United States, Erez & Globokar (2009) find that half the women arriving with their spouses had experienced an increase in violence on arrival, and that 22% of them started experiencing violence after they moved. The study also finds that 75% of the women were threatened by their spouses that they will report them to immigration agencies or withdraw their citizenship application, with resulting deportation and separation from their children, if they reported the abuse. The women's lack of awareness that DV is a crime, their lack of economic and information resources, language and communication skills, and their fear of discrimination by authorities and rejection by their families were found to be strong barriers in their decisions to report the abuse (Erez & Globokar, 2009).

Patriarchal systems operating transnationally can normalise DV. More traditional societies have been found to have a stronger gender role traditionality, and a stronger tendency to minimize DV, blame the survivor or excuse DV incidents, when compared with less traditional societies (Yamawaki, Ostenson & Brown, 2009). Traditional family practices that discriminate women in these societies, such as the practice of dowry and the preference of sons, reinforce gender inequalities in the family and prevent the reporting of violence and abuse. In their study among women from South Asia arriving in the United Kingdom, Anitha,

Chopra, Farouk, Haq & Khan (2008) find that the women faced a different marriage reality than they were expecting on arrival. Some were controlled, monitored and abused by their in-laws, who often kept their passports and documents, while others were sexually abused by other male members of their husband's family, or abandoned by their spouse who had married them to please his parents. Some were beaten by their husbands when they complained, or threatened with deportation if they would report to the police, being told that no one would believe them and that they will be assumed to have a mental problem (Anitha, et al., 2008).

Migrant women may be forced into marriages by traditional, extended families, who use honour-based violence to prevent women from reporting their husband's abuse (Idriss, 2017). Similar to other studies (Rani & Bonu, 2009; Haj-Yahia, 2005), El-Abani, Jacobs, Chadwick & Arun (2020) find gender differences in attitudes towards DV in a Libyan community living in the north of the United Kingdom, where men were found to be more likely to blame the victim, to minimise DV, and to lack understanding of the impact of DV behaviour on women (El-Abani et al., 2020). These persisting attitudes indicate that migrant families and communities from strong traditional backgrounds often resist change after migrating from their countries to less traditional societies, and seek to preserve their traditional cultures, with negative consequences on the health of migrant women.

Intersecting Sexism, Classism and Racism: Migrant Women and Native Men

Racism, sexism and classism reinforce gender inequality in relationships between migrant women and native men. In fact, International Marriage Brokers exploit these inequalities to compete for male clients in Western countries, showcasing characteristics of female sensuality, submission and traditional family values of women from developing countries (Cogua-Lopez, 2012).

Economic inequalities are powerful push factors for women to migrate, and to seek partners in more developed cities, regions and countries. Additionally, the desire to escape DV and find emancipation are also strong hidden agendas for women from poor families to migrate to other cities and countries (Parson, 2010), although they often encounter additional racism and classism, that may increase their risk to IPV. Alcalde (2007) suggests that in host communities IPV may not simply be based on gender but may include identity-based violence based on the regionalisation of race and the perceptions of men about women who they see as educationally deficient. In her study, she finds that Peruvian women coming from rural areas to Lima were discriminated both publicly and at home, with intimate partners justifying their abuse towards them by ascribing identities to them based on their ethnicities and lack of education, marking them as inferior to other women (Alcalde, 2007). In fact, the term "serrana" is used to contrast indigenous, inferior, backward, uneducated, poor people coming from the Sierra region, to those in Lima who are whiter, more progressive, educated, and successful, but it is also used by men to humiliate wives coming from this region (Parson, 2010). Patriarchal values and attitudes towards DV in the host country also have an impact on migrant women with native partners or spouses, as they often experience isolation when they move from urban cities to rural towns where their partners reside, and where their experience of DV can be more hidden (Ferreira, 2019).

Similarly, Nudelman, Boira, Balica, & Tabagua (2017) find that partners of internally displaced and refugee women from Georgia and Chechnya used racism and sexism to discourage them from reporting domestic abuse, repeatedly telling them that professionals and police will not trust them because all women with their ethnic backgrounds were regarded as criminals and prostitutes. The women came from patriarchal backgrounds where they were expected to obey rules favourable to men, and their husbands used this system, as well as the macro-context of racism in society, to control their wives' behaviours and isolate

them from neighbours, friends and service providers (Nudelman et al., 2017). Feelings and expressions of shame and humiliation are strongly associated with racism, and the perception that one culture or ethnicity is 'inferior' to another (Tang, 2014). Tang (2014) finds a similar experience in Taiwan, where Taiwanese husbands of Vietnamese wives use racist remarks to correct their wives from deviating from normative Taiwanese behaviours, and where the resistance of wives to conform was found to relate with IPV (Tang, 2014).

State Policies, Nationalism and Failure to Protect Migrant Women

Migrant women married to native men find major difficulties in accessing protection from domestic violence, as migration policies reinforce their dependence on their citizen-spouse, and conflict with DV prevention policies that support women in escaping partner abuse (Friedman, 2012). Restrictive migration policies increase the dependence of women on their native spouse, the chance of marital conflict and DV, and the risk of being deported or becoming stateless and undocumented (Chung & Kim, 2012). Migrant women can be required to give proof of their residency and relationship with their citizen or resident partner, and to forfeit entitlement to benefits for a number of years, making it difficult for them to escape IPV (Anitha, 2008).

States can also reinforce nationalistic, sexist and racist attitudes within the family, by encouraging foreign wives and partners to learn the culture and language in the country, ignoring the role of the wife's background, culture, and identity in the family (Tang, 2014). This approach imposes high levels of isolation and stress on migrant women, with a resulting impact on their mental health, especially for women who become pregnant soon after their arrival in the host country (Shu, Lung & Chen, 2011).

Acculturation and Role Reversal in Immigrant and Refugee Populations

The processes of acculturation associated with the post-migration phase often demand changes within the behaviours and relationships of migrating couples, and attitudes towards

this change can differ, often bringing disagreement and conflict between partners (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2013). Kalunta-Crampton (2013) finds that often, women show a positive preference for acculturation, as they are empowered to take new roles that make them financially independent, and that male partners can become abusive in a bid to take back control, reverse this process and reinforce a patriarchal family system. In her analysis of Nigerian people's attitudes towards the murder of Nigerian female nurses by their male spouses in the United States between 2005 and 2008, she found attitudes of victim blaming, portraying Nigerian working women as those causing a cultural conflict in the home, acting "Oyibo" (White), abusing their husbands and separating him from his children. The financial independence of spouses, and the intrusion of the state in situations of DV was seen to be humiliating for Nigerian men, especially because in Nigeria wife beating is regarded as a domestic issue and solved through random interventions of neighbours and friends (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2013).

Similarly, women in refugee camps often experience increased risk of IPV as they take new initiatives and assume new roles that increase their independence from their partners (Wachter et al., 2018). A study on drivers of IPV in three refugee camps in South Sudan, Kenya and Iraq finds that root causes of IPV were related to differences in adaptability of women and men to post-conflict situations. While men experienced a loss of status as breadwinners, and resorted to diverting family resources for self-medication, women experienced new opportunities for developing their assertiveness and economic independence, often demanding accountability from their husbands about family rations, attempting to discuss family needs, and even taking small jobs. These changes often made men feel disrespected by their wives, and IPV was used to regain their dominance in the relationship (Wachter et al., 2018). Despite the increased likelihood of conflict between partners, acculturation and role reversal is found to have a positive impact on refugee

women's ability to seek help and leave abusive relationships (Um, Kim & Palinkas, 2018). Um et al. (2018) find that good programmes for improving acculturation can therefore increase refugee women's awareness on DV, helping them to address abuse and become more financially independent (Um et al., 2018).

Acculturation responses and attitudes towards DV can also vary along categories of the same ethnic group, especially between those born in the home country and those born in the host country, or arriving at a very young age (Wallach, Weingram & Avitan, 2010). Wallach et al. (2010) found that Ethiopian Jews born in Israel had similar attitudes towards DV as Israeli born Jews, while Ethiopian Jews who had recently immigrated to Israel had more lenient attitudes towards DV than the other two groups. Poor measures of acculturation such as the use of housing segregation, was found to increase chances for newcomers to preserve their traditional culture and religious expression, maintaining patriarchal attitudes and leniency towards DV, and making it impossible for MWS to access DVS and escape the abuse (Wallach et al, 2010).

Intimate partner violence and Human Trafficking

Migration serves as a channel for the ethnicization of work, where race, class and gender identities intersect to repress women into specific occupations in destination countries (Taliani, 2012). In her study on trafficked Nigerian women in Italy, Taliani (2012) finds that survivors came from minority social groups and broken families, and were illiterate or had few years of schooling, which were powerful push factors of migration. They were also raised to highly honour family members and their expectations, and eventually accepted to migrate and become sex workers as part of their family's strategy. (Taliani, 2012). The boundary between IPV and human trafficking is also blurred, as often women enter into relationships with men who later traffick them, even using their children as a way to control their behaviour (Leidholdt, 2013). In fact, Leidholdt (2013) finds that traffickers can abuse

several women using the model of an abusive family, where they identify themselves as abusive fathers and brothers, requiring trafficked women to greet each other as the wives or sisters of the traffickers. The criminal justice system is often unaware that women can be trafficked by their own husbands or partners and may sanction survivors for crimes they were forced to commit by their traffickers/partners (Leidholdt, 2013).

This section has explored those pre- and post- migration factors that increase the risk of IPV for migrant women coming from traditional communities in developing countries. The next section will focus on the challenges and opportunities of cross-cultural social work with MWS of IPV.

The Cross-Cultural Context of Social Work

The previous sections outlined the challenges faced by minority, migrant and refugee women survivors of IPV, both within their family and community, and in their engagement with external service providers. Migrant and minority women can be supported to overcome these challenges through DVS and shelters that are inclusive, accessible and culturally responsive (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra &Weintraub, 2005). This section will explore the challenges and opportunities for social work in building trust with migrant and minority survivors of IPV, addressing power differentials, and applying cultural competence frameworks and approaches.

Understanding Help-Seeking Behaviours and Clients' Contexts

For every survivor, the context of IPV and the survivor's response is as unique as the survivor herself. Interpersonal and sociocultural factors affect women survivors at every stage of help-seeking, from problem recognition and definition, to the taking of help-seeking decisions and selection of the type of support survivors perceive they need (Liang et al., 2005). Survivors' help-seeking decisions are unique to each woman's coping response, influenced by desires to save family image, protect family members from law enforcement,

or return to the relationship, and their personal interpretation of when they "hit rock bottom" and feel they have no other option but ask for help in order to survive (Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2019).

Social workers need to give priority to the client's unique personal context and work with survivors in addressing problems as women define them, viewing DV "not as a unitary construct, but as a complex phenomenon that is subjectively experienced by each woman, and thus affected by distinct histories and values" (Liang et al., 2005). Social workers also need to help MWS deal with shame, raising awareness on the responsibility of perpetrators, the nature of the violence, and the changing of community attitudes to promote survivor support (Tonsing, 2017). Considering macro-oriented concepts with survivors is critical, especially because therapeutic approaches tend to place more responsibility on the survivor, and social workers need to challenge the dominant gender ideology and work towards gender equality (Hahn & Scanlon, 2016). Yakushko & Chronister (2005) suggest the use of the Bronfenbrenner model for considering the impact of forces of oppression on immigrant women at various levels, as well as the women's agency to mitigate these forces, so that professionals can adapt their efforts to support women's agency through culturally sensitive prevention and intervention.

Power Differentials, Racism, and Religious Literacy

Power differentials within the social work relationship and SWS have a major impact on survivors' help-seeking decisions. Keeling & Wormer (2012) find that survivors often experience re-victimisation when they engage with SWS, resulting in their loss of confidence, and increased fear of losing their children or of being blamed for their situation. Trust building can be complicated by the clients' experiences of contradictions between competing SWS, such as DVS which focus on empowering the survivor, and CPS, which focus on child safety, often leaving mothers feeling judged, blamed, threatened and

controlled (Fauth et al., 2010; Featherstone et al., 2014, as cited in Robbins & Cook, 2018). These power differentials are frequently experienced by all survivors; however, the dynamics are often different for migrant and minority women who usually experience additional power differentials based on relationships between racial groups.

Anti-racism is part of social work practice and response to power differentials. Dominelli (2018) suggests that white social workers may use several types of avoidance strategies and tokenistic responses that hider anti-racist action in their practice. They may deny the existence of racism, treat all clients in the same way and ignore the additional inequalities that minorities face, or even patronise clients and rely on perspectives that perceive "white ways as superior" (Dominelli, 2018, p. 38). Social workers can therefore sustain and reinforce minority clients' experiences of discrimination, disregarding marginalization, bias and microaggression within human services (Olcon, 2019). As a result, minority clients' satisfaction with social work services is often lower than that of other clients, as workers ignore the subject of race, deny their own personal racism, make colour blind statements, or accuse minority clients of being hypersensitive about racial or cultural issues (Delphin-Rittman et al., 2013, Jones et al., 2015, Chang & Berk, 2007, Constantine, 2007 as cited in Olcon, 2019).

Social workers are not culturally free, and they often experience cultural tensions that are intimately influenced by their racial and ethnic identity (Yan, 2008). Yan (2008) suggests that, as a Western construct historically rooted in Anglo-American culture, social work prioritises values of individual autonomy and intrinsic respect, which clash with value priorities of non-Western cultures based on collectivism and interdependence. Since state laws and social service organizational values reflect the culture of the dominant group, social workers may often take decisions regarded as culturally inappropriate by non-Western clients. Struggling to apply Western approaches to minority and migrant clients, and lacking

awareness of alternative help-seeking and help-giving indigenous practices, social workers often rely on false assumptions and interpretations based on their own experiences of acculturation and socialisation, and may discriminate between more or less socially integrating clients based on the extent to which clients' behaviours are similar or different from theirs (Fulcher, 2012). In the context of DV, practitioners and researchers may assume that migrants and minorities from the same ethnic group have the same culture, and may blame the "backward culture" of the perpetrator and victim for the situation of DV, disregarding the larger structural context of violence against women (Lee, 2013).

Social workers often lack awareness of their own spiritual beliefs, leading them to minimise the role of spirituality in their clients' lives, misinterpreting issues and developing ineffective and unresponsive interventions (George & Ellison, 2015). Religious and spiritual identity is an important part of both clients' and social workers' cultural identities. Many migrant and minority survivors seek help from God, and consult religious texts and religious leaders, which processes may empower them to seek further help and, at times, may also discourage the violent behaviour of the perpetrator (Oyewuso-Gassikia, 2019). The lack of religious literacy can easily lead social workers to stereotype clients or make false or inaccurate assumptions about people coming from certain religious backgrounds (Crisp, Epstein, Afrouz & Taket, 2018). Social workers need to understand and acknowledge the role of women believers and religious or faith-based organizations in the use of non-traditional interventions, such as talking to both abusers and survivors using a religious approach, or working for family reintegration (Bucci, 2012). This can help social workers build a more equitable relationship with the client, recognising their strengths and resources, respecting their clients' choices and adding value to already existing measures of support.

In addressing power differentials, social workers' approach in understanding the present realities of clients is critical. For example, Lum (1992) finds that attempts at cross-

cultural understanding between white people and people of colour often end up in deeper mistrust, because these attempts are not focused on engagement, but on the resentment of each group towards the other. He warns social workers that "there is a massive gulf between my wanting to know about another group's life, and that group's existential situation, which, to them, is a 'life-and-death' struggle" (Lum, 1992, p.20). Improving knowledge and awareness of the diverse contexts of clients, while maintaining a client-centred and 'learner' type of approach, can help social workers address power differentials better in the social work relationship.

Cultural Competence Frameworks and Approaches in Social Work

A critical debate on cultural competence ensues from the literature review. At one end, social work is seen as historically Eurocentric, developed on Western values, and therefore its universality in application can be problematic for social work with non-Western clients or countries (Gray & Coates, 2010). In this view, the internationalisation of social work is seen as dangerously leading to the professional colonisation of other cultures, requiring, in response, an indigenous model that inspires social work to locally formulate culturally relevant knowledge and practice that responds to local needs (Rankopo, 2011; Rowe, 2015). At the other end of the spectrum, there is doubt as to whether indigenisation can be a true model of liberation when it is based on Western and non-Western cultural differences, stunting the exploration of commonalities, and marginalising oppressed minority groups in non-Western countries who do not identify with the dominant culture (Yunong & Xiong, 2008). Most authors, however, propose approaches that sit between these perspectives by making adaptations to already existing models and frameworks (Sakamoto, 2005).

A key divergence lies in how culture and cultural competence are perceived and defined. Essentialist approaches view culture as pre-determined, homogenous and static,

while constructivist approaches view culture as socially constructed and constantly changing within a dynamic context (Nadan, 2017). According to Nadan (2017), essentialist approaches tend to define culture and cultural competence, developing social work curricula for the measurement and improvement of awareness, knowledge and skills related to cultural competence. For example, while culture may be defined in terms of "shared meanings and behaviours in a social activity setting with external and internal learning patterns that are constantly changing" (Marsella & Yamada, 2000, as cited in Lum, 2011), others may simply describe it as a matter of personal identity which is essential for individual dignity (Sowers-Hoag & Sandau Beckler, 1996, as cited in Sakamoto, 2005). What is more problematic in the essentialist view is the attempt to apply the concept of culture to measure cultural differences between groups of people, what is referred to as the 'commodification of culture' (Park, 2005). This process leads to comparisons that reinforce stereotypes and power inequalities between groups, differentiating "minorities, immigrants, and refugees from the rest of society" and distancing them from the dominant group that is seen as "culture-free" (Park, 2005, p. 10,12). On the other hand, the multicultural perspective is criticised for ignoring the structural inequalities that exist between different groups, and for assuming that cultural groups are different but equal (Nylund, 2006).

A number of solutions are proposed in adapting a more critical approach to cultural competence, acknowledging the need for social workers to be aware of diversity within cultural and ethnic groups, as well as structural inequalities that oppress minorities, and of power differentials between themselves and the client. For example, Lum (2011) prioritises client participation and diversity advocacy in his definition of cultural competence, however it is the very concept of achieving cultural competence that is contested. Dean (2001) suggests that cultural competence is a "myth", based on a Western ideal that knowledge is desirable for achieving control and effectiveness. She proposes, instead, that professionals

use different perspectives to inform themselves about the client's context, maintaining an orientation of "lack of competence", understanding their own limitations, being respectful and non-judgmental, using deep questioning, and mutually sharing beliefs with the client (Dean, 2001). Rather than focusing on the development of theories of cultural competence, therefore, social workers should strive for cultural humility, engaging as learners and reflective practitioners, and using a client-centred approach to address power imbalances in client-worker communication (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Other authors propose a more constructivist approach to multicultural social work and cultural competence. For example, Kwok (2018) proposes the use of critical multicultural social work, with the incorporation of anti-oppressive practice to address institutional oppression, racism and ethnocentrism. Similarly, Nadan (2017) critiques the essentialist perspective of cultural competence for concentrating on the 'other' and neglecting the 'self', explaining that the construction, production, and transmission of knowledge about 'the other' is a dangerous form of control. By applying an anti-oppressive framework, however, cultural competence can become reflective, addressing contextuality and power relations, and requiring social workers to consider their role and social positioning in relation to the context and the client (Nadan,2017). Sakamoto (2005) even finds the anti-oppressive framework inadequate for the micro and individual level, suggesting the use of critical consciousness to increase social workers' cognition of power differentials between themselves and the client, where they can take a "one-down position", become naive investigators, and let the clients narrate their experiences as they become the teachers, and the social workers, the students (Sakamoto, 2005, p.9).

Some authors propose the use of multiple, integrated models and approaches that fit the complex and changing needs of clients (Danso, 2001). Using this approach, Danso (2001) proposes a mixture of critical cultural competence and anti-oppressive frameworks in social

work research to promote social justice and cultural sensitivity in addressing the needs of indigenous people to be informed and consulted about research processes, and to have their cultural heritage and intellectual property protected. The framework proposed ensures that researchers do not only have the awareness, knowledge and skills required, but that these skills are employed for social change (Danso, 2001).

Indigenization or Internationalisation

The indigenisation movement in social sciences started in the 1970s, as part of the postcolonial response of the third world to Western political and intellectual decolonisation. Some of its proponents attacked assumptions of western philosophy, such as objective reasoning and culturally transcendent knowledge, while others maintained the universality of social sciences but argued that theories and concepts were derived from studies on western populations, and therefore the need for a transcultural approach (Atal, 1981; Boroujerdi, 2002, as cited in Yunong & Xiong, 2008). This had an impact on social work, requiring a stronger social justice approach and the decolonisation of research relationships, especially for non-indigenous researchers working with indigenous populations (Rowe, 2015). Social work knowledge and tools developed in the West started to be regarded as inadequate for addressing the social problems of indigenous populations, with some contending that social workers needed to develop culturally responsive practice by considering cultural differences in the production of knowledge, and the impact of different languages, communication styles and types of relationships on both research and practice processes such as data collection, interviewing, assessment and analysis (Law & Lee, 2016).

In practice, even in the absence of locally derived knowledge, social workers trained in western social work methods “indigenize their practice”, adapting it to fit the local context and the needs of their clients (Nimmagadda, 1999). For example, Nimmagadda (1999) finds that in India, social workers were more ready to give client advice, avoid client confrontation,

and give importance to family centrality even in situations of DV. These preferences were influenced by both client and worker expectations, based on Indian cultural notions of ‘darma’ (one’s duty and obligation), and ‘karma’ (the acceptance of life situations). In fact, different indigenous societies may share similarities of perceptions and behaviours, for example in preferring self-help processes and the help of informal kinship and community networks, rather than seeking help from SWS (Fulcher, 2012; Rankopo, 2011). These findings seem to justify the need for locally derived knowledge and practice, but they can also prove that social work theory and principles can in fact be universal, and that the need is for their more appropriate application to the cultural context of diverse populations (Yunong & Xiong, 2012).

As critics of the indigenization model, Yunong & Xiong (2012) express concern for the way local, culturally oppressive practices discriminate against several minorities in non-western countries. They argue that without any universal standards and values, indigenization can lead social workers to accept and sustain institutional oppression, discrimination, and human rights violations against ethnic minorities in non-western countries (Yunong & Xiong, 2012). Furthermore, the ethnocentric approach of the indigenization model forces a singular cultural identity on clients, groups and countries, denying their expression of multiple identities as promoted by intersectional approaches, and ignoring oppressive forces within families, communities and countries, such as racism, classism, political and gender discrimination (Sen, 2006).

As a more recent phenomenon to the post-colonial period, globalisation has had a major impact on the world, especially in the increased mobility and displacement of millions of people, and the increasing collaboration of diaspora and native groups to work together on national, regional and global issues of development, social justice and human rights. These developments justify the place of international social work within University curricula,

especially for the promotion of a greater global consciousness among social workers, that transcends local concerns (Robertson, 1992, as cited in Midgley, 2001). By upholding universal social work principles social workers can support the fight against ideas of cultural relativism and global issues of GBV, such as arranged marriages, gender inequality, FGM and discriminatory property laws (Otis, 1986, as cited in Midgley, 2001). Addressing cultural practices, Ugiagbe (2015) proposes a balance between the tenets and principles of western theory and practice, and that of indigenous cultures and traditions. He draws attention to developments in Nigerian law, where legal experts assess cultural practices and determine those that can be accepted and incorporated into law, and those which should be dismissed as unjust and discriminatory. In this way there is a partial assimilation of western ideals, but also a strengthening of cultural practices that promote the welfare of individuals at risk of poverty and isolation, such as the care of the elderly and persons with disabilities. This balance can also be achieved in cross-cultural social work, when social workers uphold the rights of vulnerable persons but strive to be culturally responsive to their clients.

Conclusion

The concepts explored in the literature review, including models of indigenization, universalism and internationalisation, are extremely relevant for social workers in the global North working with minorities, migrants and refugees (Rankopo & Osei-Hwedie, 2011). These concepts, and the relevant tools and frameworks developed within multicultural and anti-oppressive social work can support social workers in being more effective and relevant in their work with minority and migrant populations. More specifically, social workers working with MWS of DV can be more culturally responsive in their practice, while promoting universal human rights principles, such as gender equality and the right to be free from violence.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The research question for this research study asks: What are the cross-cultural experiences of social workers working with MWS of IPV?

This question seeks to give voice to social workers, exploring the way they perceive their own challenges and their clients' problems, the processes by which they take decisions to support MWS of IPV, and the way they perceive cross-cultural social work education and practice. Qualitative research methods were chosen because they allow researchers to access these deeper processes(Barbour, 2014), and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as an appropriate research approach because it allows for participants to interpret and make meaning of their own experiences, and for the researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences to be part of the research analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This feature of IPA gives space for deeper analysis of the participant's accounts, treating the participant as an "experiential expert", and finding patterns of convergence and divergence across participants to move from the individual to the collective experience in order to describe a phenomenon (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Knowledge and awareness that is grounded in social workers' interpretations of their own experiences can easily be used to improve the capacity of social workers working in DVS, and to improve social work training and education on migration, IPV and cross-cultural social work.

This section will explore characteristics of IPA as a research method, the criteria for selection and instrumentation, and the processes of data gathering and analysis. Finally, it will present the ethical issues encountered, and the limitations and strength of the study.

Research Design

IPA was initially developed within the field of psychology, with a concern for studying the subjective experience of individuals (phenomenology) and how they make sense of it (hermeneutics) (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

The theoretical foundations of IPA are phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Phenomenology is derived from the word 'phenomenon', meaning 'appearance' or 'that which shows itself', a concept developed by Classical Western philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, who argued that individuals can never experience the true nature of reality, but they can experience reality as it appears to them (the phenomenon) (Spinelli, 1989). The German philosopher Edward Husserl developed the concept of 'eidetic reduction', specific techniques for arriving at the essence of phenomena, beyond the lived subjective individual experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). One of these techniques, bracketing, facilitates researcher non-bias and objectivity by requiring researchers to put aside the taken-for-granted world as they know it, and to concentrate on another's perception of that world (Smith et al., 2009, p.13).

Influenced by hermeneutic theory, IPA makes use of the hermeneutic circle, which describes the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole at a series of levels, facilitating an iterative research process where one can "move back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about data, and acquiring different perspectives on the meaning of a text (Smith et al., 2009, p.28). At the same time, IPA is idiographic, focusing on the particular, and arguing that the way to discover universal laws and structures is through idiographic processes (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.7). A key opportunity in the use of IPA is that the rich, transparent and contextualised analysis of participants' accounts helps the reader connect the research findings to their own personal and professional experience, and evaluate the transferability of knowledge and experience to other, similar participants (Smith et al., 2009, 51).

Population and Sample

The research methodology initially intended to include interviews with MWS as well as social workers, but due to the COVID-19 emergency situation and the national lockdown

measures, it was no longer possible to recruit migrant women through the selected agencies, and therefore the focus shifted to the social workers' experiences. The research questions were then adapted to allow for a deeper exploration of social workers' experiences and views.

In the first part of the research process, sampling, and recruitment plans, as well as research questions, were formulated and discussed with the research supervisor. IPA research demands a fairly homogenous sample of participants who can grant access to a particular perspective of the phenomena under study, although comparisons can be made between participants with different characteristics when there is homogeneity in most other variables (Smith et al., 2009, p.48-50). The research criteria required respondents to have social work experience with MWS of DV, and therefore purposive sampling was used to recruit social workers with at least 3 years' experience in DVS, mainly from government and NGO service providers, but not excluding those working in the area of migration. This was done to enrich the research with the different perspectives and experiences of social workers in both fields, however, the larger majority of the sample were intentionally recruited from DVS, because the interest of the research is in mainly understanding the cross-cultural experiences of social workers working in DVS, and not the other way round.

An information letter (see Appendix A), consent form (see Appendix B) and research question document (see Appendix C) were first developed and sent by email to the service providers, to ask for their participation as gatekeepers. Upon confirming their approval, an application was then made to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) for ethical approval, and when permission was granted, the gatekeepers were contacted again by e-mail for recruitment support, reminded of the importance of ensuring voluntariness of participation. The researcher was then informed by the respective organizations of interested respondents, sending their email addresses to the researcher for further contact. The participating service providers were:

a. Agenzija Appogg- Foundation for Social Welfare Services (state domestic violence services).
b. Dar Merhba Bik Foundation, The Good Shepherd Sisters (NGO providing a first stage shelter).
c. Dar Qalb ta' Gesu - Fondazzjoni Sebh (NGO providing a second stage shelter), and
d. Jesuit Refugee Services (NGO providing support services to refugees and asylum seekers).

Respondents were then contacted by email to find a convenient time for an online interview, reminding the respondents of the duration of the interview, and informing them on the use of Skype as the online platform for the interview. Ten respondents took part in the online interviews, four of whom were working in residential services. Six respondents were working with government DVS, and four were working with NGOs. Two of the social workers did not hold Maltese citizenship and were not born in Malta. The sample was relatively homogenous, as required by IPA, with some variations which are important for eliciting some contrasting perspectives to privileged views and experiences.

Instrumentation

Research questions (see Appendix C) were designed during the review of literature on the research subject, while exploring possible factors that can influence social workers' perceptions and decisions when working with MWS. The questions were also tested by three social workers, whose feedback was used to improve the comprehensiveness and focus of the interview questions. The research questions were used as a guide to support the participants to tell their own stories, but flexibility and sensitivity to the participant was maintained, appreciating any unexpected deviations that would enrich the research (Smith et al., 2009, p.57-58).

The research definition of MWS in this study referred to all women who are non- EU nationals, including refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and rejected asylum applicants, persons with subsidiary or temporary humanitarian protection, and other third country nationals, since all these categories would have different entitlements and rights to EU nationals under Maltese and EU law.

Data Generation

Interviews were carried out online, using the Skype online platform, as a safety precaution to limit the chances of COVID19 infection. Although this may have reduced some of the effectiveness in communication between the researcher and the respondent, reflexivity was used to establish credibility and approachability with respondents, since these are two of the most important concepts in qualitative methodology (Hordge-Freeman, 2018). For example, the researcher used empathy and active listening with respondents, acknowledging the diversity of their characteristics and experiences, managing her emotions connected to researcher positionality, and working to reduce power differentials between herself and the participants. Researcher experience in online communication and fluency in both English and Maltese also helped this process.

The online interviews were between 1 to 1.5 hours long and were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Data was anonymised using coded data, which was stored securely and separately from the rest of the data, in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, accessible only to the researcher. Prior to the interviews, the researcher obtained participant consent by email, and later through audio-recording, as established by University procedures (University of Malta, n.d.). Participants were supported to understand the purpose and scope of the research at the beginning of the interview, and reassured that there was no right and wrong answer to the research questions, because the research interest was in understanding the experience of the social worker, assuming that this experience

differed between persons. At times participants started reflecting during the interview and were reassured that it was acceptable to do so. Clarification questions were used to help the participants slow down, remember, reflect, and express their thoughts and feelings, or describe particular situations.

During the interviews, bracketing of researcher preconceptions was used by maintaining focus on the participant's experience. Researcher's thoughts and feelings were noted for consideration in later stages of analysis and included in the conclusion.

Data Analysis

IPA analysis requires researchers to be innovative since data analysis is regarded as a subjective process, where data can be organized in different ways. What is important in IPA is that recurring themes, divergences and convergences are identified within super-ordinate themes, and that the text is analysed in terms of descriptions, language and concepts, in order to find the meaning of key events and processes for the participants (Smith et al., 2009, p.79-107).

The programme ATLAS.ti was used in coding data, and in the creation of super-ordinate themes. ATLAS.ti is an online tool for analysing qualitative data, assisting the researcher in the creation of a code list by analysing code frequencies and finding the strength of relationships between various codes (ATLAS.ti, 2020). The researcher then elicited superordinate and subordinate themes in order of importance and relevance to the research subject.

Ethical Issues, Limitations and Strengths of Methodology

An ethical consideration was the application for the UREC approval for the research study, and the permission obtained. Another ethical issue considered was the possible participant identification in relation to participants' co-workers and managers, and the possibility that this could have a negative impact on the participants. These situations were

discussed with the research supervisor, and a solution was developed to mitigate the by including enough details to bring out the participant's experience, but not enough to reveal the identity of the participant. One limitation of this study is that it was not able to conduct the interviews face to face, and therefore close observation of participants' responses and expressions was not possible. The study focuses on MWS as a client group, limiting the applicability of information to Maltese survivors, although respondents often do make comparisons between the two client groups during the interviews.

The strength of this research study lies especially in its focus on the cross-cultural experiences of social workers when working with MWS in Malta, experiences which seriously lack documentation. The findings can therefore help the development of cross-cultural social work practice, particularly in the field of DV, but also in other fields.

This section has described how the research was conducted, including the research approach, and the instruments and tools used to generate and analyse research data. Ethical issues, limitations and strengths were also discussed. The next section will present the research findings and analysis, supported by the literature review.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to provide a phenomenological and interpretative narrative and analysis of the research findings. Three superordinate themes emerged from the analysis, which include a number of subordinate themes as shown below:

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
A swaying pendulum: The general and particular	Building relationship and trust Social work values and the use of empathy Language and communication Client resistance and trauma
Constructing 'otherness' and negotiating 'difference'	Prejudice and discrimination Interracial IPV Racism towards migrant women in shelters Discussing racism with the client
Interpreting and responding to cultural difference	Cultural attitudes towards IPV Discussing IPV with the client Religion, spirituality, and religious leaders Cross-cultural social work training and practice

A Swaying Pendulum: The General and Particular

The analysis finds that the most common theme across all the interviews is the importance of understanding the client, and of building trust and a good working relationship with the client. Respondents consider communication skills and resources, the upholding of social work values, and consideration of client trauma extremely important in their work. During the interview, participants venture to describe certain particularities in their work with

MWS, but at times upon reflection, they explain that in some way their Maltese clients had similar experiences. Other times, participants make clear statements about their particular experiences when working with MWS. These responses can be compared to a swaying pendulum trying to find a place to rest, and as respondents reflect on their clients, they sometimes struggle, and sometimes find it easy to point out what is particular to their social work experience with MWS. As one of the respondents explains, there seems to be a need to reflect specifically on cross-cultural social work, and this interview was experienced as a tool for this type of reflection.

Building Relationship and Trust

Respondents believe that, in order to build relationship with migrant clients, it is critical to understand their context. They describe the complex situations of MWS, and how they themselves experience the various limitations and frustrations when working with MWS. According to respondents, these challenges are mainly due to multiple systematic barriers related to income generation, social benefits, childcare support, housing affordability and asylum determination, that exclude MWS from vital financial support they need to leave the abusive relationship. Fear is described as a constant feeling of MWS whose daily life is full of uncertainties about the present and the future:

> Listen… all clients were extremely afraid, not just of their perpetrators, but of the situation. They are in the middle of something they don't know. With abuse, they thought, I can manage with this abuse. I can survive. I can live like this for the next 20 years! But this situation, what it means? I don't have any legal documents for example. What if they arrest me? What if I have to leave the country? What if I can't enter EU countries anymore? What if I lose my job? If they find out that I was here? What if my neighbours know? What if, what if, what if…. a million things!

As social workers engage with their migrant clients, these overwhelming feelings of uncertainty, fear, and helplessness seem to be transferred onto the social worker at times:

> I think I was becoming overwhelmed because the client was very, very overwhelmed… unfortunately because she was a migrant and she was left alone with her children, the client ended up feeling really helpless. It was very difficult to see from where to start or to prioritise, because she had so much going on at the same time … so it was a closed loop basically for her, and she was very overwhelmed and rightly so! So, yeah, I feel that kind of that feeling was passed onto me, I was feeling it myself.

Respondents share that at times, they struggle with feelings of inadequacy in their work. In these moments they often use empathy to support their clients emotionally, empowering the clients to see their strengths:

> But we had clients in horrible abuse, every kind of abuse… I was so (slows down) … when I go home after a day with them, I couldn't breathe. 'Cos everything I do is not enough, it's not helping them. I felt that I'm giving them only support, emotional support. I gave them safe space to talk. I tried to give them moments of love and joy, and small things to make their day better…to see themselves through my eyes, cause I thought they are amazing women, and that they deserve more in this life than they have!

Self-reflection and rational thinking are considered by respondents as important tools for social workers to process feelings of helplessness and frustration, which are common among professionals who work with asylum seekers living in uncertain situations. The cumulative impact of these negative feelings may even lead to vicarious traumatisation, where and "inner psychological turmoil" may be experienced as a result of "a cumulative effect of traumatic events as shared by clients" (Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos &

Somasundaram, 2015). Similarly, according to Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015), professionals can also experience vicarious resilience, becoming empowered by clients themselves, and learning several coping skills from them:

> When I have people that, yes, their resilience can be felt strongly, they have been through a lot and kept thriving, that gives me strength, even to fight for that person… I mean, you feel inspired and you want to make a difference… (Q1)[1]

The majority of respondents believe they need to work harder to build trust with MWS than with Maltese survivors, as repeated and sustained experiences of betrayal and abuse by partners, governments, communities and family members can make MWS more defensive and less able to trust people who can help them. Respondents explain that social workers' knowledge and awareness of the client's context, and their cultural responsiveness, are critical for developing trust with the client. One of the participants described how she addressed her own assumptions and identified preferred communication styles to build trust with a migrant client:

> It's not easy to build trust with people from other cultures. You have to understand first what fits to them. For example, some time ago I was working with a woman from Morocco, that I showed her that my role is to support her to become independent, that she can do things for herself and doesn't need her husband. She couldn't register it. For her, it was like I was too much that this was my role, you understand?

In this case, the client may be feeling that the social worker has overstepped her personal boundary or is being overprotective of her. The social worker's cultural responsiveness and critical consciousness to review her own assumptions and adapt her behaviour to "what fits" the client is critical for addressing power relations between herself

[1] Original text in Appendix D

and the client, and for improving client satisfaction (Dominelli, 2018; Fulcher, 2012; Olcon, 2019).

Several respondents believe that addressing the client's fears is critical in trust building, especially when there are minors involved. Although there is a sense of responsibility in prioritising and ensuring minor safety, participants are also aware of how their actions can weaken the trust they have built with their client, and they point out the importance of cultural sensitivity in addressing this issue, especially in supporting MWS to consider safer options in caring for their children.:

> …if you are dealing with the life of a minor, obviously, as in any other case, that's where I'm going to focus… I'm going to act on that concern there...I can't tell her listen don't go to work, don't leave your child with that woman, because if she can't feed her child that is what she is going to do! So, I have to discuss with her and explore with her what works… (Q2)[2]

The reporting of child neglect is seen by participants as both a duty and a dilemma. Some respondents feel concerned about social workers' lack of cultural sensitivity when making child protection decisions, and that often migrant mothers are misinterpreted, mistrusted or blamed for the violence that is inflicted by the perpetrator:

> For example, I had this case of this woman… who was giving birth…and they were ready to issue an emergency care order on the child, when in reality the woman did nothing wrong. It was the man who was being abusive. She could have easily gone to the shelter with the child, which is what happened…. but child protection were like, "Well, if she goes back we do this, we do that" … I'm like but give her a chance! Give her a chance! … she just did not understand what a shelter was… and they weren't taking the time to explain what it was. They were just saying if you don't do

[2] Original text in Appendix D

> that we take the baby… and the only thing she was seeing was, we take the baby! … so she was being very resistant … she didn't understand it was a safe place…

The experience of re-victimisation of survivors who are mothers, as described by Keeling & Wormer (2012), seems to take place as child protection officers take decisions which are based on organisational assumptions and attitudes that greatly reduce the client's trust in the social worker. Alternatively, DV social workers can work with migrant mothers and child protection social workers to prevent this re-victimisation.

Social Work Values and the Use of Empathy

Participants describe important social work values, especially the use of empathy, cultural sensitivity, active listening, a non-judgemental attitude, and respect for self-determination and autonomy. Some respondents state they have not experienced dilemmas in applying social work values to migrant clients, and regard the use of empathy and cultural sensitivity as universal, applicable to any person.

Other respondents mention particular dilemmas they face, for example how they struggle to accept migrant women's decisions to return to the abusive relationship, even though they respect these decisions. One respondent describes her dilemma when using a more investigative, directive approach in crises situations with MWS, explaining that this approach can have a negative impact on the therapeutic relationship with the client:

> You have to be very directive, and I worry a lot about it because there cannot be the building of the same intimacy in sessions with clients, and that emotional connection between you and the client… It is like she went to an interview with the refugee commission, for example, it's like she is comparing you along those lines, and I am very conscious of that…

These findings indicate that while social workers seek to use universal social work values and principles with migrant clients, they often face challenges in adapting these

approaches to cross-cultural settings. Language barriers, and the lack of awareness of clients about certain risks, can require social workers to be more directive in clarifying the client's needs and communicating with the client, an approach they may not be used to. Social workers may also underestimate the level of mistrust that migrant clients may have towards them. Applying anti-oppressive frameworks, critical consciousness and cultural humility can help social workers reflect on their position in the social work relationship learn from the client adapt to a more client-centred approach (Dean, 2001; Nadan, 2017;Sakamoto, 2005).

Language and Communication

Language and communication barriers are described by respondents as primary barriers in working with MWS, especially due to limitations in finding available interpreters. According to respondents, male interpreters impinge on the privacy of migrant women to speak freely about their personal situation, while engaging unreliable and untrained interpreters places the safety of the client at risk, especially when interpreters from the client's community may inform the perpetrator or close family members and friends, who may attempt to pressure the client to return to the abusive relationship. Some respondents find that at times interpreters may also identify with communities that are in conflict with women's own communities, posing additional risk to the client's safety. Involving family members as interpreters can also hinder MWS from disclosing her situation of DV:

> … this woman would always come with her son, and her son was 15 years old, and the husband would never show up for appointments, but the son was always there. And it was very interesting … we were talking about how they're managing to cope with basic needs, and she said, no my husband knows everything, we just need money for ID cards and that's it. It was very, very evident, later on, and we obviously found out that she was a victim of DV. Em… he was checking on her when the father wasn't around…. it was also very, very sad to see that the son was given such a

> position over his mother… the thing is, especially with this current case, it was very interesting because he was there as her interpreter… so in that case what we had to tell him … you can wait outside in the waiting room, we have our interpreter who'll come in with us….so with that we managed to wiggle our way through.

Respondents also mention that there is lack of training for social workers to learn how to work with interpreters effectively, and that often social workers do not know how to maintain connection with the client while using interpreters, with resulting discrepancies between what the client communicates and what the social worker understands. In the absence of cultural interpreters, respondents describe how they use monosyllables, broken English, humour, and the use of gestures and facial expressions to improve their communication with the client. Showing genuine interest in the cultural roots of the client and avoiding judgemental questions also helps clients connect to what is familiar to them, decreasing power differentials, reducing client fear and building client confidence:

> Ladies from certain countries, they couldn't look me in the eye… like this (looks down). Eh, and then I realised what works for me… Eh, what is your favourite food? National food? Do you know how to dance your national dance? … immediately, believe me… (smiles excitedly to show how clients smiled) ... and especially when I say "that was the same thing with us when I was a child, it was like this, and we used to play the whole day and our parents they didn't know where we were!" "Yes, yes!" (nods to show response of client). And we start talking about things like that. And they used to feel less that they're coming to an institution, and more like they' re coming to see a friend who can help.

These findings demonstrate the skills social workers can use to support MWS in building their confidence to speak about their experience. They also show how the simple use of common experiences, such as childhood experiences, can help in the building of trust.

Client Resistance and Trauma

Respondents explain that they often feel overwhelmed and challenged by the particular, traumatic experiences of migrant women, and the stressful situations their clients face daily in Malta, including their major fear of deportation and asylum rejection. They mostly interpret client resistance from this trauma-informed perspective, where the lack of client compliance, the expression of sudden anger, or the client's distrust of service providers are seen as part of the client's response and adaptation to trauma:

> …for instance, we had quite a number of migrant women who would say I don't want to learn the language, which that for me was also difficult to understand… I think that erm, sort of maybe a mistake as well that we make from our end is sometimes assuming some things, you know, so not moving at their pace…I think that trust was always a big issue when it came to working with migrants, and I obviously understand that besides the fact that sort of again we're working with DV, so we're talking about people who have experienced a high level of trauma… maybe the trust level wasn't yet built to how it should be… and I think if we don't start from understanding where the client is coming from, then a lot of attempts at intervention and assessment and engagement can take place, and you find sort of a wall built up.

Certain situations also seem to act as triggers of past traumas for MWS. In the following example, the respondent how her client, a human trafficking survivor, is getting angry with her when a desk officer sent them to the wrong office. The respondent interprets her client's anger through the client's past trauma, but also refers to her own frustration:

> She used to get angry, because things were taking time, or they send us from one place to another. She's right, because one time … they told me Hal Far, and then when we arrived at Hal Far they sent us to Valletta. So, she's right, but what can I do? She used to get down from the bus and cross the road…I knew where she was coming

> from, but at face value at that time you get upset when you see her do that to you. You're trying to help her, and she goes on you know… she used to go to bed, switch off the light and speak to no one. The poor child, this is a little boy, four months old, in a dark room, his mother in bed, you try to, you know, talk to her that there's the child, at the same time you know why she's behaving this way… She even had marks on her body because she had been through a type of ritual …these things were, I'm telling you, things that make you lose your breath! And then in the end we managed to build a good relationship – but it took many, many months! (Q3)[3]

As migrant women accommodate to life in a shelter, certain behaviours, incidents or expectations may also become triggers of re-traumatisation for the client, and at times the client may become aggressive or confrontational towards the social worker and other staff members. In the following example, the respondent describes how she dealt with such an incident, when she was asking a migrant woman to remove a kettle from the floor because of health and safety, and how she used empathy to help the client regulate her emotions:

> She told me, you don't tell me what to do! You know what I survived? And she started screaming and shouting and saying many things. Em, and I didn't realise that that was going to be a trigger point! Em, and I almost got a fright that day, because first of all I did not come prepared to hear all that… I wanted to cry when I saw her in that state! … And it's ok that she sees that expression in me, because it means she had touched me with her story, and I was not judging her, that I was feeling for her. Obviously, you need to compose yourself or it does not work. I remember telling her, I'm really sad knowing that this happened to you. And she had really calmed down and started crying then… (Q4)[4]

[3] Original text in Appendix D
[4] Original text in Appendix D

Some respondents express concern for the lack of empathy of social workers, towards migrant clients who present with challenging behaviours. In the following example, the respondent describes the immediate positive change of behaviour of a migrant woman who suddenly receives news of acceptance of her asylum application, and how this causes the social worker to reflect on the psychological impact of the asylum process on MWS:

> …I worked with a person with continuous challenging behaviours… when she received the refugee status… she threw herself on the floor, screaming and shouting with joy, then got back up, jumping, and throwing herself on the floor again! And saying to me thank you, thank you Malta, thank you everyone! And from the next day this person changed completely… and I said of course she changes, because who knows what was passing through her mind, if I go back to my country this will happen and that will happen, they will deport me… sometimes I see that lack of understanding in people working with agencies and residences who don't understand this, that when you don't even know what's going to happen to you and your children, your mind is not in the duties! You don't really care about the duty! So that's what I see sometimes, like, that lack of empathy. (Q5)[5]

Client distrust of professionals also seems to develop as a reaction to past experiences where clients feel they have not been understood, treated fairly, or helped by professionals, as the following respondent recounts:

> She was taken to a psychiatric hospital at a point because she was trying to harm herself and the baby… and the psychiatrist … was more concerned with her status and why she came to Malta than with how she was feeling. And this person obviously again did not understand the language, she was not given support with an interpreter, she was extremely frustrated, and she got a bit violent at one point. He just told her

[5] Original text in Appendix D

> …. ok forget it, I discharge you! But he did not discharge her … so she cannot get psychiatric support from somewhere else... Psychiatric ward was a definite no after that time, so she was completely, completely against getting any support, not just psychiatric support… but honestly, I don't blame her because if every time she tried to get support from medical professionals, from other professionals, even social professionals, and the answer was no we can't help you…

Professionals' lack of empathy, preparedness and knowledge about trauma can have a negative impact on the mental health of migrants, and lead to further distrust and isolation of clients from important services they may need. Avoidance and indifference can also be a symptom of professionals' unwillingness to engage with migrant clients and with anti-racist action (Dominelli, 2018). Additionally, professionals can also experience emotional exhaustion, including depersonalisation, avoidance, cynicism, and feelings of indifference and resentment towards the client (Clarke, 2008). These findings emphasize the importance of preparing social workers to understand the cross-cultural context of trauma and the impact of vicarious trauma on themselves and their work with clients.

Constructing 'Otherness' and Negotiating Difference

This section focuses on the way social workers construct otherness and difference, and how they experience, interpret and negotiate situations where otherness occurs. Respondents give several interpretations of otherness, explaining how migrant clients mostly grew up in a very different culture, and are often struggling to adapt to a new country, with new expectations placed upon them by various institutions and service providers. Several respondents express concern for Malta's limited resources to address the needs of migrants and asylum seekers, while also expressing their concern for human rights violations in relation to Malta's political decision to keep boats carrying asylum seekers from landing, in

the wake of the COVID-19 situation. One respondent expresses her concern for the dangerous political discourse that challenges social workers to stand their ground:

> …I think the laws and regulations coming from the state obviously place, eh, the social worker in an uncomfortable position, because there are mixed messages. So you have the code of ethics emphasizing the aspect of, it is important to acknowledge culture… but then at the same time you have, like policies and government directives, like for example the ports remain closed, no one comes in! So obviously, they are conflicting. Em, so it is very difficult for the social worker to stand her ground or his ground. (Q6)[6]

While most respondents describe how they are appalled by the negative and inhumane comments people make about migrants on social media, there also seems to be a repertoire of otherness even in the honest reflections of some respondents. In the following example the respondent seems to be questioning migrants' rights to benefits, especially referring to African migrants:

> I think certain loopholes need to be addressed, but I understand that obviously, we are already doing a lot, I think. Because to be honest I don't think if perhaps we go to their country we will be treated in the same way. Again, I don't know, I can't say, but I don't think if I end up in the middle of Nigeria I think I would be getting maybe certain benefits that they are getting here. (Q7)[7]

This example appears to echo nationalistic discourses, where asylum seekers are seen as a "burden". Similar discourses can be found in other studies, where the history of generosity towards people in need is drawn upon as a discursive resource in the negative formulation of asylum seekers (Masocha, 2014). Masocha (2014) suggests that by comparing

[6] Original text in Appendix D
[7] Original text in Appendix D

the generosity of the host society to the lack of it in asylum seekers' countries, social workers imply that asylum seekers are undeserving of the services they receive, and therefore should not complain about their quality. There also seems to be a lack of awareness in social workers, of how they transmit a sense of otherness through their discourse, where asylum seekers are described as outsiders who are destabilising and threatening host societies, a discourse that has implications for the quality of migrant care. In fact, respondents point out to persisting prejudices and lack of cultural sensitivity among different professionals, including social workers:

> Or else when we did a home visit once with another social worker, "they have money for a television, but they don't have money for a table and a bed!" They don't understand that this is their culture. And also, a lack of respect from our side, from professionals. Obviously when you go into a home, particularly Arab people, they have everywhere carpeted, very, very thickly, very, very nicely. I mean when you go in you should take off your shoes! What, you keep walking?!

Prejudice and Discrimination

Respondents describe how they engage with their clients' experiences of racism and prejudice, especially when they are accompanying them to various offices and appointments:

> …even in the waiting room you see it. People looking, people commenting… I'm sure they experience it because I experience it myself when I'm with them… You hear them talking, and they, even though they cannot understand them, but they see them looking and gossiping. (Q8)[8]

Respondents also seem to feel deeply challenged by the negative attitudes of landlords towards migrant women, especially African and Arab women:

[8] Original text in Appendix D

> I had another person of Arab nationality and she found it difficult as she had many children. And as soon as they realise she has children… she already has Arab nationality, unfortunately there is the image that they are dirty, in people's eyes, children are going to make noise, then we don't rent to her… and I feel this is very unjust because with the same reasoning there are Maltese people who are going to dirty and not take care of the place. It breaks my heart in reality, because, when you get to know the person … and you see them fighting and trying to make a good life for them and their families… (Q9)[9]

Respondents explain how they try helping their clients by contacting the landlords themselves, often finding themselves in a dilemma between helping the client and avoiding the labelling of their client and their dependence on the social worker. There is also a concern that landlords may expect to continue their communication with the social worker and avoid communicating with the client.

Language and Discrimination. Language was mentioned by all respondents as a medium through which racism and discrimination may be reinforced. Respondents explain that several important documents, such as court papers, are sent to migrant clients in Maltese, and that clients are not able to read and understand these documents. They also refer to the attitudes of frontline officers in service departments, who often avoid engaging with the client and seek to converse with the social worker in Maltese, even when the social worker makes it clear that they need to address the client in English. Respondents describe their anger and frustration at the lack of sensitivity and understanding among police officers, who often appear to have problems understanding and speaking English:

> For example, I went to a police station to make a report, the policeman addresses me in Maltese, and it's like she doesn't exist, when she is the one making the report. And

> she tells him speak to me in English, and she answers him in English, and he continues to speak to you in Maltese! Rage! You feel like confronting him, but you need to keep your place… (Q10)[10]

Another respondent explains how she confronts a frontline worker in front of the client, in order to empower the client to address discriminatory treatment of service providers:

> But then on the other hand I think that advocacy and speaking out, even in front of the client, so that, listen, this is not acceptable, this behaviour is not acceptable, I mean in a polite way obviously, but sort of why wasn't the client served? Because then things are going to remain exactly the same, the person is going to remain frustrated, and eventually they're going to leave…

The findings show the reluctance of some frontline workers to speak in English, assuming that these workers can speak and understand English well. Some respondents explain that police officers may not be able to write a report or understand the client in English. In fact, a study of Maltese police officers finds that lower participants (police constables and sergeants) are the least favourably disposed for academic qualifications for entry into the police force, and about one fifth of them in the study believe that a school leaving certificate is sufficient (Azzopardi Cauchi, 2004). On the other hand, police officers and frontline workers may be able to speak English but refrain from doing so due to personal prejudices. The previous examples show that social workers may handle instances of client discrimination differently, although they may experience the same frustration. Empowering migrant clients to demand their rights can be difficult, especially for clients who cannot communicate in English or Maltese.

[10] Original text in Appendix D

Non-native social workers often experience discrimination themselves in the way others use language to create a sense of otherness. One of the respondents, a non-native social worker, explains how she struggled with feelings of "hurt" when Maltese colleagues complained about "foreigners":

> In the beginning I felt that I wasn't accepted as a person. They were all very nice with me, no one was rude, no one was mean, but there was that you know, like, guard on. Eh, they used to comment in Maltese, like, "Oh! Foreigners! Uh!" And then like, "but we didn't mean" … I felt like, it's hurting me, not because of me, 'cos very soon I realised… How we can have foreign clients if we say fuckin' foreigners?! How to make bond, how can we connect with those people, to try to understand them if I have that like "Uh! Not again!"

The respondent deals with this situation by sharing her own feelings and experiences with her team to build a more culturally sensitive environment:

> …they saw me crying lots of times, 'cos I missed something, or 'cos I feel like left over, things like that, and I think they were like ok, let's start speaking differently because of (her name), and then it became like natural for all of us.

The experience of this respondent seems to indicate that some Maltese social workers may be unaware of the emotional and social experiences of migrants, and of how their daily discourse can create a feeling of exclusion in migrant workers and clients. Lum's (1992) emphasis on engagement is relevant here, where social workers need to engage with the client's existential situation, and become learners in a client-centred approach, in order to improve trust in the social work relationship (Lum, 1992). It is also interesting that the respondent here decides to share her deeper life experiences in order to make her colleagues aware of the challenges of migration, confirming how a more informal type of relationship can build stronger relationships between cultural groups.

Police Officers and Discrimination. Respondents show concern for the lack of empathy and cultural sensitivity among some police officers towards migrant women. They describe their feelings of anger, frustration, and hurt, when they see how police officers treat their clients:

> I was offended, extremely, and extremely angry, 'cause every time I went to the police I went with foreign clients… my clients who came from, for example, Nigeria, 3 months ago, she didn't know one word in English or in Maltese. You have to explain to her! She was in bruises and you are looking at her like (looking down and sneering) Wow! What next? To tell her, why he didn't kill you? I mean that's why I was angry! I was hurt as a person! It was extremely unfair!

At times respondents found that police officers wrote reports that were not accurate, and that conveyed a different truth than the survivor was relating. Since the reports are often written in Maltese, survivors could not verify these reports:

> I had a case, she was not African, she had Filipino nationality, and she even spoke good English eh! And still, when I saw the report and I was next to her and I know what she had said, there wasn't written what she had said… To make it worse they give them the report in Maltese, so unless they have someone to go through it, they won't even realise! (Q11)[11]

Many respondents seem to find themselves intervening with police officers, assisting them, motivating them, and ensuring that their work is done properly. Conversely, they seem to find little cooperation from police officers, with whom they need to negotiate on behalf of the client. One respondent even suggests that police officers use racial discrimination in the way they treat migrant perpetrators. Azzopardi Cauchi (2004) finds that Maltese police officers see their world as a complex and dangerous one, which they seek to control, and that

[11] Original text in Appendix D

this experience creates an occupational culture filled with racism, ageism, classism and exasperation towards victims of domestic violence. She explains that Maltese police officers reflect the racist attitudes present in Maltese society towards foreigners, which are based on prejudices and stereotypical assumptions (Calleja, 2000 as cited in Azzopardi Cauchi, 2004). The literature review also finds that the cultural insensitivity of police officers towards minority women discourages them from reporting incidents of domestic violence (Willis, 2011).

Interracial IPV

Respondents explain that MWS experience a heightened fear of their partner when he is Maltese, often based on increased power differentials in the relationship. They describe instances where Maltese men threaten MWS by asserting their own power and comparing it to the survivor's powerlessness in Maltese society. Respondents explain how they support clients to address these fears, informing them of their rights in Maltese society and reassuring them of their support. One respondent describes how she uses humour to build the client's confidence to address these fears:

> …even with well educated women who were married with Maltese guys, even they were afraid, and even they were insecure because he knows everyone! "Listen", I say to them, "there is no one who knows everybody! And if he is from the South and you live in Qawra, its different. So, don't worry, it's not possible that everybody knows him! And ok, how is he that special? Is he wealthy?" "No!" "He has Lord title, what? Why is he so special?" "I don't know". "Show me his photo" (pats the table) … "Ok, he is not Leonardo di Caprio!" And they were like (giggles). And then I explain to them how it works. It's not just him, every perpetrator is the same, that's the point, it's not about you, that's the situation how it works… And then we can talk like… you know, serious talk, serious things…. Sometimes they needed to just laugh

> actually, or to tell what he… "can you imagine what he did yesterday?" and things like that… because they couldn't talk to their friends about that!

Although humorous situations described by respondents are few, this example shows how social workers can make powerful use of humour and informal conversation to help the client deconstruct the perpetrator' s narrative and re-construct their own. Helping clients reconstruct a coherent post-trauma life narrative is critical in social work, since this is a significant part of trauma recovery (Jirek, 2016). Social workers can use humour to help clients understand complex and contradictory social realities (Koestler, 1964, as cited in Longo, 2011), and to challenge powerlessness and create counter-discourses (Longo, 2011, p.123).

Respondents affirm that race plays an important role in the selection of submissive migrant women from traditional societies by Maltese men, who then use racial discrimination to control the relationship. Poverty, and lack of access to finances and income generation are strong push factors for migrant women to seek such relationships and live with the abuse:

> …yes the abuse is not only coming from the fact that the man is using his power over the woman, but even he always mentions her nationality, like, I made you somebody because in your country you have nothing! So, there is that criticism. Or even cases where you know men who brought women from certain nationalities, certain countries, to Malta, mainly for sexual relationships. And you know that they selected those particular nationalities for that reason… because maybe it's easier for the person to accept to come, maybe because of financial situations…So there yes, there's the issue of race as well, that certain nationalities are targeted because of those things… (Q12)[12]

[12] Original text in Appendix D

Respondents explain that often migrant women are more vulnerable to sustained abuse, as perpetrators use their power to threaten the survivor that she would be deported, and that they would get custody of their children. They find that migrant women are more likely to feel ashamed of telling their families that they are leaving the relationship, and often lack important support networks and good legal representation in Malta. According to respondents, fear of deportation is higher when migrant women have children and family members in the home country, who strongly rely on the survivor's remittances. These findings confirm what Alcalde (2007), Parson (2010), Nudelman et al. (2017) and Tang (2014) also find, that racial discrimination is used by perpetrators to create fear in migrant and minority women towards authorities, and to maintain dependency of the survivor on the perpetrator. The situations of poverty that migrant women come from can make them vulnerable to deception and IPV, and more prone to live with the abuse out of fear of returning to their former situations. In response, social workers may focus on empowering migrant women to attain their own financial independence and leave the abuse.

Maltese Women Survivors and Migrant Perpetrators. One of the respondents refers to the additional discrimination and blame that Maltese women face in Maltese society when they suffer abuse at the hands of their migrant partner:

> I think that the Maltese woman still experiences a lot of discrimination unfortunately, but on a different level… the perception of the Maltese, sort of how can it be that a Maltese woman would marry a Muslim man and convert? That perception, I think, is not easy… that perception of, em, you're doing something wrong, it's your fault that this happened, you went, you went and you know what they're like! That is what people tell her.

The respondent describes how she feels when she hears her colleagues blame a Maltese survivor for choosing a Libyan partner:

> …but yes, I heard from my colleagues as well saying, but isn't it her fault that she went with him? She knows what they are! They're all like that! Or, it's true, if we have Maltese sort of why are we bringing these people who don't appreciate like? And for me, sort of, my first reaction is, are you serious? (Q13)[13]

While the respondent advocates for a non-discriminatory approach with her colleagues, she also reflects on the impact of cultural differences on IPV behaviours, and on whether there is some truth to Maltese women experiencing a higher risk of IPV in relationships with men from certain cultural backgrounds. The literature review does find that more traditional, patriarchal societies have a stronger tendency towards cultural and family practices that often increase gender inequalities and may normalise abusive behaviours towards women (United Nations, 2020; Yamawaki et al., 2009). However, the respondent's reflection also confirms the need to support social workers in articulating certain realities they struggle with, to share their thoughts and develop their own language for addressing DV in a cross-cultural approach.

Racism Towards Migrant Women in Shelters

Respondents describe shelter space as a scarce resource which is extremely important for providing clients with a safe, learning environment. Some respondents explain how they ensure that shelters are culturally responsive, encouraging migrant women to cook their traditional food or express their cultural identity through their daily routines. One respondent explains that although cleaning duties are important in shelter life, cleaning does not always have to be done in the same way, the way "I'm used to". The respondent's words suggest that there may be resistance among workers and residents towards other ways of cleaning and housekeeping, and that migrants may struggle to adapt to behaviours that are regarded as superior to their own. The respondent states that culturally responsive environments need to

[13] Original text in Appendix D

prioritise values of respect and commitment over prescribed methods of doing things, such as cleaning and cooking.

Respondents explain that many migrant and Maltese women seem to form friendships that are sustainable beyond their stay in the shelter, but that it is not uncommon for Maltese and migrant cultural groups to socialise separately, with the possible exclusion of individuals who do not fit in any group. Respondents also mention rare incidents when Maltese women started "ganging" against migrant women:

> …having Maltese people ganging like, against foreign persons, and anything that happens we label the woman because she is a foreigner. So we had these circumstances, but they were not the majority… they used to create a lot of anger in us, when you have a person that you know she is picking on a person because she is of a different colour for example. We sort of always try and, you know, if she is in the wrong we point out she is in the wrong, so she has no right to call her names. Because in this particular incident it was exposed the type of language used, you understand? And that's very degrading. Simply referring to her as "that black one", and then the word starts to go from one resident to another, and they start ganging… we try, I mean these things they are confronted about them… because you can't tolerate that. (Q14)[14]

Respondents explain how they intervene early in this conflict process to prevent escalation of the situation, educating individuals about the shelter policy of non-discrimination, and attempting to build peace between the women. These findings raise questions on how racist behaviours are prevented in shelters, especially when survivors tend to create alliances and groups based on language and nationality.

[14] Original text in Appendix D

Discussing Racism with the Client

Some respondents state that migrant women do not usually discuss the subject of racism with them. They believe that this is because they are facing so many other challenges that they do not have the time and energy to deal with racism. Discussing racism with clients seems to make social workers feel uncomfortable, or that the client is facing far more serious challenges to engage in this discussion. One respondent describes how she tried to divert the attention of the client when she saw how people were treating her client in a waiting room:

> Yes, I try, so maybe she doesn't realise… yes I believe they know, but I also think they become immune to it to a certain point. As I told you, it's like we explore it when we come to it, if I start seeing that the situation is like increasing, I will ask her listen do you feel comfortable? Why is it bothering you? Because then they will obviously tell you. And you try to explore it at that point in time. But if it has not really escalated, I think I try to go around it without giving it much importance. (Q15)[15]

This example suggests that the respondent is avoiding the subject of race as though she has not realised what is happening, where the social worker's response seems to be one of alienation or denial. Other respondents do feel that it is important to explore racism with their clients, and they also mention that their clients disclose incidents of racism with them. One respondent reflects:

> Hmmm…yes…we don't have so much time sometimes, and even the language, but I know it's not good, erm, we don't do it I think, we don't address it that much. I know that we need to talk about it, so even talking about the fact that I am Maltese and I am a woman, what questions she has for me, you know, so she can understand a little what I believe, what she believes…It's like I know we need to talk about gender,

[15] Original text in Appendix D

about our beliefs…. we don't always do it… and again, I reflect with you…it could be that I need to do it… that I need to start there and not with the documents.

The resistance of respondents to engage in the subject of race and racial discrimination with their clients is in line with the literature review findings, that often social workers from the dominant group are unwilling to explore this subject. According to Olcon (2019), the root cause is that social workers are often colour-blind and discriminatory towards minority clients. However, the last example shows that social workers often need to be supported and empowered to develop the language and knowledge for addressing race and racial discrimination with their client. In fact, one respondent explained that migrant clients often spoke about their experiences of racial discrimination with her, expressing their frustrations and confusion at these situations. These differences indicate the need to share good practices in cross-cultural communication among social workers.

Interpreting and Responding to Cultural Difference

An appreciation of the cultural context of DV is critical for social workers practicing in this field. DV laws and policies apply to all survivors, but social workers often need to adapt their approach to help clients from different cultural backgrounds to address the abusive relationship. It is interesting to look at how social workers access, interpret and respond to the cultural context of MWS, as good practices can also be applied to the cross-cultural context of social work in other fields, as shown in this section.

Cultural Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence

Respondents explain that patriarchal attitudes are stronger within migrant communities coming from traditional societies, than in Maltese society. According to respondents, women from these communities have a stronger tendency to maintain traditional gender roles, accept certain abusive behaviours of men towards them, and seek help only when violence becomes life threatening. Respondents explain that many migrant women are

not aware of the nature of abuse and control, and that family honour plays a key role in the persistence of these abusive behaviours:

> Sometimes for some of them… it's a form of love of the husband that he needs to be protective, you can't go here or there…for them it is interpreted as ok, he loves me. It is a problem if he hits them… but it's like they just see the fact that he hits them and are expecting that like … "help me so he can stop hitting me" or "help me so he will stop drinking". Ok, but there are other ways he is not treating you well… they cannot perceive the idea of control, and financial control, example, sexual assault in marriage… we have Maltese who do not maybe know about these things, but with migrants even more, especially in some cultures there is this idea of honour…

One respondent describes herself in a "struggle" as she engages with the reactions of migrant women during awareness raising sessions on GBV, who seem to be "surprised" by some of the information they receive:

> …when we're talking about issues of DV for example, or SGBV, you know, these topics that come about, there's a sense of, of surprise… I don't like the reaction ta, but always a sense of surprise that there's surprise, you know… It's like how can… how can you not know that something is being done to you? …for me it's a struggle, I find it in myself, again, even I find it in DV like… (takes a deep breath) you know like, something that is causing you so much pain! … it surprises, not surprises me, but there's always that like, why? You know, it challenges me.

The respondent takes a deep breath during the interview and seems to be trying to find words to explain her frustration. This response indicates the importance of social workers being supported to understand and cope with their clients' realities, especially the realities of certain gender-discriminating practices in traditional regions and countries where migrant women come from. It also indicates the need for social workers to learn about indigenous and

international practices used in these regions, to support migrant women in understanding the nature and impact of DV and addressing it (Rankopo & Osei-Hwedie, 2011).

Respondents explain how factors such as migrant women's nationality, tribe and religion, and the way they arrive in Malta, play a role in their context of DV. According to one respondent, women coming to Malta as dependant spouses may be more vulnerable to family retribution, and may be returned and even killed as a punishment for dishonouring the family, if they attempt to leave the relationship or report the abuse. In contrast, a non-native respondent shares her perspective on common behaviours of perpetrators and survivors that are beyond cultural or regional contexts:

> I thought for example in (her region) … it's like, what is in the house should stay in the house! And for the neighbours you have to be, everything is perfect, this is my perfect husband … I went to Malta… same. Then I met clients… from 28 different countries all over the world, and I realised it's the same. The same everywhere! I had clients from the US… with the same situation, like, "I shouldn't talk about that because of … our fine neighbours!" So, no its not (her region)! It's everywhere! And then perpetrators. They behave the same way. From the way they walk, they talk, they think, they watch TV, they ask for dinner, the same. The same!

The common behaviours of perpetrators and survivors, as described by the respondent, are behaviours rooted in historically unequal power relationships that act as a social mechanism of subordination of women (Council of Europe, 2020). This common experience of women survivors requires a social work response that is based on universal standards and values of human rights (Yunong and Xiong, 2011). Such responses, when delivered in a culturally responsive manner, can be powerful in transforming women, increasing their awareness on domestic violence, and providing them with opportunities to change the power dynamics in their relationship with men. In spite of their various

experiences of abuse and violence, migrant women are described by respondents as very resilient, especially referring to African women's determination and perseverance:

> Every time I was with clients from certain countries, African countries mostly, I was like (takes a deep breath), "I'm tired just looking at you!" I told them… "you should be proud!" 'Cos it's something! That courage, that passion for life, for better life… that hey, with my hard work, with my strong beliefs I will kill this fear I have! That's amazing! … European women, especially from certain countries, it's my opinion… they are weaker and they are not ready to fight…

The comparison between European and African women here is interesting. The respondent seems to imply that African women's unique life experiences based on a narrative of survival have made them more resilient to face situations of violence, than European women who are weaker because they have not faced so many hardships. This interpretation may be seen as a generalisation of racial categories, or an interpretation rooted in practical daily experience of social workers. In fact, the high level of resilience of African women is mentioned by other respondents, even in comparison to other migrant women, and described as an adaptation to a harsh environment where flourishing is difficult.

Discussing Gender-Based Violence with the Client

Respondents describe the different approaches they use to discuss concepts of gender-based violence and discrimination with their clients:

> … from my perspective normally, it would be a human rights approach… I think a human rights perspective takes you to the point of being a human. We are all human beings, irrelevant of our religion, irrelevant of the colour of our skin, irrelevant of our context, everything, our gender, our ability, our age, everything... we deserve respect, and to be respected and to be perceived as a person who is unique and individual… But it's not easy…because when it is culturally ingrained…. I mean we can see it in

> Malta that it's taking a lot, a lot of work to try to change certain perceptions even related to gender…

By using a human rights approach to increase women's awareness of their own rights, the respondent here is applying universal standards and values of social work (Yunong & Xiong, 2011), while regarding culture as an oppressive force that works against these values. The global culture of gender inequality, where women face oppression through cultural practices such as misogyny, sexual harassment, discrimination, and the devaluing of their contribution, is a barrier to women's development and to human development in general (Nardone, 2019). Nardone (2019) explains that culture is not only transmitted socially, but in the same way that trauma is transmitted, biologically through the DNA, and therefore is highly resistant to change. She suggests that the culture of complicity, silence and cynicism can be broken through the use of technology for globally connecting women to break this culture, to understand better the nature of violence and find protection while exposing instances of abuse and discrimination. Social workers need to be aware, not only of their own role in supporting their clients, but also of their role in connecting clients to supportive national and global fora, where survivors become agents of cultural transformation.

The concept of culture has also been criticised for demarcating certain categories of people as culturally different to others, constructing their culture as a "deficit" by comparing them to superior cultures (Park, 2005). In the following example, the respondent seems to be referring to the "deficit" culture of the client, and comparing it to Malta's superior position where domestic violence, which is "hazin" (wrong), is not tolerated:

> I explain to her the Maltese context at the end, but I explain to her for example that… although she came from that type of situation and that type of culture, it doesn't mean it's everywhere. And God forbid it's everywhere, because it is wrong. You sort of try to explain to her that, yes, it's not just Malta that has these laws, but England…. You

> know it's like you try to make her understand in that sense. I think that is the only way, in reality. (Q16)[16]

By comparing the client's cultural background to Malta or England, as countries which comply with this standard, the respondent seems to be presenting a paternalistic explanation to the client, who may feel undermined because of their different cultural roots. It seems that the respondent is not aware of the efforts of developing countries in their fight against DV. Research on these efforts could have been used in a more culturally responsive approach, to empower the client in considering new options for addressing her situation. In fact, other respondents describe how they engage with the client in deeper reflection on DV using a non-judgmental approach, and taking in consideration how their words may affect the perception of the client about her own cultural background:

> I think I use this approach, as I'm saying, like, "Come let's talk about it, let's explore it together", and then in it, what I do, I ask like "Do you think that this is fair?" And then she starts to come to it… for example, "He is a Muslim but he drinks, you feel like it is good what he is doing?" "No, it's not good what he is doing that he drinks, even because when he drinks he becomes aggressive!" So, then she comes to it on her own… What I see is that when I am in a hurry and I just say in Malta we believe that this is not right, it's useless that I said that, because she would say so in Malta it's like that, but I am different…. Yes, and that I give her a chance to express what she thinks, more than telling her how it is supposed to be….

One respondent describes how she uses the client's own feelings to improve the client's awareness on DV:

> Because sometimes they don't even realise that that's abuse. As they're talking to you, they say eh, you know, especially with regards to marital rape, "but mhux (isn't

[16] Original text in Appendix D

> he) he's my husband? I have to, even though I'm in pain, even though I don't want it"… and then you explain to them, very slowly, "but no, you know, he mustn't"… they know something's not right, but when they actually hear somebody say it's not right and it shouldn't be done, it's sort of enlightening for them. So, their inner feelings that they've had, speci ta (sort of), you know, mela (so) I was right to feel bad or upset or, you know … see a lot of the times … they are made to feel guilty, they are made to feel inadequate….so, slowly, slowly we build up their self-esteem, and explain to them …

The example here shows how, maintaining focus on changing the culture of abuse, rather than the client's cultural background or nationality, can be a better tool for improving the client's awareness on domestic violence. By supporting clients psychologically and emotionally to connect the culture of abuse to their own context, clients can be able to identify and articulate the abuse, build their self-esteem and make more informed and safe decisions to leave the abusive relationship.

Religion, Spirituality and Religious Leaders

Respondents explain how they regard religion and spiritual identity as a source of strength, hope and well-being for their clients, respecting their clients' religious backgrounds even when they are not religious themselves, or when they disagree with clients' decisions to return to their relationship with the perpetrator. According to respondents, however clients with stronger religious values tend to find it harder to leave the abusive relationship, and there seems to be a higher incidence of domestic violence among Muslims and radical Christian groups. One respondent describes her own "struggle", as a Christian herself, to accept instances where religion becomes an oppressive barrier rather than a tool of empowerment:

> So I mean, unfortunately, I hate to generalise … but … I would say from the point of numbers, many of the clients who are victims of domestic violence unfortunately happen to be Muslim, and that is, even more, I find it very difficult to work with… It can be a tool for empowerment, definitely…but many times unfortunately I see it impedes, which is a very sad aspect because as a person I am very spiritual. I mean… I'm a practising Christian so I really…. I feel that sometimes you know, God tells me I must be with my husband you know, I've signed a contract, you know, I've given my promise to God that I will be with this man… so, its, I, ehe it's a struggle… sometimes unfortunately I feel it's more of a barrier rather than a tool.

This respondent's description shows how social workers working with women survivors, who are mostly women themselves, may be challenged to review and reflect upon their own beliefs as a result of helping clients address beliefs and traditions that sustain women's experiences of domestic violence. Studies also show that social workers working with survivors of IPV experience a blurring between their private and professional lives, with a resulting questioning of their intimate relationships and gender role identities (Goldblatt, Buchbinder, Eisikovit & Arizon-Mesinger, 2009). These findings indicate the importance of supporting social workers through adequate supervision and training, especially in empowering social workers to address the impact of their work on their own intimate relationships.

The impact of religious leaders on the client and the social work relationship is often described as a negative one by respondents, where leaders put pressure on the survivor to stay in the relationship, sometimes because of pressures they face from the couples' family. One respondent describes her negative experiences of Pastors who try to hide the abuse "for their own personal gain". She shares about a session that was organized for her unit, where the Imam explained to the social workers that the Koran does not allow a man to abuse his wife.

She also recounts a case where the Imam actually helped a client leave the abusive relationship:

> … the Imam, believe it or not… he spoke to the partner, he told him no, you are not interpreting the Koran correctly, that is not what the Koran says! And he really fought for the woman's right, yes. He fought in favour of her, to get the separation not to bring them back together. He told her I will speak to him but if he still does not treat you well do not go through with this marriage, do not continue in a place where you are disrespected!

Another respondent, however, describes her personal struggle with the situation of a Maltese, Muslim client who was suffering DV together with her children, and who had asked for divorce from the Imam, but was denied. The respondent struggles to understand the decision of the Imam, pointing out that this decision gives "more power and control" to the perpetrator:

> And she has written letters and has spoken to him countless times, and unfortunately, and there is a great deal of abuse and a great deal of, even abuse on the children. In fact, this is a case that is ongoing in court and access to the children is supervised. But still, sort of since … the partner is not accepting, then it is not possible… For me that is not easy because there is a lot of evidence, there is a lot of proof, she is very young, she can easily continue on with her life, and this is only giving more control and power to him.

There are other instances where respondents describe similar situations, where an Imam is against the divorce of a couple, even when there is severe abuse. There appears to be uncertainty among social workers when it comes to religious leaders, because in their experience, some respondents feel that different people are treated differently in terms of the support they receive. Generally, most respondents feel that many times religious leaders have

a negative impact on their work with the client, and that their influence on migrants is particularly strong, especially because migrants tend to depend on their religious community for support in a new country.

The Value of Cross-Cultural Social Work: Training and Practice.

Respondents explain that they are given training on important topics such as migration, human trafficking, and cross-cultural social work mostly by international organizations working in the field. They feel that this training should be an essential part of the training of social workers at the University of Malta, in order to support social workers in addressing their own biases and assumptions, and in becoming better informed about the context of migration, the sociocultural background and the rights of migrant clients:

> …the social work practice, unfortunately in itself, biases itself. And it's discriminatory in that fact, because unfortunately, I hate to say it… because I've learned a lot from the Social Work course, but I think there's so much that can be done… and that needs to be done. We can't ignore that fact. We can't. We are not the only country who is passing through such a time…. And unfortunately, in Malta what, we have two guest speakers on migration? … Which is really, it's sad you know…. we need to expand our knowledge and our understanding of diverse cultures, and how, how we've been taught to work as social workers, but with diverse cultures…It's important to understand the context…

Some respondents emphasize the importance of nurturing social workers' conscience on matters of social justice and the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, supporting them to develop self-reflective skills to address personal biases and prejudices:

> …I mean, where it comes to the aspect of immigrants, social workers need to do more…I sometimes feel that they are there yes, the migrants, but they are not there you understand?...for example… recently there was a professional talking, a

> professional in my presence, she was, em, on this COVID… "don't worry, because those they found were blacks from Hal Far!"...Em..and this she is passing on to clients! So, I don't think we have learned enough…let me take an example on Facebook… when the MASW backed, em, something to do with refugees, how many likes were there?... where you have a cause, where it concerns social justice, equal access of services, equal opportunities, that are our values, of our profession, that it is not popular on social media worries me! (Q17)[17]

In this previous example, it seems that social workers are giving in to racist discourse that maintains racialised power relations, as Dominelli (2018) explains, sustaining the politics of segregation and assimilation, where immigrants either "become like us" or face deportation and segregation. This approach seems to demonise migrants, ignore their identity and story, and construct them as dangerous human beings that can be stripped of their dignity. Organizations need to carefully monitor and address such behaviour if they are serious in developing an anti-racist organizational culture.

Respondents often request training on subjects related to migration and cross-cultural communication. Eight of the respondents agree with the need for more training on migration and cross-cultural social work at undergraduate level. The other two respondents point out that social workers do have the tools to explore these subjects if they wanted to. Most respondents are concerned that reality is changing for social workers as they find themselves working with an increasing number of migrant clients in all sectors but lack preparation for this reality. One respondent sees this as an injustice on migrant clients:

> I think it should be increased... I mean, this is a changing reality for many of us, always having new people from different nationalities …so I think, starting from University and even whilst working, being given training is very essential. Because

[17] Original text in Appendix D

> the professional is working as though with her eyes closed, so I feel we are committing injustice with the person we are working with, because if I'm not informed, I can't give a holistic service. (Q18)[18]

One respondent suggests that the undergraduate social work course would offer migration and cross-cultural social work as a basic subject, and then further training would be provided to social workers as they work in fields:

> New grads are learning on the job, if they had…I mean there might be something small about migrants, but it is not specific to social work practice. And it needs to be given importance … obviously more people are seeking asylum, more people are seeking protection, and we need to be much more knowledgeable about it. So, I think it should start at university, and wherever they are employed they are followed up according to field. If it's domestic violence, they are followed up with migrant women as survivors in domestic violence situations.

Another respondent suggests that course study units taught in the undergraduate course would include an application to the context of migration and trauma, in order to support social work students in developing cultural competence. The following respondent even explains the importance of giving space for students to think and reflect on cross cultural situations and cross-cultural competence:

> I think also when I say training, I also say training about ok about the context, and about different cultures and about how we can be culturally competent, but also opportunities I think to reflect and think… so even just this interview gave that opportunity, you know, I mean having it done I think in a few study units... In a way it can be incorporated into nearly everything, so it doesn't need to be, kwazi (almost)

[18] Original text in Appendix A

> one study unit, you know, but as part of SW training, that we are culturally competent…

This respondent continues to explain that there needs to be consideration for a broader meaning of cross-cultural social work in the course. She describes the challenges she had encountered when she had started working with clients from different Maltese cultural backgrounds, and how she had felt unprepared. The respondent suggests that training should not only be about migration, but needs to start from an appreciation of other cultures, including local Maltese cultures, and their social realities.

Respondents also recommend the training of social care professionals on migration and cross-cultural communication, since these professionals spend more time with clients, and are often excluded from this type of training. According to some respondents, there is a need for encouraging more reflection and discussion among social workers, in order to support them to work with their migrant clients and to deconstruct daily messages on social media which strongly affect workers' perceptions. Finally, respondents point to the need for more cooperation between services, and for social work supervisors to be trained in this field so that they can provide better supervision to social workers concerning clients from different cultural backgrounds and immigration statuses.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Prioritising Cultural Responsiveness in Social Work Education, Research and Practice

This research study used IPA to explore the cross-cultural experiences of social workers working with migrant women survivors of IPV, by interviewing social workers working in DV services about their views on migration, the challenges they encounter and the methods and approaches they use when engaging with MWS. The interviews also explored social workers' use of methods and approaches when working with MWS, and their recommendations on how cross-cultural social work practice and education can be improved.

As a result, this study yields several recommendations for general social work education, research and practice, as well as specific recommendations for DVS in the context of MWS. In fact, the literature review includes topics that address the broad cross-cultural context of social work, as well as the specific context MWS, and the close connection between these contexts is often made by respondents during the interviews, indicating the critical role of cultural responsiveness in all social work practice, including within DVS.

The cross-cultural perspective in social work practice and education seems to be somewhat lacking in Malta, with a resulting negative impact on the preparedness of social work students and the quality of SWS. This perspective is necessary for exploring the various contexts of migration, but rather than categorising people according to nationality or citizenship, it should provide a broader context for exploring cultural differentials between the client and the social worker, and include the cultural contexts of Maltese social groups. Social work education and training, therefore, needs to empower social workers and students to reflect, research, analyse and apply various tools, principles and approaches that are culturally responsive to different client groups. The study elicits further recommendations below.

Improving Client Trust by Reducing Power Differentials and the Us/Them Binary

As the findings suggest, social workers' emphasis on differences between their own cultural background and that of the client often has a negative impact on trust-building between the social worker and the client. Client distrust and fear of engaging with service providers increases the risk of social exclusion and vulnerability to IPV for migrant and minority women in socially isolated communities, where traditional attitudes towards gender roles persist. Therefore, addressing power differentials in the social work relationship is critical for building client trust.

The recommendation is for the quality of social work services to be improved by providing spaces for reflection and learning on the impact of power differentials and otherness on client trust, while sharing good practices that are culturally responsive and reduce power differentials in the social work relationship. In the context of DV and MWS, social work students and practitioners need to be empowered to explore and share methods and practices that help clients reconstruct a coherent post-trauma life narrative that supports their recovery.

Facilitating a Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Practice

Several respondents describe how clients can experience re-victimisation by professionals in various services, including SWS. In the context of DV, the different approaches used by DV and CPS services, and the lack of collaboration between these services can easily re-victimise DV survivors. For MWS, multiple experiences of trauma make it very difficult for clients to feel safe and to trust the social worker. Therefore, social workers' lack of knowledge on MWS' possible experiences of trauma and their impact on client behaviour and response, can manifest in low client satisfaction or discontinuation of the service.

The recommendation is for improving trauma-informed practice by training social work students and practitioners on the nature of trauma and its impact on client response and

agency, and on the social worker. The training needs to include the application of trauma-informed tools and models in social work, and to explore the context of migration and the various traumas that migrants may experience before, during and after their journeys. Dilemmas encountered by social workers in these contexts can be discussed, with the application of relevant adaptations of social work approaches to address such dilemmas. The training can also be adapted to the specific context of MWS, focusing on migrant women's experiences of trauma, and the role of gender, race and class in these experiences.

Collaboration between CPS and DVS can also be improved, in order to reduce the likelihood of re-victimisation and to facilitate trauma-informed practice for all DVS clients, including MWS. Prevention strategies on racial discrimination can include communication tools that promote diversity in DVS, while shelter support groups and residents' meetings can be used to discuss the shelter's anti-racist human rights approach, even when there are no migrant women at the shelter. Additionally, newcomers at shelters can be informed about this policy in their first meeting, including their own responsibility towards non-discrimination in the shelter. Finally, increasing awareness on structural inequalities and their impact on access to services for vulnerable groups, such as MWS, needs to be prioritised in social work training and practice.

Improving Anti-Racist Action in Social Work

The findings show that social workers are aware of racial attitudes in society and experience these attitudes as barriers to their work with clients. However, they may be less aware of how their own discourse reflects prejudices and assumptions that are harmful to minority and migrant clients and professionals. This lack of awareness reduces anti-racist action and increases the chances of victim blaming, especially in the case of MWS.

The recommendation is for social workers and social work students to be empowered in addressing their own, and others' prejudices, racial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours.

They also need to be supported in exploring and applying cultural, anti-oppressive and anti-racist perspectives, for empowering clients to address prejudices and discrimination in their daily lives. These responses can be applied to various fields, including the context of MWS, where intersections of gender, race and class often demand a more focused response.

Building Capacity in Cultural Responsiveness to GBV

The findings show that, while social workers engage with increasing culturally diverse populations, the subject of cultural responsiveness remains unexplored, with negative consequences on the quality of social work services to all clients. The lack of knowledge on patterns and trends of GBV and migration, and the lack of information sharing among social workers stunts the development of cultural responsiveness in the field of DV. Social workers' lack of training on the role and correct use of interpretation services can also disrupt effective communication with migrant and minority clients, including MWS, and reduce their confidence in social work services.

The recommendation is for cultural responsiveness to be on the main agenda of social work education and practice. Within the context of DV and MWS, cultural attitudes, patterns and trends of IPV and DV need to be monitored and discussed by social workers so that practices and services can be adapted accordingly. Addressing the context of DV and IPV in interracial relationships, and exploring the role of shame, deception, isolation and oppression in survivors' lives is critical in building the capacity of social workers in this field.

Recommendations for further research

The research study finds a lack of training of social work students and professionals on migration, cultural responsiveness, trauma and the vulnerability of migrant women to IPV. The study also finds that there is a lack of information sharing and coordination between various service providers that may become involved in situations of IPV, and that social workers working in DVS often lack knowledge about the rights of migrants, including the

rights of MWS. Therefore, further research is recommended in exploring and evaluating tools for continuous professional development, and for developing and evaluating University study modules and workshops for social work students on the subject of migration, trauma, and cultural responsiveness. Additionally, new research can explore better models of practice for improving coordination between DVS and CPS in situations of IPV, applying these models to the cross-cultural context of social work.

The cross-cultural dynamics of social work practice is extremely important to consider in the improvement of the quality of social work practice, and of the outcomes for clients of social work. This study has given voice to social workers to share their perspectives and experiences of the cross-cultural dynamics and their impact on themselves and on MWS, and on how cultural responsiveness can be improved through more focused and mainstreamed social work education and training, and through the provision of adequate supervision and coordination among social work services.

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Appendix A

Information Letter for Social Work Participants

Title of research project: Exploring cross cultural social work with migrant women survivors of domestic violence.

Research aims and description

My name is [redacted]; I am currently a social work student reading for Master of Social Work at the University of Malta, and conducting research under the supervision of [redacted], [redacted].

The aim of this research is to understand the experiences of social workers helping migrant women survivors of domestic violence, in order to increase knowledge and awareness among social workers and social work organizations of how cross-cultural practice and education can be improved.

This research project includes semi-structured online interviews conducted with social workers from various organizations, concerning the topic of cross-cultural social work with migrant women survivors of domestic violence.

You are kindly being asked to participate in an online interview.

Research procedures

After reading the information sheet and listening to an explanation about the research, if you do agree to participate in an interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form detailing your rights. The interview will then commence and is expected to take between 60 and 70 minutes.

During the interview, you will be asked questions concerning:

1. The experiences, challenges and good practices in working with migrant women survivors of domestic violence in your organization, including collaboration with other services
2. Systematic barriers and the influence of cultural communities
3. Recommendations for improving cross cultural social work with migrant women survivors

The interview will be conducted through a Skype call, audio-recorded and then transcribed by the researcher for the purpose of data analysis.

Further information about your rights can be found in the consent form associated with this information sheet.

Appendix B

Consent Form for Participants

This consent form is linked with, and is being presented to you, together with the information sheet associated with the study entitled

Exploring cross cultural social work with migrant women survivors of domestic violence

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. Please fill in this form after reading the information sheet and listening to an explanation about the research. If you have any questions, please ask the researcher before you decide to sign this consent form and participate in this research.

I have read the information sheet, and I also understand that:

An online interview will be carried out, of 60 to 70 minutes duration, which will be audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription and data analysis. All personal and/or identifiable data will be destroyed once this research project is completed and examined, that is, in July 2020.

Any personal data given in the online interview will remain anonymous. This consent form, together with any other personal information, such as that listed on the participant characteristics form, will be stored separately from the pseudonymised interview. Any personal data collected will be processed solely and exclusively for the purposes of this study and will only be accessible by the researcher and his/her supervisor. Furthermore, my identity will not be revealed in any publications/dissertations resulting from this study.

Participant rights

I understand that all the information collected in this study will be handled according to the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). I thus have the right to access, rectify and where applicable erase data about myself. I further understand that my participation in this study is totally voluntary. I understand that if I decide at any time during or after the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researcher and withdraw from the study up to three weeks after the interview, without prejudice and without the need to provide any justification. Refusing to participate or withdrawing from the study involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. Furthermore, I have the right to ask that any personal or identifiable data I supplied up to that point be destroyed.

Participant's Declaration of Consent

I, _____, hereby affirm that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction. Furthermore, in view of the information listed in the information sheet and consent form related to the study 'Exploring cross cultural social work with migrant women survivors of domestic violence:', I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this study. I therefore agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____
Date _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the results when the research project is completed, kindly write down your contact details (email address or mobile number)

_____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

The interview will open with this introduction:

"As you know, during this interview I will be asking a number of questions about your social work experience with migrant women survivors of domestic violence. The interview will take between 60 to 70 minutes at the most. Before we start, I would like to explain the content of the consent form and ask for your signature".

Questions:

1. **What is your background and experience of cross-cultural social work?**

Prompts
- How many years have you worked as a social worker? In domestic violence?
- What is your current role?
- What are your general views on migration and cross-cultural social work in Malta?

2. **What is your social work experience in engaging with migrant women survivors of domestic violence?**

Prompts
- What specific challenges have you experienced? How did you address them?
- How do you engage with migrant women and build trust with the clients? What are some good practices you have developed in this area?
- How do you experience client resistance with this target group and how do you address it?
- How do you experience differences/similarities between the client and yourself?
- What is the impact of this difference/similarity on the social work relationship and outcome?
- How do you try to address this difference/similarity?
- What is your experience on differences between social work with migrant women and social work with Maltese women in the area of domestic violence?
- How do you experience discomfort (lack of self-efficacy, frustration with client, etc.) in your work with the client group?
- What are the challenges you have faced in identifying problems to work on with the client? How have you addressed these challenges?

3. **What type of social work interventions do you use with migrant survivors of domestic violence?**

Prompts

- What is your experience of applying social work values cross culturally with this target group?
- What is your experience of applying social work models and interventions cross culturally with this target group?
- What is your experience in adapting learned social work practice to serve these clients?

- What are some dilemmas you have faced (ethical, personal, moral, other) in applying social work values and methods cross-culturally with this target group?
- How did you address these dilemmas? What were the challenges and benefits as a result?
- How do you experience and address issues or perceptions of race and racism with your client?
- How do you experience and address issues or perceptions of gender norms, gender discrimination and violence against women, with your client?
- What is the impact of religion/spirituality on your relationship and work with the client?

4. **What have you learned from this cross-cultural social work experience with migrant women survivors of domestic violence, and what can be done to support you in being more effective in these interventions?**

Prompts

- How have you benefited from these cross-cultural experiences, in terms of awareness, knowledge and skills?
- How do these cross- cultural experiences add value to social work?
- How can social workers be supported in working more effectively with clients from other cultures, and particularly with migrant women survivors of domestic violence?

Appendix D

Original Translations

Q1. Meta jkolli nies li, ehe, r-resilience taghhom tinhass hafna, ghaddew minn hafna u baqghu jissieltu, that gives me the strength anka li jiena niggieled ghal dak li jkun… I mean, thossok ispirata u trid taghmel differenza, trid tghin dak li jkun biex ikun hemm differenza fil-hajja taghhom ukoll.

Q2. …jekk ghandek hajja ta minuri, ovvjament, bhal f'kull kaz iehor hemmekk ha niffoka…Ha nagixxi fuq dak il concern li hemm… Ma nistax nghidilha jien isma tmurx ghax-xoghol, thallix it-tifel ma' dik il-mara, ghax jekk din m'ghandiex biex titma' t-tifel, xorta hekk ha taghmel! So I have to discuss with her and explore with her what works…

Q3. Ghax hi kienet tirrabja, ghax l-affarijiet ha jdumu, jew inkella jibghatuna minn post ghall- iehor. Ghandha ragun ta, ghax darba… qaluli Hal Far umbaghad kif morna Hal Far baghtuna l-Belt. Igifieri ghandha ragun, imma jien xi tridni naghmel? Kienet tinzilli minn tal-linja, taqsamli t-triq…. jien kont naf minn fejn hi gejja, imma int at face value dak il-hin tinharaq, taraha taghmillek hekk . Qed tipprova tghinha u hi tkompli taf kif… kienet tintefa gos-sodda, titfi d-dawl, ma tkellem 'il hadd. It t-tifel miskin dan tifel ta' erba xhur, go kamra mudlama, ommu gos-sodda, tipprova taf kif tkellimha, hemm dak it-tifel, fl-istess hin hi taf ghalfejn qed taghmel hekk ….Din kellha ghandha marki fuq gisimha ghax kienet speci ghamlu ritwali fuqha … dawn l-affarijiet kienu, qed nghidlek, tal-qtugh ta nifs! Sakemm fl-ahhar qisu kellna relazzjoni tajba flimkien… imma sakemm wasalna f'dak l-istage ghaddew ix-xhur u xhur sew!

Q4. Qaltli, you don't tell me what to do! You know what I survived? U din bdiet twerzaq u taghjjat u tghid hafna affarijiet. Em, and I didn't realise that that was going to be a trigger point! Em, u qisu kwazi kwazi iktar inhsadt dakinhar, ghax l-ewwelnett qisu ma kontx gejt ippreparata jien qisu biex nisma dak kollu … kelli aptit ninfaqa nibki jien stess, x'hin

rajtha b'dak il mod … and it's ok li tara dik l-espressjoni fija, ghax dak ifisser li allura hi qieghda tmissni bl-istorja taghha, u li jiena minix qed niggudikaha, anzi qed inhoss ghaliha. Ovvjament trid izzomm imma l-composure tieghek, ghax inkella ma tahdimx. U niftakar igifieri nghidilha, I'm really sad knowing that this happened to you. U kienet vera kkalmat u bdiet tibki mbaghad….

Q5. … hdimt ma persuna fejn ic-challenges fil behaviour taghha kienu kontinwi… meta jaslilha r-refugee status… dil-persuna tintefa ma l'art, twerzaq u taghjjat bil-ferh, terga tqum bil-wieqfa, taqbez, terga tintefa ma lart! Em, u tibda tghidli thank you, thank you Malta, thank you everyone. U mill ghada 'l hemm dil-persuna qisu nbidlet … u jien ghidt uzgur li tinbidel! Ghax din kellha, minn jaf x'kien ghaddej go mohhha , jekk immur lura pajjizi ha jigri hekk, ha jigri hekk, ha jiddeportawni… gieli nara n-nuqqas ukoll, li n-nies jifhmu, fl-agenziji jew fir-residenzi li, li ma jifmuhiex din, li meta inti laqqas biss taf x'ha jigri minnek u minn uliedek, inti mohhok ma jkunx fid duties! Id-duty tigi alabiebek minnha propja! Jigifieri dik in-nuqqas ta' empatija qisu gieli nara!

Q6. …nahseb il-ligijiet u r-regolamenti li johorgu mill- istat ovvjament ipoggu, eh, is-social workers f'pozizzjoni daqxejn antipatka, ghax jibdew ghaddejjin mixed messages. Mela ghandek il-code of ethics li qed tenfasizza l-aspett ta, hija mportanti li tirrikonoxxi kultura … imma mbaghad fl-istess hin ghandek eh, qisu policies, u ghandek qisu direttivi tal- gvern, bhal per ezempju il-portijiet huma maghluqin, hadd ma jidhol! Li ovvjament, they are conflicting. Em, igifieri it is very difficult for the social worker to stand her ground jew his ground.

Q7. Nahseb li s-sistemi certu loopholes iridu jigu indirizzati, imma nifhem li ovvjament diga qed naghmlu nahseb hafna. Ghax ha nkun onesta ma nahsibx jekk forsi mmorru l-pajjiz taghhom ha nigu trattati bl-istess mod. Again ma nafx, ma nistax nghid,

imma ma nahsibx li kieku nispicca f'nofs in-Nigerja nahseb ha niehu forsi certu beneficcju li huma qeghdin jiehdu hawnhekk.

Q8. …anka mil-waiting room taraha. Nies iharsu, nies jikkumentaw … I am sure li huma jesperjenzawha wkoll ghax nesperjenzaha jien meta nkun maghhom… Tismaghhom jitkellmu, u huma, ghalkemm mhux qed jifhmuhom, imma jibdew jarawhom iharsu u jzekzku.

Q9. Kelli persuna ohra ta nazzjonalita Gharbija kellha diffikulta ghax kellha hafna tfal. U kif jindunaw li ghandha t-tfal… diga nazzjonalita Gharbija, hemm sfortunatament l-image li dawn mahmugin, f'ghajnejn in-nies, tfal ha jgibu hafna storbju, mela ma nikruliex…and I feel this is very unjust ghax bl-istess ragunament hawn nies Maltin li ha jhammgu, mhux ha jiehdu hsieb post! Hekk, it breaks my heart fil verita, ghax meta inti ssir taf il- persuna, u tkun taf il- persuni x'inhuma… and you see them fighting and trying to make a good life for them and their families….

Q10. Per ezempju mort go ghassa ta' pulizija biex taghmel rapport, il-pulizija jindirizza lili u bil-Malti, u hi daqs li kieku ma tezistix, meta r-rapport qed taghmlu hi. U tghidlu kellimni bl-Ingliz, tirrispondieh bl-ingliz 'il pulizija, u jibqa' jkellmek bil-Malti! Rabja! Ikollok aptit tikkonfrontah imma trid izzomm postok ukoll…

Q11. Kelli kaz ma kinitx Afrikana, kienet nazzjonalita Filippina, u kienet titkellem b'Ingliz tajjeb din eh igifieri! U xorta meta rajt ir -rapport u kont hdejha u naf x'qalet, u ma kienx hemm miktub dak li qalet kif qalitu… Umbaghad, biex taghxxaq, ir-rapport jaghtuwulhom bil-Malti, so unless they have someone who can go through it dawn laqqas biss jindunaw!

Q12. …ehe l-abbuz qisu ma jkunx gej biss ghax ir-ragel ikun qed jaghmel power fuq il-mara, imm' anka jkun il- hin kollu jsemmi n-nazzjonalita taghha u qisu jiena gibtek nies ghax f'pajjizek m' ghandek xejn! Igifieri jkun hemm dil-kritika. Jew anka kazijiet fejn taf li

rgiel gabu nisa f'Malta minn certu nazzjonalijiet, certu pajjizi, mainly for sexual relationships. And you know that they selected those particular nationalities for that reason… and I think they reach out to these nationalities because maybe it's easier li l-persuna ha taccetta li tigi, forsi because of financial situations… So dik eh, hemm l-issue ta race ukoll, li certain nationalities are targeted minhabba dawk l-affarijiet."

Q13. …but ehe, I myself have heard from colleagues as well saying, imma mhux hi marret mieghu? Taf x'inhuma! Dawk kollha hekk! Or vera hux, jekk ghandna l-Maltin sort of ghalfejn qed ingibu dawn biex qas biss ma japrezzawx tipo? And for me, sort of, my first reaction is, inti bis-serjeta?

Q14. …having Maltese people ganging qisu kontra n-nies barranin, u anything li jigri we label that woman because she is a foreigner. Igifieri kellna dawn ic-cirkustanzi, imma mhux ha nghid li kienu maggoranza… kien jqanqlu anka hafna rabja fina, meta inti ghandek persuna that you know she is picking on a person because she is of a different colour per ezempju. Ahna qisu we always try and, taf inti, if she is in the wrong we point out she is in the wrong, igifieri m'ghandha l-ebda dritt li taghjjar. Ghax qisu f'dan il-kaz partikolari kien johrog hafna qisu l-lingwagg li jintuza fhimt, and that's very degrading hux. Sempliciment jirreferu ghal "dik is-sewda", umbaghad tigri l-kelma bejn residenta u ohra, and they start ganging… nippruvaw igifieri, I mean, dawn l-affarijiet jigu confronted fuqhom… because you can't tolerate that.

Q15. Ehe I try, biex forsi hi ma tindunax…Ehe nemmen li huma jkunu jafu, imma nahseb jigu immune ukoll ghaliha, sa certu punt. Kif ghidtlek qisu I explore it meta nkunu fiha, jekk nibda nara li s-sitwazzjoni qisu it's increasing ha nsaqsiha isma inti thossok komda? Ghalxiex qed iddejqek? Ghax umbaghad ovvjament huma ha jghidulek fhimt. And you try to explore it at that point in time. Imma jekk ma tkunx verament eskalat, nahseb I try to go around it minghajr ma ntiha hafna importanza.

Q16. Ifiehmha l-context Malti at the end, imma nispjegalha li per ezempju, li ghalkemm gejja minn dik it-tip ta sitwazzjoni u tip ta kultura, ma jfissirx li qeghda kullimkien. U Allahares hija kullimkien ghax hija hazin. Qisu tipprova tfehma li, ehe, mhux Malta biss li ghandna dawn il-ligijiet, imma l-Ingilterra… taf kif qisek tipprova tfehmha in that sense. Nahseb that is the only way fir-realta.

Q17. … I mean, fejn jidhol dan l-aspett ta' l-immigranti s-social workers iridu jaghmlu aktar… gieli nhossni qeghdin hemm iva l-immigranti, imma mhux qeghdin hemm fhimt? …per ezempju…dakinhar kien hemm xi hadd li tkellem, professional fil-prezenza tieghi, kienet, em, eh fuq din tal-COVID…"toqghodx tinkwieta ta, ghax dawk li sabu s-suwed ta Hal Far ta kienu!"… Em … u qed taghddiha l-klijenti! Igifieri ma nahsibx li taghllimna bizzejjed…ha niehu ezempju fuq Facebook… meta kien hemm li l-MASW ibbekjat, em, xi haga li ghandha x'taqsam mar-refugjati, kemm il-likes tella? … fejn inti ghandek il-kawza… fejn inti ghandek social justice, equal access of services, equal opportunities, li huma il-valuri taghna, tal- professjoni taghna, li inti ma tiksibx popolarita fejn tidhol is social media tinkwetani hux!

Q18. Jien nahseb irid jizdied iktar… I mean, this is a changing reality for many of us, dejjem jigu nies godda minn nazzjonalitajiet differenti qisu… so I think, li nibdew mill-Universita u anka meta nkunu qeghdin nahdmu fix-xoghol taghna nibqghu ninghataw training huwa essenzjali hafna. Ghax il-professjonista qed tahdem qisha b'ghajnejha maghluqa, inhoss li ha naghmlu ingustizzja mall-persuna li nkunu qed nahdmu maghha, ghax if I'm not informed mhux ha naghti s-servizz komplut.