

Article

The social worker's role in educating youth on the dangers of rumour spreading

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¹ Aldhanhani Salem Abdullah

¹Sociology Department, University of Sharjah, UAE

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Abstract: In the modern society, the proliferation of digital communication systems has contributed greatly to the growth of rumours especially among the young generations. The nature of social media environments promotes the spread of information in real time with or without fact checking to enhance the dangers of misinformation and social unrest. Considering that young people spend a lot of time on these platforms and are still learning to think critically, they are particularly prone to becoming the consumers and spreaders of rumours. The study aimed to identify the role of the social worker in raising youth awareness about the dangers of rumours. The study employed a descriptive methodology and involved a sample of 122 students from Al Ain University. A questionnaire consisting of 10 items was used as the primary tool for data collection. The findings revealed that the mean score for the social worker's role in raising youth awareness about the dangers of rumours was high, reaching 3.68. Additionally, the results showed that the mean scores for proposals to enhance the role of social workers in raising awareness about the dangers of rumours also stood at 3.68, indicating a high level. Furthermore, the study found no statistically significant differences at the significance level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the role of the social worker in raising youth awareness about the dangers of rumours attributed to the gender.

Keywords: *Social worker, youth awareness, rumours, descriptive methodology, gender differences*

Introduction

Youth are considered the cornerstone of life due to their vitality, physical energy, and creativity, as well as their aspirations and innovative ideas. A bright future is built upon the seeds planted by the youth, and without them, there is no future. The future of any nation relies entirely on the enthusiasm and achievements of its youth. Without their contributions, a nation cannot progress (Matar, 2019).

Youth is the stage following childhood and adolescence and precedes old age. It combines the energy and enthusiasm of children with the wisdom and maturity of adults. However, as more youth engage with social media platforms, the impact of rumours becomes increasingly evident. Rumours can influence their personalities, prompting them to make poor decisions for themselves and their families. Rumours may also foster hostility by targeting individuals or ideas, undermining their image, and inciting aggression. Furthermore, rumours have psychological effects, weakening young people's trust in societal beliefs and norms, lowering morale, and undermining their psychological resilience (Fahmi, 2018).

A rumour is defined as information or beliefs transmitted by people without relying on credible references to confirm their validity. It may involve false or fabricated information or contain a small element of truth (Salem, 2016).

Rumours directly influence the collective mindset, leading to gradual psychological and social impacts. They can demoralize individuals, causing frustration and a sense of helplessness that affects productivity and slows societal progress. Economic stagnation, over time, renders a country's economy less attractive to foreign investments, directly affecting local stability. Hence, society must unite to combat such issues, with social workers playing a pivotal role (Sulaiman, 2020).

A social worker is a professional equipped to operate in educational and social domains with developmental and therapeutic goals. Adhering to the principles of social work, they operate within the framework set by their organization, ensuring compliance with professional ethics and avoiding overstepping boundaries (Al-Zahrani, 2017).

Social workers play a critical role in educating youth on discerning credible information and verifying its authenticity. This involves guiding them to reliable references, such as media-recognized sources or government websites. Educational institutions also bear a significant responsibility in raising awareness about navigating social media effectively (Al-Yusuf, 2020). This study addresses the critical topic of rumours and their effects on individuals and society. It offers recommendations for decision-makers in

government and private institutions to minimize the negative impact of rumours and highlights the role of social workers in countering them.

Problem

The youth's significant role in societal development is undeniable. Their aspirations and efforts contribute to various fields, from professional to athletic, requiring their energy to drive progress. However, youth are often targeted by rumours, which erode trust between private and public sectors and foster suspicion. The harmful effects of rumours necessitate proactive measures to address their influence on national and societal reputation. Social workers are at the forefront of this effort, tasked with raising awareness and promoting a culture of truth-seeking and critical evaluation of information from an early age (Al-Mahlawi, 2018). This study seeks to answer the following question: **What is the role of social workers in educating youth about the dangers of rumours?**

Objectives

1. Identify the role of social workers in educating youth about the dangers of rumours.
2. Propose strategies to enhance the role of social workers in combating rumours.
3. Examine the statistical significance of the social worker's role in educating youth about rumours, considering gender (male and female).

Questions

1. What is the role of social workers in educating youth about the dangers of rumours?
2. What are the recommendations for enhancing the role of social workers in combating rumours?

Hypothesis:

H0: There is no statistically significant effect at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the social worker's role in educating youth about the dangers of rumours, attributed to gender (male and female).

Literature review

The review includes studies related to the current research topic: the role of social workers in educating youth about the dangers of rumours. It comprises both Arab and international studies. Shatla (2021). Examined the impact of rumours on violence and intellectual security among Libyan university students. The study highlighted Facebook as the most commonly used platform for spreading false news, particularly during periods of terrorism and conflict. Recommendations included awareness campaigns and media monitoring. Hassan (2021). Investigated the effect of social media applications on spreading false news and its impact on public perception and national security in Egypt. The study

emphasized the need for monitoring news sources and addressing the origins of rumours. Mubarak (2021). Focused on the role of websites and applications in shaping young people's awareness and handling fake news. Recommendations included awareness programs on the dangers of online criminal behaviours. Daniel (2021). Explored types of rumours on social media and strategies to counter them. Findings underscored the detrimental effects of false news on societal stability and recommended media management and public awareness initiatives. Al-Salama (2020). Analysed the stages and causes of rumours and strategies to combat them. Results revealed that public interest significantly influences rumour spread, highlighting the need for reliable information dissemination. William (2017). Investigated the psychological and social motivations behind spreading rumours online. Recommendations included regulatory oversight and promoting credible news sources

Methodology

Sample and Sampling

Table1

The distribution of the study sample members according to personal variables

Variable	Level	Social Workers
	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	69
	Female	53
	Total	122
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	86
	Postgraduate Studies	36
	Total	122
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	23
	5-10 years	37
	More than 10 years	62
	Total	122

Table 1 shows that the number of social workers in the study sample reached 69 males, representing 56.6%, while the number of female social workers in the sample was 53, representing 43.4%. For students, the number of males in the sample was 345, accounting for 56.6%, while the number of

females was 265, representing 43.4%. The highest percentage of the sample's distribution based on the educational qualification variable was for the Bachelor's degree, at 70.5%, while the lowest percentage was for Postgraduate studies, at 29.5%. Similarly, the highest percentage of the sample's distribution based on the teaching experience variable was for the level of more than 10 years of experience, at 50.8%, while the lowest percentage was for less than 5 years of experience, at 18.9%.

Tool

The present study utilized a questionnaire consisting of two sections:

- The first section focuses on the demographic characteristics of the study sample, such as (gender, age, educational status, employment status, monthly income, and family size).

- The second section contains items aimed at answering the study's questions and achieving its objectives, comprising 10 items divided into two main axes:

1. Axis One: The role of the social worker in raising youth awareness about the risks of rumours. It includes 5 items. Axis Two: Proposals to enhance the social worker's role in raising youth awareness about the risks of rumours. It includes 5 items.

To ensure content validity, the initial version of the questionnaire was reviewed by a group of experts. They evaluated the clarity of the items, linguistic phrasing, and their relevance to the study's field, suggesting adjustments and noting areas for improvement.

A five-point Likert scale was adopted to respond to the items, as follows: Very high (5 points), high (4 points), moderate (3 points), low (2 points), very low (1 point).

Reliability of the Study Instrument

To verify the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha (α) formula was used, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients of the Questionnaire

Tool	Internal Consistency Reliability
Questionnaire	0.82

It can be observed from Table 2 that the internal consistency reliability value of the questionnaire is (0.82), indicating the good construction and validity of the scale for the purposes of this study.

Correction of the Study Tool

To assess the mean scores of the study tool, its sections, and the related items, the response level was determined based on the five-point Likert scale, calculated as follows:

Thus, the category length is (1.33), and the response levels were as follows: Low level (1–2.33), medium level (2.34–3.67) and high level (3.68–5).

Statistical Methods

The study used frequencies and percentages to identify the demographic characteristics of the study population, and mean averages and standard deviations to answer the study's questions.

Educates youth on how to confront rumours," with a mean of (3.43), while the lowest was item (3), which states: "The social worker clarifies to youth the dangers of rumours on their intellectual security," with a mean of (3.08).

Results

First question results: "What is the role of the social worker in raising awareness among youth about the dangers of rumours?"

To answer this question, mean averages and standard deviations were extracted to assess the social worker's role in educating youth about the risks of rumours.

Table 3

Mean Averages and Standard Deviations of the Social Worker's Role in Raising Awareness among Youth about the Dangers of Rumours

Rank	Item	Mean Average	Standard Deviation
1	The social worker explains to youth the negative role of rumours on the country's economy.	4.05	0.44
2	The social worker provides youth with the necessary knowledge about the dangers of rumours.	4.01	0.58
3	The social worker helps youth protect themselves intellectually from the dangers of rumours.	3.69	1.07
4	The social worker educates youth on how to confront rumours.	3.43	1.50
5	The social worker clarifies to youth the seriousness of rumours on their intellectual security.	3.08	1.87

It appears from Table (3) that the mean averages for the social worker's role in educating youth about the dangers of rumours ranged from (3.08 to 4.05). The table also shows that (5) items received a high rating, with the highest being item (1), which states: "The social worker explains to youth the negative impact of rumours on the country's economy," with a mean of (4.05) and a high rating. The lowest was item (4), which states: "The social worker helps youth protect themselves intellectually from the dangers of rumours," with a mean of (3.69) and a

high rating. Meanwhile, two items received a medium rating, with their means ranging from (3.08 to 3.43), with the highest being item (5), which states: "The social worker

Second question results: What are the suggestions to activate the role of the social worker in educating youth about the dangers of rumours?

To answer the second study question, the mean averages and standard deviations of the suggestions to activate the social worker's role in educating youth about the dangers of rumours were extracted.

Table 4

The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the proposals to activate the role of the social worker in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours .

Rank	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Organizing training courses for social workers to increase their expertise.	4.42	0.86
2	Financial and moral motivation for social workers.	3.63	1.16
3	Reducing administrative burdens on social workers to allow them to focus on training and connecting with young people.	3.59	1.25
4	Appointing specialists from social workers to raise awareness through programs to combat rumours.	3.52	1.13
5	Honouring social workers who present outstanding initiatives to combat rumours.	3.22	1.14

It is clear from table 4 that the mean ratings of the study sample on the proposed suggestions to activate the role of social workers in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours reached an overall mean of (3.68) with a high degree, ranging from (3.22 to 4.42) across its items. The table also reveals that there is one item that received a high rating, which is item (4) with the statement: "Appointing specialists from social workers to raise awareness through programs to combat rumours," with a mean of (4.42).

Meanwhile, the other items received medium ratings, with their means ranging from (3.22 to 3.63), with the highest mean being for item (1) with the statement: "Organizing training courses for social workers to increase their expertise," with a mean of (3.63), and the lowest being for item (2) with the statement: "Financial and moral motivation for social workers," with a mean of (3.22).

The hypothesis result: There is no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the role of the social worker in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours due to the gender variable (Male, Female).

To test the hypothesis, the means, standard deviations, and (T) values were calculated as shown in the following table:

Table 5*Results of the (T) Test According to the Gender Variable*

Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation (T)	Significance Level
Male	3.6831	0.58579	
Female	3.7600	0.47659	

It is clear from Table (6) that there is no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the role of the social worker in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours due to the gender variable (Male, Female), as the significance level of the (F) value was (0.195), which is greater than the significance level (0.05).

Discussion

Discussion of Results Related to the First Question: What is the Role of the Social Worker in Raising Awareness among Young People about the Dangers of Rumours?

The results of the study show that the mean score for the role of the social worker in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours was high, with a mean of (3.68). This result can be attributed to the fact that the social worker plays a vital role in developing awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours and their negative effects on individuals and society. Rumours pose a significant risk to social relationships, intellectual security, and community stability. The social worker organizes awareness sessions for young people in schools, universities, and community centers, to clarify the concept of rumours, how they spread quickly, listen to young people's opinions on emerging issues, and guide them on how to deal with uncertain information.

This result aligns with the findings of studies by (Shattla, 2021), (Hassan, 2021), (Mubarak, 2021), and (Al-Malkaawi, 2021), which showed that the social worker plays a central role in raising young people's awareness of the dangers of rumours and their harmful effects. Through education, dialogue, and guidance, the social worker can empower young people to address rumours in a conscious and responsible manner, contributing to the development of a stable and cohesive community.

Discussion of Results Related to the Second Question: What Are the Proposals to Activate the Role of the Social Worker in Raising Awareness Among Young People About the Dangers of Rumours ?

The results of the study show that the mean scores for the proposals to activate the role of the social worker in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours were high, with an overall mean of (3.68).

This result can be attributed to the importance of the social worker's role in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours and reducing their spread. A variety of initiatives and activities can be implemented to improve interaction between the social worker and young people, which was emphasized by the study sample. The sample stressed the need to develop educational programs that address the concept of rumours, their causes, and their negative impact on individuals and society. It also included interactive and practical activities, such as workshops, educational games, and simulations to illustrate how to confront rumours.

This result is consistent with the findings of studies by (Al-Sharif, 2021), (Ghazi, 2020), and (Al-Sharbin, 2020), which highlighted the necessity of providing training courses for social workers to enhance their skills in communication with young people and utilizing digital tools effectively.

Discussion of the Data Related to the Study Hypothesis: There is No Statistically Significant Effect at the Significance Level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the Social Worker's Role in Raising Awareness among Young People about the Dangers of Rumours Due to the Gender Variable (Male, Female).

The results showed that there was no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the social worker's role in raising awareness among young people about the dangers of rumours due to the gender variable (Male, Female).

This result can be attributed to the fact that individual differences (such as educational level or engagement in social media) may have a greater impact than gender differences in young people's responses to awareness efforts.

This finding aligns with the results of studies by (Al-Sharif, 2021), (Ghazi, 2020), and (Al-Sharbin, 2020), which showed no statistically significant differences based on gender. This serves as a positive indicator of the neutrality and effectiveness of the social worker's role, though it opens the door for exploring other factors that may have a more significant influence in understanding young people's responses to the dangers of rumours.

In light of the results obtained, the study recommends the following:

- Develop educational programs that address the concept of rumours, their causes, and their negative effects on individuals and society.
- Include practical and interactive activities such as workshops, educational games, and simulations to illustrate how to confront rumours.

- Organize joint media campaigns with relevant authorities such as schools, universities, and cultural centers to highlight the dangers of rumours.
- Use social media platforms to broadcast short and engaging messages targeting young people, such as awareness videos and infographics.
- Develop applications or websites dedicated to educating young people on how to verify news and misinformation.
- Create social media groups managed by teams of social workers to respond to young people's inquiries regarding rumours.
- Collaborate with schools and universities to include the topic of rumours in curricula as part of moral education and citizenship.
- Organize periodic seminars in cooperation with teachers to educate students on how to deal with circulating news rationally.
- Provide training courses for social workers to enhance their skills in communicating with young people and using digital tools effectively.
- Train social workers to monitor and analyse circulating rumours in society to provide appropriate guidance.
- Organize awareness sessions on how to handle news on social media and the importance of verifying sources.
- Invite media experts to deliver lectures and workshops highlighting techniques for identifying fake news.
- Establish clubs or groups within youth centres focused on discussing and addressing rumours .
- Empower young people to participate in awareness activities themselves to have a greater impact among their peers.

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